

# Technology in Place to Assist Lawyers

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Technological innovation touches all of us in ways that were unimaginable as recently as 10 or 20 years ago. I left work one day recently and traveled a couple of miles down the road before realizing that my BlackBerry was back in the office.

I have lectured my sons about their proclivity to spend way too much time on the computer, playing with their Game Cubes and Game Boys, and listening to music on their MP3 players. My kids can't fathom that I made it through childhood without those toys, and I can't fathom that they want to stay in the house on a beautiful sunny day with their noses stuck to a computer or Game Cube monitor. Perhaps now I have a little better understanding of the hold that these technical toys have on kids, because I turned around and headed back to the office to retrieve my BlackBerry rather than be without it for one night.

Technology also influences the way we do business, and that includes the art of legal representation. Several judges and administrative personnel in this court want to expand the technology available to lawyers to facilitate the presentation and quality of evidence. Some readers may not know that we have made some strides in this area, with other initiatives on the horizon. We thought it would be helpful to describe the technology offered by the court and available to lawyers, and to mention some initiatives that will be underway soon.

Lawyers currently have the ability to play back VHS tapes over the monitors in any of the video-equipped courtrooms. New technology was installed in the courtrooms of Judge Gene Schnelz and Judge Colleen O'Brien that will enable the playback of DVDs in addition to VHS tapes. These courtrooms also have large flat-screen monitors that greatly enhance the visibility of evidence presented in DVD or VHS formats. When practicing in these two courtrooms, lawyers who want to present evidence in DVD or VHS formats do not need to bring equipment as the necessary items are already installed.

In addition to DVD and VHS playback, Judge Edward Sosnick's courtroom has been equipped with connections to enable lawyers to present evidence via the courtroom monitor from their laptop computers. The digital and electronic presentation of evidence has been done in several cases and deemed a success. This technology will be expanded to the courtrooms of Judge Steven N. Andrews and Judge Nanci Grant in the near future. Those courtrooms will also have large monitors with DVD/VHS playback capabilities soon.

Litigants may bring their own VHS tapes into any of the video-equipped courtrooms and request that the clerks make a

copy of the proceedings at no cost to the litigant. In lieu of bringing a blank VHS tape to court, litigants may request DVD copies of proceedings for a small fee. Another option available to litigants, assuming that the clerks have sufficient time, would allow for playback of archival copies of court proceedings via a laptop. This last option will require that advance arrangements be made with the clerk assigned to the judge before whom the proceedings took place.

The court administrator's office is a little like your neighborhood electronics store in that we have several items available for checkout through the applicable chambers. The items include an ELMO document camera, 42-inch LCD monitor, 27-inch TV DVD/VHS combination unit, TVs, DVD and VHS players, and projectors. Lawyers are welcome to use this equipment but advance arrangements must be made through the judge's staff to which the applicable case has been assigned.

Visitors may use the Internet through several wireless networks located at open access points throughout the courthouse. Wireless hotspots include the cafeteria, jury assembly room, and the entire 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the courthouse tower.

We hope to install encrypted wireless projectors in each courtroom in the near future. This would enable litigants and attorneys to bring their laptop computers into court for presentations without the need for additional hardware or software. Some of the courtrooms, as mentioned earlier, have been equipped with large flat-screen panel monitors. We hope to equip every courtroom with similar capabilities as time and funding allow.

Lastly, the Register of Actions can now be viewed online from anywhere that Internet connectivity can be achieved. An abundance of positive feedback has been received from the legal community regarding this joint effort with the Clerk's Office and Department of Information Technology – known as *Court Explorer*. I wrote extensively about *Court Explorer* in the February 2007 edition of *Laches*.

*Court Explorer* is a free application that enables the user to view the docket and to order public court records online. This service should be of considerable benefit to legal practitioners who can now see the docket and order public records from the convenience of their offices or homes. You can take a tour of *Court Explorer* at <http://www.oakgov.com/clerkrod/courtexplorer/index.html>.

If you have any questions about the technology described in this article, please contact the court's Data Technology Unit at 248-452-9564.

Until next time...