The Lawyers' Guide to Creating Persuasive Computer Presentations

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For anyone born after the 1950s, television has been the dominant source of information and entertainment their entire lives. For good or ill, it has shaped the way we expect facts to be presented to us, and provides a powerful visual component to the way we learn. Does it not follow, then, that when presenting a case to twelve men and women on a jury, you should augment your case with visual aids with the help of a computer?

This is the theme of *The Lawyer's Guide to Creating Persuasive Computer Presentations*, by Ann E. Brenden and John D. Goodhue. Ms. Brenden is an attorney with the Iowa Attorney General's Office and has extensive experience using computer presentations in court as well as lecturing on the subject. Mr. Goodhue is a patent lawyer in Des Moines, Iowa with a background in computer engineering, who in addition to his practice, also writes and presents on intellectual property issues.

The first portion of the book considers why a lawyer should use computer presentations as part of making his case in the courtroom. Some may question the value of this type of visual aid or dismiss it as a gimmick. The authors give a number of compelling reasons. First, there is evidence that people are much more likely to remember information that is given to them visually as well as verbally. A computer presentation can highlight pieces of evidence, offer timelines, help clarify complex concepts, and generally improve the ability of jurors to follow the case that the lawyer is building. Also, on a practical level, being able to store all your video and audio displays in a single computer presentation reduces your reliance on flipcharts, magic markers, tape players, VCRs and other physical apparatus traditionally used in the courtroom.

The authors then look at how best to use various techniques to incorporate computer displays into opening statements, examination, cross examination, closing arguments, appeals and tribunals. For instance, a linear slideshow wherein one slide builds on the previous in putting together the 'story' for the jury is effective in opening statements. If an expert witness is providing very complex testimony on DNA evidence, a few diagrams on display at the same time illustrating how DNA works can prevent the jury from becoming confused and tuning out. The authors have included many examples of slides used in actual cases, and in one instance, the entire sequence of slides used in the closing arguments of a murder trial.

The book also deals with a number of the questions that have been raised about the appropriateness of computer displays in the courtroom. Is there a difference between evidence displayed by computer and 'computer-generated evidence?' Does presenting

evidence in such a way prejudice a jury? Does the admissibility of evidence change if the means of displaying it change? The authors look at objections that have been raised over courtroom computer displays and offer their own take on the issues.

The final chapters of the book cover the nuts and bolts of actually creating a computer display; from what software and hardware is needed to convert your evidence into a digital format to organizing it into an impressive and professional looking presentation. Since Microsoft PowerPoint is the most common application used in presentations, the authors focus mainly on getting the most out of this program: two chapters are dedicated to a mini-tutorial on the features available. PowerPoint does have certain limitations though, so the book also looks at other trial presentation software available and the circumstances in which they may be preferable to PowerPoint.

The reader of this book will come away with a new appreciation of just how important a visual presentation can be, when made a part of a compelling case.   Rather than 'pandering' to a jury member's familiarity with TV, you are providing information in a way that is proven to make a powerful impression. The authors combine a fascinating discussion of how people learn and the various legal issues surrounding the use of computers in a courtroom with a wealth of technical information and real world examples. A computer presentation may not be the way to go in every case, but when it is, lawyers will find this book an excellent resource.

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