

# Justice at the click of a mouse

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From today consumers and small businesses can sue for money owing, get judgment and then send in the bailiffs - all over the internet.

Claims for unpaid debts, goods and services, rent arrears and overdue hire purchase payments are the biggest category of claims filed with the courts, totalling 1.6m claims in 2000. Only 36,000 money claims were defended in 2000.

Under a pilot scheme anyone owed a fixed sum under £100,000 will be able to issue a claim through the court service website. The service will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

After registering with the secure website claimants create a user ID and password, then type in the name and address of the person who owes them money, the amount owed and details of the claim, such as goods and services provided and invoice numbers. The court fee - £27 minimum, payable by debit or credit card - is calculated automatically.

Using the ID and password claimants will be able to follow the progress of their cases. With a click the court can be asked to enter judgment if the defendant fails to put in a defence within the time given. Later, if no payment is received, sending in the bailiffs can also be started online.

For those without computers, access will be provided through a network of schools, public libraries and community centres throughout England and Wales. Ian Magee, chief executive of the court service, said: "The launch of the money claim online pilot is the court service's first step into interactive electronic services.

"We expect to have 25,000 claims made using the new online service by the end of this year. It will be quicker and easier to use, and will take some pressure off court staff too."

Click [here](#) to visit Money Claim Online.

- From 2003 people needing legal services will be able to bypass solicitors and hire a barrister direct, under proposals unanimously passed by the Bar Council at the weekend.

The council has bowed to threats from the Office of Fair Trading to stop any of the bar's restrictive practices which could not be justified in the public interest.