

Using Technology at Trial



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Today, technology is an accepted part of trial preparation. A modest time investment and a basic understanding of where digitized presentations make sense in the courtroom can yield great dividends. When preparing for trial, regardless of the technology you opt for, you'll need to consider its use in the larger context of your presentation. Here are a few tips that might prove helpful.

1. Balance Technology with your Style

Always make technology decisions based on your personal style. If you walk around the courtroom and engage with the jury, position the screen as to not block it or the projector during your presentation. If you are operating the equipment, coordinate your oratory with the management of the equipment. If you are anchored to the podium, make sure the equipment is within arms reach. Make allowances in your opening and/or closing statements for activities, such as changing documents and playing video clips.

2. Mix Media

An electronic solution is not the only solution. Many times, the use of a flipchart or board can be as effective as displaying a PowerPoint™ presentation or animation. Use a combination of media to effectively present the merits of your case. “Anchor boards” of PowerPoint slides used during opening and closing statements can be very effective when outlining key points of the case to jurors.

3. Choose Appropriate Technology

As you probably know by now, when working with technology – especially in a pressure situation – the devil lurks in the details. Make sure your equipment is compatible and meets some minimum performance criteria. For example:

- A projector should have a lumens or brightness of at least 2000 for courtroom presentations. A high lumens projector will allow for greater resolution in a courtroom where there is bright natural and/or artificial lighting.
- When displaying graphically rich presentations, video clips, and/or images of documents from your laptop, make sure the laptop has enough memory for your needs. Minimum requirements vary according to the size of the graphics presentation and the number and length of the video clips and images. Consult with a graphic artist to create the right resolution for quick loading graphics.
- If you are playing video clips, always bring in a portable audio system. Very few courts have adequate audio systems.

4. Go Slow

Digital media such as PowerPoint presentations use technology to teach fine detail. A skilled advocate reveals facts on the screen slowly and systematically. Jurors viewing a partially empty screen anticipate the revelation of additional facts with increased interest and curiosity.

5. Get The Most From Digital Displays

Don't view digital slide shows as electronic versions of blow-up boards. The power of the digital display is in teaching the details. Jurors will read and remember a phrase that is enlarged on the screen. Displaying a full-page document on a monitor is not conducive to learning. Other techniques well suited to digital presentation include pull quotes, photo enlargements, and spontaneously zooming in on an exhibit's details.

6. Consider Lines of Sight

The decision to use a screen, monitors or a combination of the two depends on the lines of sight of the jury, judge, witness and counsel. The layout of the courtroom will dictate your options. It is suggested that at least the judge receive a monitor while the jury views the presentation on at least an 8ft screen.

7. Be Redundant With Your Presentation

Unless the power crunch is miraculously resolved, some of us will be looking at rolling blackouts, brownouts, and other "outs" that could send your almost-ready-for-Cannes presentation to oblivion. It's smart to determine an alternative method for displaying your presentation, such as a backup laptop (that's all charged up!), document camera or hardcopies of the presentation (8.5 X 11's or boards). Be prepared to give your presentation without the aid of electricity.

As with so many other technologies, it was only a matter of time before increasing numbers of attorneys adopt basic multi-media presentation techniques to make their case. Today, technology is part of the practice of law. More and more attorneys are accepting that technology tools are an asset, not a burden. A modest time investment in a program like PowerPoint -- and a basic understanding of where digitized presentations make sense in the courtroom can yield great dividends.