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# Information World

review

## RM Online expands reach to the letter of the law

**Samantha Thomson talks to RM Online about doing business with partners**

In the increasingly crowded market of online information provision, London-based RM Online is sensibly expanding its reach by working with established names.

While a range of users – from bankers and accountants to corporate librarians and journalists – currently access RM's flagship aRMadillo databases directly through [www.rmonline.com](http://www.rmonline.com), a new and large legal audience can now inspect and download its wares via Butterworths' recently relaunched Law Direct information service.

According to Emmanuel Cohen, RM Online's Managing Director, aRMadillo is the only non-Butterworths information service offered through the subscription-based Law Direct service. He is as excited about this as he is about the joint venture's ability to give users "low-cost, immediate and round-the-clock Internet access to a wide range of legal and statutory data".

Launched in 1997, aRMadillo comprises three pay-as-you-go vertical databases: UK and US companies databases along with a UK and EC trademarks database. Between the three databases, more than 10 million documents can be downloaded or auto-faxed. The UK companies database contains statutory information on all UK companies. The data held includes County Court judgment data, registered trusts, court writ information, analysts reports for both private limited and public companies, media reports on some of the public companies, London/Edinburgh Gazette information and, for any public limited company, accounts going back four years. Via the US database – which took RM two years to pull together – users can access information on public and private companies in 46 states. "This is the only database outside the US that contains information on private companies as well," Mr Cohen said.

The aim of the trademarks database was simple: "We wanted to make pre-registration trademark searching easy." Offering good value was also crucial: "Normally you pay £200 for a search through a trademark agent. Ours is an intelligent search. It does everything a trademark agent would do – but for about £40."

Users can also search for registered brand names. "Say you're brainstorming and you're trying to think of names for a new product or service. Where before you'd have to check whether names were available afterwards, our database allows you to do a search – for £3.50 – while the brainstorm is happening. You can also see who owns it and whether the company is still around. This saves time and money. It means the names people pass on to their legal department are more likely to succeed as brands or trademarks," Mr Cohen said.

Both the UK and US databases allow users to search on directors' and officers' names to see what directorships they hold. Hypertext links mean users can toggle between the databases.

Mr Cohen said the company was currently facing up to the challenge of developing an engine to search across all three databases. "Their sheer size makes it a little difficult. The UK database has information – and, in some cases, really detailed information – on 1.3 million limited companies, 350,000 dissolved companies and about 600,000 partnerships and sole traders. It's a bit of a technological feat to amalgamate all the data – but it will happen in the next couple of years," he said.

Both Mr Cohen and Butterworths' online publisher, John Pitman, believe the aRMadillo databases will be a strong complement to Law Direct's other, more purely legal, information services. "When we relaunched our Web-based services to include Law Direct, we saw the partnership with RM Online as the ideal way to add



value to our activities, providing lawyers with quick and easy access to RM's statutory information on a pay-as-you-go basis," Mr Cohen said.

Mr Cohen also feels that aRMadillo will be particularly useful in light of the imminent closure of Companies House's London office. "People in the City will still have easy access to company data. We're not trying to compete with Companies House: what we do is provide its statutory data in report format."

As well as being accessible through Law Direct (at a 10 per cent discount), aRMadillo's information

can also be downloaded from Butterworths Direct, Farmers Weekly, Law Link and Business Gold servers, to name a few.

With two main divisions and around 50 staff in London, RM Online has grown steadily since it was established in 1974. Its services include online and offline research ("anything we supply online we also supply offline," commented Mr Cohen), international business reports, Internet searches, and outsourced and overflow researching, along with the registration of companies, trademarks and domain names, and developing and hosting Web sites for a range of companies including start-ups.

As yet, RM Online has no overseas presence but, according to Mr Cohen, "we're working on it".

RM Online is firmly committed to its democratic Web philosophy. "Whatever you take, you pay for, as and when you take it. We don't want to tie people in. The data's not free, but the ability to use the service is. For us, that's what the Internet is all about."

[www.rmonline.com](http://www.rmonline.com)