

Web-based technology setting next stage for trial prep

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Technology has revolutionized many parts of the legal industry, and trial presentation is no exception. Not long ago, hiring a trial presentation company was necessary for even the simplest needs due to high costs and the expertise required to operate software programs.

Times have certainly changed. Now, myriad do-it-yourself solutions have hit the market, Microsoft PowerPoint is widely popular and hardware costs continue to shrink, all making it more feasible for law firms and corporate counsel to craft homespun solutions for their trial presentation needs.

Still, working with a trial presentation provider can confer a multitude of technical and non-technical advantages.

Non-technical benefits include the positive impact that complex animation, creative and strategic demonstratives, and venue analysis can all have on courtroom presentations and a legal team's success.

Additionally, providers that focus on trial support are consistently developing new technologies and delivering creative visual strategies that provide law firms with the technical advantages they need to be successful at trial.

Within the litigation arena, a few providers have become "technology innovators." These leaders are developing tools that will set the next stage for trial preparation and presentation and are ushering in a new era of technology in this sector of litigation support. While their tools may differ, their vision is largely the same: drive efficiencies, reduce costs, and enable law firms to gain control and better manage and present information.

With these goals in mind, the latest technologies feature intuitive user interfaces and powerful functionalities that enhance every step of the process.

New in the spotlight are web-based tools that provide transcript management, graphic design, jury research and venue analysis capabilities.

The principal (and obvious) draw to tools such as these is that they are accessible from anywhere - some providers even offer smart phone apps - and they are helping firms of all sizes meet their objectives faster, easier and cheaper than ever before.

In contrast to other tools on the market, web-hosted programs also free up internal resources of the law firm from both a hardware and personnel standpoint. There is no longer a need to install and license software, build networking solutions or employ massive amounts of data storage space on the firm's servers.

Web-based tech tools

The hallmark of a web-based transcript manager, for example, is its ability to facilitate collaboration among trial team members through streamlined and instantaneous communication.

The web component allows trial teams to efficiently load and share deposition transcripts in one central and accessible location, providing for easy review and annotation. Sharing transcripts and work product on web-hosted programs is as easy as opening a web browser, and case access is kept secure.

To involve only those participating in the project, team managers can add or remove users instantly online. Individual team members may work independently or enable additional users to collaborate in real time without e-mailing documents back and forth. At the click of a mouse, new content and work product is instantly available for other users to review.

These features are designed to empower deposition review teams and clients to better communicate, collaborate, and manage cases and costs.

Streaming video synchronization is also available in some online tools on the market. That feature enables trial team members working from separate locations, or even different work stations in the same facility, to access the same video depositions and easily review all witness and expert testimony. Teams no longer need to send around copies and upload video files, which are often too large to e-mail and require local administration to set up for review.

Just a few years ago, video depositions were almost exclusively constrained to localized computers, but now access is fast, reliable and affordable online, giving teams the power to seamlessly coordinate deposition review.

Other areas of trial preparation have also been taken to the web. One example is the process of creating visual aids for trial presentation. Whether a legal team is looking for an online source to create graphics or is seeking tools to drive cost efficiencies in the graphics production and design process, solutions now exist.

Need a timeline, chart or graph, and need it for a low cost? Legal teams can simply go online and select from a group of sample templates, enter their content and place their order.

With the assistance of these new graphics services, teams can now support their arguments with all the advantages of professionally designed visuals, while also adhering to fixed budgets that otherwise would have made such presentations impossible to produce.

In many instances, collaboration is the key to creating powerful visuals. Web-based graphic management enables team members to review, annotate and organize graphics online in real time. As with other Web-based tools, it streamlines communication and allows team members to collaborate across dispersed locations.

In addition, members of the litigation team can upload, track and strategically organize graphics as they are added to the case. Team colleagues and experts can then mark up exhibits and view changes made by other users directly on a web browser, rather than forwarding e-mails with attached files.

With everyone literally on the same page, the team can apply a consistent design theme and work through presentation issues as they arise, eliminating the need for group review sessions and extensive revision.

Another web solution gaining popularity among legal teams is online jury research. While the number of providers is still relatively low as compared to other trial preparation solutions, conducting jury research protocols via the web affords many of the same benefits: saving time, conserving costs and empowering teams to gain more control over their proceedings.

Online research also offers many advantages over traditional telephone surveys such as speed, reach and accuracy. Legal teams have several options when choosing the right type of online research, from venue profile and juror profile online surveys to online focus groups.

While online jury research has been available for several years, recent advances and improvements in sampling databases, security and hosting capabilities have fortified it as a viable method of data collection.

Given that it is harder each passing year to reach potential jurors via phone, online research is quickly becoming a valid alternative to a phone survey, and in some cases it has even become standard protocol.

These products speak to the aggressiveness of providers not only in regard to taking their services to the web, but in dedicating their technological resources to developing unique components particularly adapted to meet the needs of trial teams and the clients they serve.

Online venue analysis also falls under the jury research umbrella and is just as valued as a dependable online solution.

With online venue analysis tools, legal teams can gain a competitive edge by previewing juror demographics on age, ethnicity, income and voter breakdown to determine a tactical approach to voir dire and litigation.

That information has proven helpful when building case presentation strategy. It provides a convenient way for the presentation team to plan and decide how best to connect with the jury.

The best online venue analysis tools offer a wealth of information at a glance, allowing teams to study the layout of the courthouse and courtrooms, link to important courthouse resources, assess community attitudes, and survey any negative venue biases. These components are critical to trial matters, particularly when trying a case in a remote venue.

To use an old adage, our greatest strengths are often our greatest weaknesses, and that apparently holds true in the case of online trial presentation products as well.

Of course, web-based programs require an active Internet connection and are useless without one. Internet access is now nearly ubiquitous, however, even while a team member travels between points or works outside the office.

Also, team members who know in advance that they will be working from a signal-free zone can download documents and temporarily work off of their hard drives.

Technology innovators are pioneering the frontier of online trial presentation tools with the idea that combining unlimited access with professional design can lead to greater efficiencies and success for trial presentation teams.

Because of the low costs associated with online trial presentation products, the low level of administration they require, and the user-friendly interfacing, these products present viable top-quality solutions even for smaller and mid-size firms.

As web-based tools grow in popularity, the capabilities offered will undoubtedly increase. In just a few years, we will likely be seeing more tools, with more capabilities, offered online.

Those who have supported recent discovery matters know firsthand the value technology provides and how it has changed the face of discovery. Working with the new advancements offered by some trial preparation and presentation companies can provide tremendous efficiencies in costs and time, as well as greater control and support for teams that are already handling full caseloads.

Lastly, and at the crux of the matter, these innovations can help firms of all sizes win.

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