

TRIAL REPORTER

A woman with curly brown hair, wearing a white suit, is shown in profile, speaking to a judge. The judge, an older man with glasses wearing a black judicial robe, is seated in a red leather chair. An American flag is visible in the background.

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Buyer's Guide to Courtroom Technology

There is a proliferation of continuing legal education and legal handbooks about presenting the client's story to the jury. Part of the lawyer's storytelling toolbox should include, when appropriate, technology. For those just striking out in the technological arena, or for those looking to upgrade, here are some buying tips.

Laptop computer:

A laptop is the storage device for presentations at trial. It will plug directly into the digital projector, and possibly the document camera. The specifications of a laptop computer are beyond the scope of this article, but as with all technology, buyers should consider the purpose of the purchase. Is it going to serve as an attorney's primary computer? Is it to be used only for presentations? What software will be downloaded onto it? Will it be compatible with software used in the office? Local computer store salespeople can provide guidance on the type of computer best suited to particular purposes.

Digital projector:

The projector is the mechanism that transmits the computer's image to the projector screen. It will plug into the computer, typically with a RGB cable (which will be included with the projector). It can also transmit an image from a document camera. Projectors range in price from \$500 to about \$2,000. Two good brands are Optoma and ViewSonic.

Any new projector should have a minimum of 2,000 lumens (which is quickly becoming the minimum), and should be XGA (as opposed to VGA) or higher. Lumens are the total amount of light a bulb is capable of generating. More lumens means the jury will be able to see the presentation, even in a well-lit courtroom. XGA denotes a resolution of 1024 x 768 (whereas VGA denotes 640 x 480). Resolution is the number of individual dots used to create an image, and it is expressed as the number of horizontal picture elements ("pixels") by the number of vertical pixels. A higher resolution indicates a better picture quality.

Of less concern is the type of projector: DLP (Digital Light Processors) versus LCD (Liquid Crystal Display). As a general rule, DLP projectors are better for displaying video (i.e., deposition clips), and LCD projectors produce a sharper image. Aspect ratio is also a consideration. It is the relationship between the width and height of an image. Most projectors have 4:3 (standard), whereas some have 16:9 (widescreen), and many are capable of both. Finally, most projectors include speakers, which can be useful if playing deposition clips.

Document camera:

A document camera is like the overhead projector from high school, except it does not require transparencies. However, unlike an overhead projector, it does not display an image to a screen by itself, but must be attached to a projector. The advantage is that it can capture any document (or even three-dimensional

objects) for projection. Unlike most presentations loaded on the computer, like PowerPoint, the document camera can be used on the fly with any document available. For this reason, it is a terrific device for cross-examination. When shopping for a document camera, the sky is the limit. Prices range from about \$500 on the low end (for example, Samsung, Toshiba, or ELMO) to \$26,000 for a top-of-the-line device (WolfVision). The most important factor is the resolution (the number of pixels the camera will display). However, anything higher than the resolution of the projector is merely wasted pixels.

Additionally, a lawyer's document camera should have a zoom lens, with auto-focus capabilities so the focus will not have to be manually adjusted after zooming in and out. Newer document cameras can capture images and transfer them directly to a computer, as well. Finally, consider the size and weight of the document camera.

Toshiba makes a projector-document camera hybrid for about \$1,300. It has the advantage of being two devices in one which is very convenient. However, anything that damages the projector will damage the document camera, and vice versa. This can make replacements or upgrades more expensive in the long run.

Projector screen:

The screen is what the jury will look at during the presentation. The main considerations in any screen purchase are size and portability. Find a screen that folds up easily for transport, and assembles easily. New models simply rise pneumatically from a tubular aluminum case to the desired height (i.e., the Draper RoadWarrior). The size of the screen will depend on the available space and layout of the courtroom, but a width of 72 to 80 inches is standard.

As with all technology, it is important that the user is comfortable with it, or it will simply be a wasted purchase. Buyers should shop around, take a test run, and solicit the opinions of friends and colleagues before making a final purchase. A solid warranty on any major technological purchase is a must in anticipation of the unthinkable disaster. And of course, don't forget the accessories (extra batteries, laser pointers, extension cords, a small table to place the projector on). Walk into your next trial with this equipment, and let your client's story tell itself. ■

About the Author

John J. Cord (Janet, Jenner & Suggs, LLC) graduated from the University of Colorado School of Law in May 2003. Mr. Cord concentrates his practice on assisting victims of birth trauma and other serious injuries of medical negligence. He is licensed to practice in Maryland, the District of Columbia, Pennsylvania, Georgia and Minnesota. He is a member of the American Association for Justice and is the current chair of the Maryland Trial Lawyers Association Technology Committee.