

# Ideas and Tips for Technology in the Law Office

by David D. Bice and Peter H. Davies

“[Modern cell phones] are now such a pervasive and insistent part of daily life that the proverbial visitor from Mars might conclude they were an important feature of human anatomy.” Chief Justice Roberts, *Riley v. California*.

This column offers ideas on how to incorporate particular products into a modern law practice, along with tips on using those products.

On the way to work, whether it’s a quick drive or a two-hour commute, having a Bluetooth-capable vehicle is a handy way to call clients and check in with the office. If you have an older car, replacing the factory radio with a Bluetooth system can cost as little as \$200. Not having to hold your phone to your ear while driving frees up your hands and peripheral vision so you can focus on the road.

*A tip:* Use Siri, Cortana, or some other voice assistant to dial your calls for you. Safety first.

Keeping track of e-mails can be daunting. By creating subfolders in your inbox for each client, you can sort e-mails in a way that makes sense. And if you want to give your assistant or associate access to certain e-mails, you can save duplicates in a public folder — just remember to create one for each client.

*A tip:* Rather than printing e-mails for clients’ paper files, you can use Adobe Acrobat Pro to create a PDF version to save electronically. Simply select Adobe from your list of printers. There are free alternatives to Acrobat Pro, if you don’t need the extra features in Adobe.

For those of us who still dictate, there is an alternative to the old cassette tape system. Olympus and other companies offer digital dictation. Depending on the system, you can dictate into the device, place it on its docking station, and the digital dictation file will be automatically e-mailed to your assistant for transcription. These audio files can also be saved electronically.

*A tip:* If you don’t want to spring for a dictation system — some of which run several hundred dollars, not including the transcription hardware — voice-to-text on your smartphone can be a cheap alternative.

For trial preparation, gone are the days of having to make copies of exhibits for the witnesses, opposing counsel, and the judge. With increasingly-common courtroom technology, exhibits can now be shared digitally. For example, the systems recently installed in the Lynchburg Circuit Court feature monitors for counsel table, the witness stand, the judge, and a seventy-inch screen for the jury box. Attorneys are able to project exhibits on the screens, mark documents, zoom in and out, and so on.

*A tip:* Familiarize yourself with the courtroom technology where you practice. It is a significant tool. Ignore it at your clients’ peril.

Surprisingly, many attorneys do not take advantage of smartphones. A smartphone is essentially a workstation that you can take anywhere. So if you are still using the old flip phone, consider upgrading to a smartphone. If you do, be sure to add to it your calendar, contacts list, e-mail accounts, law-related apps, and a free dictionary. You can dictate e-mails using voice-to-text (be sure to proofread), get directions using mapping and GPS services, send

text messages, and, of course, make telephone calls. If you are uncomfortable with technology, the best thing to do is to dive in and try it out. It is very unlikely that you’ll hurt anything. Be sure to password protect the device and enable the auto-erase feature which will be triggered by a certain amount of failed login attempts.

*A tip:* YouTube.com is an excellent resource. Watch reviews of specific phones, such as the iPhone 6s and the Samsung Galaxy, before making your purchase. YouTube also features “how to” videos on a wide variety of topics. YouTube offers reviews of apps that you can install on your smartphone.

Finally, don’t forget to unplug. Virginia is a remarkably beautiful state and offers many distractions from the technological beeping and buzzing incident to a modern law practice. Technology in the workplace is a tool — an important tool, to be sure — but you are the craftsman. Make sure you take a break and spend time doing what’s important to you. Your e-mails will be there when you get back.

*A final tip:* If you absolutely must have your smartphone with you, consider turning on airplane mode to get a break from e-mails, texts, and phone calls. Just don’t forget to turn airplane mode off when you are ready to come back to work.



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