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Ten Technology Tips

by John Cord

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Introduction

It's easy to fall behind the times in terms of technology. Keeping up with the Joneses can be confusing, time-consuming and expensive. Every generation of kids grows up with the latest technology and is more comfortable using improvements. I've always considered myself relatively tech-savvy, but even I'm getting behind the eight-ball. My last game system was the Nintendo 64 from 1996 (Has it been so long?). I've never even touched an iPod,

while my 20-year-old brother has gone through all of Apple's variations.

But no matter how far behind the times you are, there are plenty of opportunities to catch up and to stay competitive. You may have to ask your children, nieces and nephews to demonstrate the complexities of web design, but, as a matter of principle, you should be able to set the time on your own VCR.

Here are ten technology tips (many are free!) to make you more efficient in your legal work:

Tip No. 1: Make Your E-mail System Work For You

Whether you use Outlook, Netscape, Yahoo, or G-mail, there are plenty of options available to make life easier. It is to your advantage to learn the bells and whistles of each program. For purposes of illustration, this article will refer to Microsoft Outlook 2003, one of the more common e-mail systems used in businesses.

- A) **Sort:** You can sort e-mail in a number of ways that are convenient. In Outlook, click on the gray column headings above the message list to sort by common features such as the sender, and date received (or, click the "Arrange by" button on the "View" drop-down menu). Additionally, you can segregate the messages you've responded to from the ones you haven't, or you can organize according to the priority you have assigned to messages.
- B) **Search:** If you can't find an e-mail by sorting based on the sender or date received, try a search (in Outlook, this is done through the "Find" button on the "Tools" drop-down menu). Type a word that is somewhat unique to the message you are looking for, specify which folder you want to search, and you should come up with a list of messages that pertain to your subject.
- C) **Rules:** Perhaps the most overlooked feature of e-mail systems are rules. These sound complicated, but they are in fact very intuitive, and vital to streamlining your overloaded inbox. You can use rules as a second line of defense from spam (*i.e.*, send all e-mail messages with "Cialis" or "Viagra" in the subject line or message body to the junk e-mail folder – although this might not be a good idea if you are a pharmaceutical at-

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— Robert Frost

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torney). Or, it can keep you more organized (*i.e.*, send all listserv messages to a certain folder so they don't clog your in-box and you can look at them later, or send all messages from a particular person or client to a specific folder). To create a rule in Outlook, simply click "Rules and Alerts" from the "Tools" drop-down menu, click "New Rule," and use the templates to create your rule.

D) **Spell-check:** Your e-mails should be as professional as your letters. You wouldn't send a letter out without checking the spelling, and e-mail etiquette requires that you do the same for your e-mails. Most e-mail systems are equipped to spell check e-mails before they get sent. Do this as a favor to all your readers! Click "Options" in the "Tool" drop-down menu. Go to the "Spelling" tab and click the box marked "Always check spelling before sending."

E) **Follow-up:** If you can't address an e-mail message right away, but know it is important, put an alert

on it. In Outlook, simply click the "Actions" drop-down menu and click "Follow-Up" and "Add Reminder." Put in the date and time for the alert, and you will receive a message at that date and time, reminding you about the e-mail. This is an important way to prevent your e-mails from being lost in the shuffle of your in-box. Additionally, if you want to remind yourself to follow-up on an e-mail message you send out, use the same procedure in a new message before you click "Send."

Tip No. 2: Stop Ordering Paper Transcripts From Your Court

I'm not here to tell you to make your entire office paperless; paper is part and parcel of the legal business. However, there is absolutely no good reason to order a full-sized or condensed ("mini") manuscript of depositions from your court reporter (unless you noted the deposition and are in charge of the "official" copy). Save yourself and your client the money. The only thing you need to order is an E-Transcript and an ASCII. With an

E-transcript and an ASCII, you can do as much and more than you could with a simple paper transcript. A little background—ASCII (pronounced "ask-ee") stands for American Standard Code for Information Interchange. If you have a computer, you can use it. It is a very basic program that displays text. Usually it will come up on your computer as a Notepad (look in your Accessories file on the Start menu). From here, you can search text (Ctrl-F) very quickly during trial on your laptop, and you can copy text and paste it into your briefs.

E-transcript is a proprietary program used by 70% of court reporters.¹ A free viewer is downloadable from <http://www.reallegal.com/eTranscript.asp>. Once you have that on your computer, you are ready to go! E-transcript provides an easy way to read, print, and search transcripts. From this program, you can print full-size and mini deposition transcripts, including the word index. You can view an index of words that appear in the transcript, and by clicking on any word in the index it will take you directly to the word in the transcript. Other versions with additional

¹ <http://www.reallegal.com/eTranscript.asp>

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As an additional bonus, both of these electronic transcripts merge seamlessly with TextMap, a program put out by Lexis Nexis CaseSoft, which can be used to create incredibly useful deposition summaries.² At the end of the deposition, just ask the court reporter for an E-tran (that's the lingo, if you want to appear "cool") and ASCII to be e-mailed directly to you and/or your assistant.

² <http://www.casesoft.com>

Tip No. 3: Use Instant Messenger

Instant Messenger ("IM") is e-mail with adrenaline: it allows two or more people to have an actual typed conversation over the computer. There are plenty to choose from, including MSN, AOL, and Yahoo! If you have a laptop computer with wireless capability, or if you are able to hook up to the Internet while at trial or at a deposition, you can instantly communicate with your associates, assistants, and experts. Need a document that you didn't bring with you? IM your assistant, and have him e-mail it to you, or send it directly through the instant messenger

program. Need more information on a particular point the defense expert is making? Instant message your expert, and find out the lynchpin of his analysis. Also, if you want your remote associates and experts to be able to read the deposition *as it proceeds*, ask your court reporter about LiveNote's Realtime Internet Service.³

Tip No. 4: Get A Projector

Let's face it, in this day of multimedia, jurors are not interested in listening to any of us talk. And, if you do, you need something visual that gives the jury a reason to remember it. If you are a trial lawyer, you need a projector. Projectors have many uses: showing demonstrative evidence to the jury, playing a critical deposition segment to the mediator, or giving a presentation to the office.

What specifications should you get? Your projector should have a capacity of at least 1000 lumens (a measure of the brightness capability). The higher the lumens, the easier it is to see the projection, even in a well-lit room. Unless you're a connoisseur, the differences between an LCD and DLP projector are not likely to be significant, but talk to your retailer about your anticipated projector uses. A basic projector can be purchased for under \$1,000.

Of course, the projector will need a screen (\$100 to \$200 for a basic version; find something that shrinks down that you can travel with and display in a courtroom), and it is important to make sure you have the proper cables to connect your laptop to the projector. Most projectors and laptops communicate through a USB cable, which is the standard technology hook-up. All of these components are available at your local office supply store. You can also connect a digital presenter (like an overhead projector, except that it can project regular paper and objects instead of transparencies) directly to the projector.⁴ *Always* make sure to test your presentation a couple of days before you need it.

Tip No. 5: Use Videoconferencing For Your Depositions

Videoconferencing is not just for big corporations anymore. As the technology has advanced, it has become more

³ <http://www.livenote.com/service.asp?service=2#faq>

⁴ See www.samsungpresenter.com for one example of a digital presenter.



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accessible and affordable for even smaller firms. In some cases, it can actually save you money.

Essentially, you need two videoconferencing locations. Kinko's has videoconferencing sites available in every major city, and larger court reporters, such as LAD Reporting, Art Miller & Associates, and Esquire Deposition Service all have these capabilities, as well. If you are videoconferencing a deposition, it makes sense to go through your court reporter for the transcription and videoconferencing components.

How much will this cost you? Videoconferencing typically ranges from about \$200 to \$350 per hour per site. Compared to a round trip plane ticket, time spent out of the office, meals, and even hotel charges, it might be wiser to videoconference a deposition than to travel to the deposition location. Of course, some depositions you should go to in person, when you can. Typically, the defendant and key fact witnesses should be deposed in person. Witnesses who will be asked to examine or refer to a large number of documents may be easier to depose in person. However, a defense expert who is prepared appropriately will likely be immune to the additional pressures that come to bear in a live deposition, so videoconferencing may be to your advantage.

Note also that a deposition done by *videoconference* is not the same thing as a *videotaped* deposition. Not all videoconferences are recorded, and you should determine if any special measures need to be taken in order to play a recorded deposition. Maryland Rule 2-416 contains numerous requirements for the operator of a videotaped deposition, including stating his name, employer, date and time of deposition, caption of case, deponent's name, and name of the party giving notice on the tape. MD. R. CIV. PROC. §2-416(f) and (g). Likewise, the operator must attach a certificate that it is a correct and complete record of testimony given. Great care must be taken to ensure that the videoconferenced deposition may be used at trial.

Tip No. 6: Get A Desktop Searching Program

We've all had that sinking feeling when, after searching every folder on your computer for the final version of the brief you worked on a month ago, you come up empty-handed. It's always in the last place you look. Now there is a way to cut down your search time. Download a free desktop searching program, such

as Google Desktop (<http://www.google.com/downloads/>) or Copernic (<http://www.copernic.com/>). With it, you can search your entire hard drive for e-mail, files, documents, folders, and anything else that is saved on your computer, including your Internet history. This brings the ease and efficiency of an Internet search to your hard drive.

Tip No. 7: Upgrade From Adobe Reader

Adobe Reader is free software available at www.adobe.com. The creators have distributed over 500 million copies of the program, so chances are that it is on your computer right now.⁵ It offers the ability to view, print, and even to search PDF documents, albeit to a limited extent.

The Adobe family includes Acrobat Professional, and Acrobat Standard. Acrobat Professional has more features than Acrobat Standard, but the version you use depends on your firm's requirements. Here are some features that you may not know about:

- A) Use the "Snapshot" tool to select and copy a portion of an Adobe document. Paste it into another ap-

plication, such as onto PowerPoint slide.

- B) Re-arrange pages within a document, or insert pages from one Adobe document to another. Simply click the "Pages" tab on the left side of the screen, select a page or pages, then move your cursor to the insertion point of that or another Adobe document.
- C) Create new PDF documents from WordPerfect: click the "File" drop-down menu, and click "Publish to PDF."
- D) Create new PDF documents from Microsoft applications (Word, Excel, Outlook) by clicking the "Convert to Adobe PDF" icons on the toolbar or in the "Adobe PDF" drop-down menu.
- E) Create new PDF documents from Microsoft Explorer by clicking on the "Convert current web page to an Adobe PDF file" icon on the toolbar.
- F) Conduct a presentation using only Acrobat by clicking "Full Screen" on the "View" drop-down menu. This omits the toolbars and cre-

⁵ <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/acrrfaq.html>



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ates a linear presentation, much like PowerPoint, that is suitable for showing to a jury or mediator.

- G) Search within PDF documents: click the "Document" drop-down menu, click "Recognize text using OCR," and click "Start." Once the process is finished, you can search for text within a PDF document by clicking "Find" on the "Edit" drop-down menu.

Acrobat enables you to make comments and notes directly on the PDF document, to share comments with others across e-mail, to organize documents using bookmarks, and to create forms. It is a dynamic product with incredible potential for the educated user.

Tip No. 8: Use A Case Presentation Program (i.e., Trial Director, Sanction)

Adobe and PowerPoint are useful for presenting information during opening statements and closing arguments. However, in document-intensive cases, such as medical malpractice, commercial cases, or personal injury cases with extensive medical records, you may need trial presentation software with more capabilities than Adobe or PowerPoint can provide. For example, if you are cross-examining a witness who begins to discuss something you were not prepared to address at that moment, it takes precious time for you

to fumble with your computer to find the slide or document you need. Case presentation programs like Trial Director and Sanction are equipped to handle the uncertainties of trial. Using these systems, the first step is to scan all of your case documents into the computer. Each group of documents will have a specified prefix code, and each document will have an individual identification number. When a witness addresses something out-of-turn, these case presentation programs can instantly access the document you need, and can magnify, highlight, and mark up documents on the "big screen" for the jury. This provides for a more interactive examination that will, at the very least, keep the jury interested.

Single-user licenses can be ordered online from www.sanction.com and www.trialdirector.com for about \$600 each.

Tip No. 9: Scan Your Documents

Creating an internal document scanning system can make you more productive. If you are doing some last-minute early-morning deposition preparation out of the office, you can still access documents even when your colleague is home asleep.

By investing in a relatively inexpensive high-speed scanner, you can convert mounds of documents into PDF or TIF formats. The originals may be disposed of or, if that is too nerve-racking for you, at least filed away in an unused corner

of the office. These documents, when scanned and saved onto your server, are accessible to the entire office at the same time, can be copied quickly to your hard drive while out-of-town at depositions or trial, and are ready to be e-mailed or printed. Additionally, a laptop computer and high-speed Internet connection can allow you to access these documents from home or when you are traveling.

Tip No. 10: Google Desktop Alerts

If you want to keep up on current events regarding a certain topic, defendant, corporation or witness, you can request Google to automatically perform a specified search and report the results to you via e-mail. Go to <http://www.google.com/alerts>, type in your search terms and choose whether you want to be notified once a day, once a week, or instantaneously when the news comes in. Links to the new web pages will be e-mailed to you automatically.

Conclusion

It's a brave, new world out there. But you don't need to be an engineer, computer scientist, or eight-year old to divine the mysteries of modern technology. All you need is some initiative, and a commitment to give yourself and your clients every possible advantage.



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