

As seen in the August/September issue of



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Digital Courtroom - DOAR's New Facility Provides Research Opportunities For Legal Professionals.

By Amanda Clifford

To say DOAR's new \$3 million Digital Court Facility is high tech, is an understatement. DOAR, a litigation support and courtroom technology company, hosted the grand opening of its new 56,000-square-foot Lynbrook, N.Y., facility on June 6. The facility houses a full-featured high-tech courtroom, three mock jury rooms, three conference rooms and a boardroom, as well as the company's in-house litigation services offices on the top floor.

The new facility, which was financed by the Town of Hempstead by way of an industrial Development Bond, boasts features such as high-tech video, digital audio and computer equipment, as well as Web casting, real-time court reporting and videoconferencing capabilities.

Created for lawyers, judges, law students and other legal professionals, the facility can be rented for trial preparation, education and research purposes. Fees vary depending on the particular resource used.

DOAR CEO Sam Solomon said what makes this facility exceptional is attorneys now can benefit from the company's litigation support services as well as fulfill trial research and preparation needs, such as imaging, graphics and document management. "It is not trivial to support both trial and litigation in a single integrated organization," he said.

"This whole area of combining graphics and research, and tying it together with litigation support is a new concept. Rather than going to different firms, we offer a single service portfolio for everything right here."

Among the many possibilities for use, the facility could be used by a law firm to analyze a case, using a focus group, mock jury or a mock trial to prepare a case for trial; or for judges and courtroom technologists who want to examine how to run a high-tech courtroom. Other law firms might use the facility to learn how to implement technology into their own firms or how technology will have an impact in a trial.

Pieter Van Tol, an associate at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett in New York, a full-service general litigation firm, recently used DOAR's new courtroom and a jury observation room. "It was really first-class, and the courtroom looked and felt and sounded like the real deal," he said. "The facility was extraordinarily helpful. We learned about several

issues that were troubling the mock juries that were not strictly legal issues, and thus were not at the forefront of our minds. I would say it was indispensable.”

DOAR’s facility will provide research results to various groups including the Federal Judicial Center (FJC) in Washington, D.C., an organization within the federal courts responsible for quantitative and qualitative research for various issues related to the courts.

"By statute, the FJC is to work with other public and private organizations to stimulate quality research on federal court operations, and in that regard, we look forward to working with DOAR and other groups with the same interest in objective studies," said Beth Wiggins, senior research associate of the FJC, who with Meghan Dunn, directs the FJC Courtroom Technology Project.

"The digital court facility promises to offer, among other things, great opportunities for researching the effects of new courtroom technologies on legal decision making," explained Neal Feigenson, law professor at Quinnipiac University School of Law and a research affiliate in the Yale University Department of Psychology.

"Learning more about what happens in the high-tech courtroom is one of the most important items in the entire law and social science research agenda. For instance, without useful empirical research, advisory committees and legislatures will not be in a position to draft, recommend and enact sound evidentiary rules to address the uses of modern methods of visual communication," said Feigenson.

In the next three years, expect to see two to four more DOAR digital court facilities across the United States and in the United Kingdom, Solomon said. "We want to look at primary trial markets, where there is a significant amount of litigation to the size of the city, such as Chicago or L.A., and to develop an integrated network of digital courtroom facilities. That is the ultimate goal." Solomon also noted courtroom technology has an extremely bright future, predicting that by the year 2007, about 70 percent of the federal trial courts and 40 percent of the state trial courts in the United States will have presentation technology.

"I think many lawyers believe attorneys who are good at presenting their cases visually have an advantage over attorneys who aren't. They see it as another advocacy tool," Wiggins said.