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Hands-on training in court technology

When an attorney presents a case in court, he or she presents the jury with a substantial amount of information that must eventually be converted into a decision by the jurors. Increasingly, computer technology is being used to support such presentations, sometimes in very sophisticated ways. Use of such technology can provide a more integrated view of information related to a trial and a clearer presentation of timelines, crime scenes and scientific information. According to a report by the Federal Judicial Center (fjc.gov), use of electronic information can reduce court time by 30% or more. On the other hand, jurors may be inappropriately affected by slick presentations, and care must be taken to ensure that animations accurately reflect the facts.

A new facility designed by DOAR (doar.com) allows attorneys to get hands-on experience in a high-tech courtroom. Located in Lynbrook, NY, the Digital Court Facility is designed for education and research as well as trial preparation. Funded by the town, the facility offers secure Webcasting, digital video capture of courtroom proceedings and videoconferencing. In addition to providing a training site for attorneys, the Digital Court Facility will provide a venue in which research can be conducted on the effect of technology on juror understanding and decision-making.

DOAR specializes in technology-based systems and services for judicial courts, litigation and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) markets. Its Court Division provides integrated technology for evidence presentation and courtroom communications in federal and state courtrooms. Systems developed by the division have been implemented in over 500 federal and state courtrooms, and are also being installed in law schools, law firms and government agencies. The Litigation Support and Trial Services Division offers consulting services on the use of those systems and support services such as document imaging and management, graphics and animation for litigation, and electronic evidence management.

"Today's jurors are too sophisticated to be taken in by slick technology," maintains Samuel Solomon, CEO of DOAR, "but they can be put off by a trial lawyer who has not mastered the use of computer technology." The problem, he says, is that lawyers cannot easily hone those skills while on a case, so the Digital Court Facility provides a much-needed practice

environment. Proficiency in the use of digital information is essential because the trial environment is highly dynamic. By the time closing arguments are presented, key issues may need to be reframed and information displayed with a different emphasis. A comprehensive plan for managing digital information is required in order to respond effectively in a fast-paced court environment.