

Devices Every Trial Team Must Have in the Courtroom

By Adam Bloomberg

With more than 20 years of “hot seat” experience in courtrooms across the United States (and the USVI), our presentation technology teams have always employed the most capable and reliable equipment possible. Our devices have been performance tested, sat on, dropped, had water/coffee spilled on them, etc, during a wide variety of trials, hearings, mock trial and focus groups. In this *Insights* we will focus on key front-end equipment and leave discussion about distribution and display equipment for another time.

The Laptop – Buy Peace of Mind

Today’s laptop computer is by far the most important piece of technology you will take into the courtroom. Everything depends on the performance of this device.

When considering this purchase, your peace of mind should be the deciding factor. Select something with a proven operating system that is not only compatible with your firm’s software, but one with enough horsepower to effectively handle today’s demanding trial presentation software and databases. It is also most important to allow performance and reliability, not price, to steer this purchase.

Tips

- Don’t use your personal office laptop for trial. Using it in hearings and simple ADR sessions is fine, but when preparing for a formal trial, employ a laptop your firm has equipped and programmed specifically for the courtroom. This computer will not be burdened with unneeded office applications. Instead, it will be loaded with the latest trial presentation software and your relevant databases, and it will be ready to operate with maximum speed and reliability.
- When researching a purchase, seek a state-of-the-art, high speed processor. Add maximum RAM, a high speed, large capacity hard drive and a high-performance graphics card.
- Always include an on-site maintenance plan (for the battery too).

Recommendations

In our experience, the two best performing courtroom laptops are manufactured by Lenovo (formerly IBM) and Dell. Both of these brands have reputations for durability and outstanding performance in court. Current models that we recommend are:

- **Lenovo Thinkpad T500**, Intel Processor Core 2 Duo, 2.26GHz, in 14” and 15”screen sizes
- **Dell Latitude E6400**, Intel Core 2 Duo P8400, 2.26GHz, 1066MHz 3M L2 Cache

Best Places to Purchase

For a quick, online purchase, both of these laptops can be found at Best Buy, Costco or Wal-Mart. Check with your local stores for over-the-counter availability of these makes and models. That said, we recommend you (or your IT folks) call the manufacturers directly and speak to someone about the configuration you are looking for. When ordering new systems, we often find that manufacturers are able to inform us of new

technologies that aren't yet available to large retail chains. It's worth the 30 minute phone call.

Remote Mouse – Controlling the Attention Span of your Audience

As today's presentation "remote controls," these hand-held devices allow you to manage the pace of your presentation, call attention to key graphic or copy (as a laser pointer) elements of your exhibits and they even give you the ability to "black" the screen, pulling jurors' attention back to you when the visual display is not needed. When used in coordination with your laptop operator, these inexpensive, simple to use, reliable devices provide great presentation control.

These are simple plug-and-play devices (no software required). All of them have built-in controls for "Launch Slideshow," "Slide Forward," "Slide Back," "Black Screen" and "Volume" functions. Most manufacturers also offer a red or green laser. We have found the color green to be much crisper and it allows the eye of your audience to follow your lead even more closely.

These controllers allow the presenting attorney or expert witness to work a good 50 feet away from the laptop, allowing movement around the courtroom (if allowed) with confidence. They also have a built-in LCD timer with vibration alerts to help you manage your time, which is especially useful in opening/closings where the judge is giving a specific amount of time to present your case.

Tips

- Test your remote every time you plan to use it, even after a break or lunch.
- Walk around the entire courtroom while testing the buttons to confirm you are within range.
- Always carry back-up batteries and begin with fresh ones.
- Bring two remotes as they have a tendency to walk off (in clients' pockets).

Recommendations

- Logitech 2.4 GHz Cordless Presenter
- Da-Lite RF PowerPoint Remote with Green Laser Pointer
- Microsoft Presenter 3000 Presentation remote control

Best Places to Purchase

- www.amazon.com
- www.bhphotovideo.com

Memory Sticks – Providing You Enormous Flexibility with Your Files

As most trial teams have transitioned to electronic presentation of evidence and demonstratives, the need to easily move these files between your team's computers and provide them to opposing counsel or a court reporter has become crucial. A removable USB memory stick fits this need beautifully. Originally introduced in the early 2000s, but not used much by trial teams until around 2005, these reliable devices have become ubiquitous in the legal profession. The early days of the memory stick saw capacities around 128k, which would store only a few exhibits. Today's memory stick is light years ahead of the early models with far more storage capacity (up to 256gb) and the capability to store several weeks of video depositions and large databases of exhibits.

Tips

- Purchase a memory stick with encryption hardware on it.
- Label your memory stick with your firm's logo in case they are misplaced in the courtroom. They can even be ordered in bulk with your logo artwork at very reasonable cost.

Recommendations

- Kingston's new DataTraveler® 310 USB Flash drive (256GB)
- SanDisk Extreme® Contour™ (64GB)

Best Places to Purchase

- www.newegg.com
- www.scandisk.com
- amazon.com

Broadband Card – Always Stay Connected

Whether the courtroom has wi-fi internet access or not, it's always a good idea to have your own broadband connection available. You never know when you might need that last minute document or exhibit revision transmitted quickly to you during trial or early hearings. In the last three to four years new laptops have been offered with the broadband wi-fi hardware already built in. If your existing laptop does not have wi-fi broadband built-in, consider using one provided by all of the major cell phone providers. They can fit in either a USB connection or a PCMCIA slot on the side of your laptop.

Tip

- During pre-trial hearings, test the cell phone coverage in your venue to confirm signal strength.

Recommendations

- AirCard® 402 by Sierra Wireless
- U301 USB Device Sprint 3G/4G Mobile Broadband
- AT&T USBConnect Velocity

Best Place to Purchase

Any major cell phone provider.

Ten years ago scanners were the size of most copy machines. They were big bulky, heavy and scanned a single page at a snail's pace. Through the years, scanning manufacturers have been able to reduce their size while increasing their "per page" scanning speeds. Today, we carry a portable scanner the size of a flashlight that is fast, lightweight and lives easily on a courtroom counsel table. A scanner can be an important trial tool because it allows the team to quickly convert hardcopy exhibits and jury instructions into electronic documents on the spot, at the last minute.

Tips

- Purchase a scanner that can be powered by a USB port.

- When it's not in use, store the scanner in its carry case since these devices are very sensitive to wear and tear, especially being dropped.

Recommendations

- Xerox 100 Travel Scanner XTRAVEL-SCAN
- NeatReceipts Mobile Scanner

Best Places to Purchase

- www.neatco.com
- www.newegg.com
- www.amazon.com

As we all know, legal technology changes almost daily. Devices become smaller, more capable, faster and, in most cases, less expensive over time. The devices mentioned in this article are among the best currently available and the brands mentioned should continue to produce good products over time. We recommend you always put your mind at ease by conducting your own research before you make these critical trial team purchases. Please feel free to contact us for current tips on these and other devices.