

Technology

Inside the High-Tech Courtroom

To Take Advantage of Innovative Equipment, Place Your Request Early for Courtroom 625

BY DANIEL J. SIEGEL

When Judge William Manfredi discusses Philadelphia's high-technology courtrooms, he sounds like a proud father. "Our new technology courtrooms are improving the way lawyers try cases," says Judge Manfredi, supervising judge, Trial Division-Civil for the Court of Common Pleas. "When used fully, these courtrooms make for a cleaner presentation of documentary evidence and shorten trials by one third," he adds. Attorneys who have tried cases in the new courtrooms echo the judge's enthusiasm.

So what's all the fuss? Although high-technology courtrooms sound like something from the future, what they really do is combine modern technology with traditional courtrooms to allow attorneys to present their cases more efficiently and more effectively. The centerpiece of Philadelphia's program is Courtroom 625, a beautifully renovated courtroom that mixes historic architecture with cutting-edge technology. Judge Manfredi believes that Courtroom 625 is the only historically certified space that houses a high-tech courtroom.

At first glance, Courtroom 625 looks like most other courtrooms. But a second look around reveals significant differences. The

most obvious change is that there are monitors virtually everywhere, ranging from small ones for counsel, jurors and the judge, to a 50-inch plasma screen that looks like it belongs as part of a home entertainment system. Other modifications are less obvious but equally important. There is a



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podium for counsel, where lawyers can link their laptop computers into the room's fully networked infrastructure. From this podium, counsel can control the evidence presented and move seamlessly from one piece of evidence to another. With the touch of a button, jurors and witnesses can view a video clip, then a chart and then a transcript, all of which can be annotated, printed and preserved. Other features of the courtroom include:

- An easy-to-use wireless control system.
- A video evidence presentation system with an interactive plasma display and touch-screen annotation at the podium and witness positions.
- An interactive display that is also a SmartBoard® (a board that one can "draw on") mounted on the 50-inch plasma screen.
- Touch-screens at the witness stand and podium that allow a witness or attorney to mark digitally displayed evidence for everyone in the courtroom to see.
- Document cameras at the podium and witness locations that permit easy display of evidence such as documents, pictures and x-rays.
- A video printer that makes postcard-size representations of the displayed evidence, creating a record of all annotated materials, without replacing the originals.

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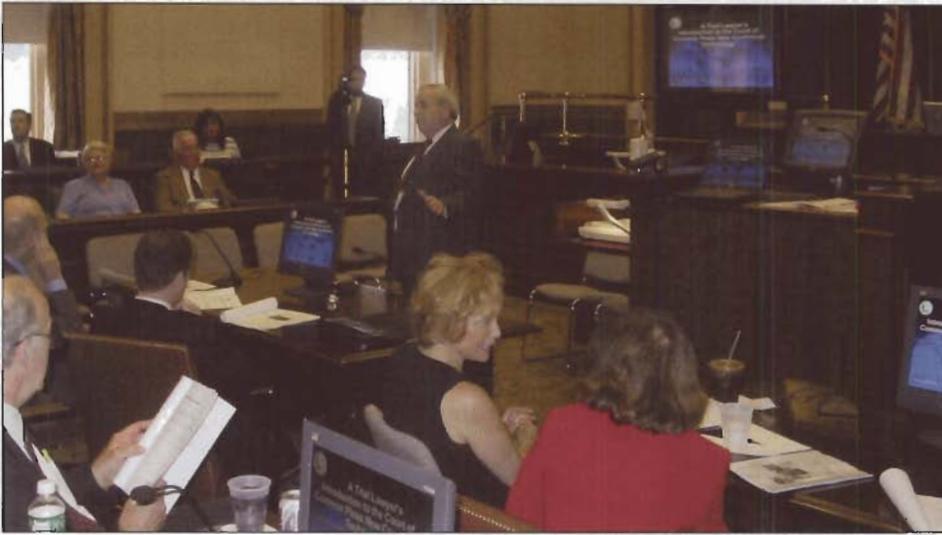
- A teleconference system and a videoconferencing system.
- Multiple video cameras that automatically switch to the speaker at various locations within the room without requiring any operator control.

■ Digital recording equipment and voice-activated cameras.

Courtroom 625 is fully networked. By hooking up their computers to the network, judges and counsel

can receive "real-time" transcripts. In addition, video conferencing is a snap. In short, Courtroom 625 is user- and jury-friendly, provided counsel are prepared. In fact, to reduce the possibility of technological glitches, the court requires all counsel to have qualified personnel present to operate the system. (The court does not supply personnel for the parties.)

While most of the attention has, rightful-



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ly, been focused on Courtroom 625, the court has also renovated four other courtrooms across the hall from Courtroom 625. Although these do not have all of the bells and whistles, they are fully wired and ready for trial. Litigants using these courtrooms will need to supply more hardware (such as large screens), but they will still be able to utilize technology similar to that used in Courtroom 625. In most instances, these alternative courtrooms are able to accommodate counsel's needs.

"If you have planned properly, the presentation of evidence goes very smoothly in the high-tech courtroom," says attorney Peter Hoffman of McKissock & Hoffman. On the other hand, as with traditional courtrooms, if an attorney has not done his or her homework, the lawyer will fumble around and make mistakes. Hoffman believes that one of the high-tech courtroom's most important assets is the ease with which the jury can see, hear and understand the evidence.

For example, consider a document that is being used as evidence. In a traditional courtroom, counsel seeking to use the document as an exhibit would first mark it, provide it to the witness and give copies to defense counsel and the trial judge. Perhaps, if counsel were well prepared, he or she would have copies for the jury. In Courtroom 625, the process is simpler. Counsel just calls up the document on his or her computer, and the item immediately displays on all of the courtroom's monitors. If there is a particular passage that counsel wants to emphasize, it can be highlighted on the screen, and a copy can be printed immediately for preservation.

"In terms of providing information for the jury, it's outstanding," says Hoffman. "The jury can follow along on their individual monitors, and attorneys can use the

courtroom's audio and video capabilities to improve the jury's understanding of the issues in a given case."

Of course, there are also safeguards to prevent an attorney from running amok. The trial judge has a "kill" button that instantly blacks out every monitor and speaker if he or she disallows a piece of evidence or if overzealous counsel tries to go too far. Most reports indicate, however, that attorneys using the courtroom have handled themselves appropriately.

The court is actively encouraging the use of Courtroom 625 and the other technology courtrooms, which are in constant demand. To be assigned to the courtroom, counsel must file a Request for Technology Courtroom 625 form, which is available for download at <http://courts.phila.gov/pdf/forms/625request.pdf>, or can be picked up at numerous locations, including at case management conferences and the Complex Litigation Center. Because the demand for Courtroom 625 is high, counsel should submit their requests as far in advance of trial as possible, but no less than thirty days before trial. Generally, more than one set of litigants requests the courtroom, with others assigned "back-up" status.

The bottom line is that the Philadelphia courts are becoming more and more technologically savvy. But Courtroom 625 remains the hallmark of Philadelphia's transition into a court for the twenty-first century. As Peter Hoffman notes, "I'd love to try all of my cases there."

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Tech BRIEFS

Orphans' Court E-Filings

Beginning January 1, 2005, the Clerk of the Orphans' Court of Philadelphia County will be accepting pleadings filed electronically, as PDF files, through the Philadelphia courts' Web site, <http://courts.phila.gov>.



Beginning July 1, 2005, filing electronically will be required. Lawyers must first apply for a user ID and password through the Web site. After a pleading is filed electronically, an

e-mail will be sent to confirm that the filing has been received. Exhibits to pleadings can be filed as part of the same PDF file as the pleading (preferred method) or as separate PDF files. Visit the courts' Web site for filing fees and additional instructions and explanations.

New Web Site for Justinians

The Justinian Society has launched a new Web site, www.justinian.org. The site is designed to inform members and prospects about upcoming events, news, membership,



the history of the Society and more. The site was donated by Legal Internet Solutions Incorporated and Furia Rubel Communications. "The Justinians

can take pride in the excellent quality of the design and content. We encourage everyone to explore the site," said Rudolph Garcia, vice chancellor of the Justinian Society.

Business News Alliances

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business information and news sources including *The New York Times*, Thomson Financial News and Dialog NewsRoom. The agreements also

add to exclusive business development partnerships and content from Thomson Financial and Dialog, and set the foundation for next-generation Thomson West information services designed to support the practice and business of law. For more information, visit <http://west.thomson.com>.

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