

Going to the Top

Technology know-how takes former paralegal to forefront of software development.

By MELISSA MORRIS

Meet Glenda Snodgrass: She is lively. She is smart. She is transforming the paralegal industry with her technology know-how.

The 37-year-old Mobile, Ala. resident and president of The Net Effect, launched a specialized Internet software program in 2001 to help the legal industry better manage its business. Docu-Base software is a Web-based program allowing users — many of whom are paralegals — to manage and share litigation information from anywhere in the world.

"Docu-Base allows a firm to literally share intelligence among its members, laterally and vertically," Snodgrass said. "And if you want to search the

She said several types of software allow paralegals to build their own information databases. What makes Docu-Base different is its ready-made framework that allows paralegals to simply enter information, rather than build an entire database structure. The software also can be customized, even after information is entered.

However, it's the accessibility and workability that is best enjoyed by customers. A year after its development, Docu-Base users such as Elizabeth Hagan, a legal assistant at Johnstone, Adams, Bailey, Gordon & Harris, in Alabama, are raving about it.

Hagan said the software has changed the ways she works, making tasks easier. She first used the program in 2001 to maintain large files of information for a construction case. One of the lawyers working on the case needed a document quickly, which meant Hagan had to sort through thousands of pages of information. She said the software helped her find the document she needed within about 15 minutes, as opposed to the hours she would have otherwise spent digging for the record.

"He [the lawyer] didn't know whether it [the document] was a letter, memo or what. He knew the matter generally, and approximately when the document would have been prepared. He acknowledged it was a needle in the haystack search," Hagan said. "I started running searches. In a couple of minutes, I had two or three possibilities, one of which was the document."

Snodgrass said it's that kind of job simplification she was looking for when she created Docu-Base. "The savings in time and frustration, searching through box after box for just the right document, makes the paralegal's day go so much better," she said.

The software is billed on a subscription basis, which means a paralegal or law firm can use it for as long as necessary, then discontinue the subscription. Docu-Base ranges from \$89 monthly for one set of documents with up to five users, to \$499 monthly for an unlimited number of documents and users. Snodgrass, who specializes in secure commerce and other Web database applications, plans to add more features to the software and is researching and developing ways to improve future versions of the soft-

ware, including package deals on imaging, coding and uploading of document images. She also is in the process of developing another software package for law firm use, but is hesitant to discuss its details or release date.

For now, the idea of retiring and living off the royalties of her Docu-Base software is far from her mind.

"Heavens no. I'm too young to think about retiring!" she said. "A coder never stops coding." ■

Snapshot

Who: Glenda Snodgrass

Age: 37

Education: Bachelor's degree from the University of South Alabama (1986); a maîtrise from Université de Paris I — Panthéon-Sorbonne in Paris, France (1989).

Why she is in the spotlight: She developed an Internet software program, Docu-Base, which makes document gathering and sorting easier for paralegals and others within the legal field.

Number of years she spent as a paralegal: 13 years, switching between legal secretary and paralegal. She said the professional designation "paralegal," doesn't exist in France, where she worked for three years. The remaining time she worked as a paralegal in Mobile, Ala., and Washington, D.C.

How she became a paralegal: She worked her way through college and graduated school as a paralegal and legal secretary.

Her emphasis during her paralegal career: Mostly litigation document management.

The one paralegal problem she remembered from her past and attempted to solve with Docu-Base: Answering the question, "Who knew what when?" Docu-Base helps users locate the documents that answer that question.

And another thing: She and co-founder Geoff Peacock opened the Net Effect, an information technology company, in September 1996 in Mobile, Ala. She is the president and manager of the firm.



Rising Star: Former paralegal Glenda Snodgrass is a leader in software development. *Photo courtesy of The Net Effect.*

content by simple or advanced keyword searches, that is done instantly as well."

Snodgrass noticed the need for such software during her own paralegal work in the early 1990s.

But it wasn't until she was approached by a client at The Net Effect, that she began developing serious plans for the software — software she said she believes is unparalleled in its field.