



Have laptop – will travel

Using technology to maximize untethered productivity



Cooper

BY MILES B. COOPER

The lawyer's phone rang. "Hold on," he said as he answered. He left the bustle of the hotel lobby. "Yes?" The voice came through on the other end. "Tomorrow?" the lawyer asked. "Sure. I'll be there by noon." He hung up, slid his laptop into his bag, and started walking for the train station.

Today's mobile office

Between depositions, meetings, conferences and hearings, lawyers are rarely in the office. The time is passing for an imposing office, heavily staffed and file-drawer deep in infrastructure. Most of what needs doing no longer requires an army. It can be done from anywhere with a laptop and Internet connection. This serves dual purposes – reducing overhead (always important for plaintiffs' lawyers) and increasing productivity – whether waiting in the Law & Motion gallery for line 32, or at 41,000 feet. So what tools are needed for the road more traveled?

A laptop

This is not an *Apple vs. PC* debate. Pick one and go with it. Why not a tablet? Tablets are getting more robust, true, but they remain a more passive device. Can you produce with them? Yes. You could also build a house with a Swiss army knife – but a full toolbox sure is easier.

Buy a laptop at the upper end of the performance (and cost) spectrum. Despite my tech advocacy, I only update my machine every two to three years, and I keep the prior machine as my trial backup. This means four to six years of service – eons in tech terms. In order to not get blown out by newer programs' increasing data consumption, upgrade the memory (rule of thumb – double the stock option) and get a larger hard drive (same rule.) Like to work for hours without plugging in? Get the solid-state hard drive – they are more efficient power consumers. These upgrades increase initial expense. Overall, though, the machine provides years of additional service, substantially lowering equipment costs.

Microsoft Office suite

There are other products out there, but for compatibility and production, nothing beats a full Office suite. Produce briefs with Word, present at mediations and for Opening Statements with PowerPoint, read email and store with Outlook, and pretend to understand Excel (if you actually understand Excel, tip of the hat – but you probably should have been an accountant.)

Adobe Acrobat Professional

Again, there are workarounds, but they are all workarounds. Professional does all the regular necessities – optical character recognition, reduced file size saves, print to pdf, plus it Bates-stamps and redacts like a champ. One never needs to touch paper again. It makes document production, deposition preparation, and trial exhibits a one-person operation.

Cloud storage

I don't use paper – after scanning, everything goes into the electronic case file. Cloud storage like Dropbox, Box, or Drive synchronizes the files on a computer with a cloud backup and any other computer one works on – another laptop, a desktop, an assistant's computer. This means the current versions of all case files are with you at all times. It also means continuously backed-up data and not needing a slow-as-molasses remote login to an office computer.

A caveat: some early ethics opinions raised concerns about the sanctity of client confidences on a third-party server. Ethics panels wrote similar opinions regarding email transmissions back in the day. They are worth considering in light of the cases handled. The impact of the confidence breach is one significant ethical consideration. Litigating *Apple vs. Samsung* and worried about business-altering trade secrets? Cloud storage might not be the solution. Jane Doe's auto crash? Probably okay.

Wi-Fi, hotspots, and a robust data plan

"Road warrioring" and cloud synchronization require connectivity. That café Wi-Fi with 15 other mobile professionals sucking up bandwidth may not provide the best connection. Using a phone as a Wi-Fi hotspot gives one more control. I stay constantly connected and consume large amounts of data – a five gigabyte per month data plan is plenty.

Accessorize

That laptop trackpad will eventually cause carpal tunnel syndrome. Splurge – add a full-size wireless mouse, particularly if one cuts and pastes on a regular basis. Logitech makes nice (affordable) options. Bring along the earbuds. It is a lot easier to take notes during a call when both hands are free (and stream music to drown out noise.) Finally, a large capacity thumb drive allows you to transfer data, print that motion at a copy place, and download the expert's file from the expert's computer at deposition.



Outro

Back to our mobile lawyer. On the train, he read the new client materials that arrived by email. He broke them up into separate documents in Acrobat, and saved them in a new client file, synched to the cloud. In the time remaining, he finalized an opposition to summary judgment. At the meeting, he popped open his laptop, pulled up Google Earth, and the new client was able to explain how the incident occurred. Armed with the information, the lawyer decided to accept the case.

Miles B. Cooper is a partner at Emison Hullverson LLP. He represents people with personal injury and wrongful death cases. In addition to litigating his own cases, he associates in as trial counsel and consults on trial matters. He has served as lead counsel, co-counsel, second seat, and schlepper over his career, and is a member of the American Board of Trial Advocates. Cooper's interests beyond litigation include trial presentation technologies and bicycling (although not at the same time). ☒