

Courtroom Ready

Arm your team with essential trial tools.

By Gordon Moffat

In the previous column, I discussed how to choose the best software to meet your trial presentation needs. Now that you are aware of the available software, you must gather the equipment you need, decide what type of presentation style will be the most effective and consider the possibility of bringing in a trial technology consultant.

Your Electronic Courtroom Kit

The following is a list of essential items you most likely will need in the courtroom for effective trial presentation.

Laptop computer. Your computer will be the focus and master controller of all your evidence and exhibits. Be sure to use a machine with plenty of processor speed, at least 512MB of memory, 64MB or more of video RAM and Windows XP Professional.

LCD projector, portable screen and speakers. If the courtroom isn't equipped with these items (and many are becoming so), you will need to bring your own. Liquid crystal display projector brightness is judged by lumens. Pay attention to this rating and buy the highest number of lumens you can afford.

External hard drive. Your case data could be voluminous. A high-capacity external universal serial bus 2.0 or FireWire hard drive will give you the space and flexibility to manage your data.

Bar code reader. This device, which attaches to your computer via a USB port, allows you to scan a bar code for a particular exhibit so it appears on screen, greatly simplifying the process of choosing exhibits.

Cables and cords. You most likely will have to run extension cords for power and extend the reach of your video and sound cables to reach your projector inputs and speakers. Be sure to have plenty of power strips handy.

Printer/scanner/copier. A quality all-in-one device frequently will prove to be a lifesaver in the courtroom.

Multiple monitors. Situations can arise, especially during large trials, where it becomes necessary to display your exhibits in multiple locations. For instance, the judge might want a monitor and you might wish to provide a display for other attorneys. Be prepared to use a distribution amplifier and several video extension cables to route your laptop output to multiple displays. These are available from most audio-visual rental companies.

Getting Set Up

A few courts still might see trial presentation computer technology as a distraction and just might bar its use altogether. Check with the court and be prepared to provide samples of your dig-

ital exhibits. Most trial presentation suites have tools designed specifically for creating excerpts for outside review.

Once you have clearance for an electronic presentation, several pretrial visits to the courtroom will be well worth your time. Many courtrooms have no audio, video or computer connections at all, and no two courtrooms are arranged in the same manner.

A good bit of experimentation might be necessary to find optimal audio level and screen placement. Many courts have dedicated audio visual technicians. They can provide a wealth of knowledge about where to set up and place your equipment. It also is helpful to set up all of your equipment in the office beforehand so any hardware issues are identified and addressed.

Presentation Pointers

Here are some basic presentation guidelines to follow in court.

Keep it simple. Don't overload your screens with too many exhibits, mark-ups or bullet points.

Color. Use color conservatively, but don't be afraid to use color to accentuate the "mood" of your exhibit. For instance, red suggests excitement and alertness, green evokes growth, white creates a mood of professionalism or innocence, blue suggests truth and trust,

and gray calls to mind integrity as well as maturity.

Use markup tools on documents. Channel attention to the key parts of document exhibit images by using the powerful tools found in all dedicated trial presentation packages.

Avoid animation and sound. When incorporating PowerPoint elements into your presentation, sounds and excessive animation are distracting and look unprofessional.

Don't rely on text. Add images, maps and video to accentuate and clarify your argument for the judge and jury.

Technology Consultant

No matter how powerful and flexible a software package is, all trial presentations need days of preparation and rehearsal. This is where a trial technology consultant can be most valuable, by importing and organizing your data and leaving the attorney and paralegal free to create the most effective series of exhibits. A trial technology consultant also can smooth over any bumps on the learning curve.

Trial technology consultants often are not legal professionals. They are most effective when concentrating strictly on the technical aspects of presenting the case. Try to have your case materials as prepared as possible before contacting a consultant. While it's usually not possible to have all materials together at an early date, try to identify key exhibits as early as possible. Be sure to include your consultant in all visits to the courtroom and in correspondence about any issue that might affect the presentation of the case.

The potential of electronic trial presentation has grown immensely in recent years as computing power and capabilities increase and hardware costs decrease. Choosing the right software and implementing the proper strategies and techniques will make all the difference in your next case. ■



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Moffat graduated from the University of Tennessee in 1992 and from Ohio State University in 1997 with a master's degree in history. Moffat has been in the information technology field for eight years.

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