



Superior Court, County of Ventura

Court Facilities Management

Memorandum

September 2003

TO: Court Administrators & Other Interested Parties

FROM: Bruce K. Doenges, Court Facilities Manager
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SUBJECT: Exhibits Presentation Equipment

It is our understanding that your court is looking at having evidence presentation systems installed in your courthouse, possibly by ExhibitOne. Our Court has done this and currently uses the mobile courts along with some permanently installed components. Essentially, we have the basic cabling embedded and the monitors installed in 19 courtrooms. Everything else is housed in a mobile cart along with a separate cart for the Proxima. Based on previous inquiries, the following Q&A is provided.



What has your experience been with the evidence presentation been?

This Court contracted with Exhibit-One in early 2001 for what could be considered a hybrid TrialView system. When we were looking at the system, the concepts were fixed and portable. We wanted more flexibility so we essentially created a system with some fixed components and the rest portable. The goal we had was to come up with something that would minimize the amount of time and energy to be expended during setup, minimize any potential hazards, and maximize the availability of the technology. Consequently, we paid to have the respective monitors installed with all cabling buried. At key locations we had appropriate jacks and power installed. That way, anyone could push in the two carts, plug them in, and go.



In essence, we outfitted 19 courtrooms with monitors, underground cabling, and plugs. We purchased six TrialView carts, five for the Hall of Justice and one for our branch court at the East County Courthouse. For the Hall of Justice, we strategically place the carts on floors 2, 3, and 4 with the understanding that the Judicial Assistants would coordinate the scheduling of this equipment. One of our primary concerns here is that we did not want to have to create a new employee position just to handle this equipment. Additionally, it was understood with the Bar Association that attorneys who want to use this equipment had to be trained and the training was the responsibility of the Bar or respective departments, e.g., District Attorney and Public Defender. Again, we did not want to be spending limited court resources on this program.

The net result was a good fit of fixed plus portable components in a single system.

What problems have you have encountered?

Throughout the project, we made every effort to keep the judges and others apprised of the plans and so forth. However, once the equipment was installed a couple of issues arose.

- **Monitors** – Our original plan called for bolting the monitor in place so they could not be stolen or knocked off. Before we could do that, we found that in a large percentage of courtrooms, the monitors were placed face down, put on the floor, or totally removed. This was essentially less than a week after installation. We abandoned the idea of bolting them down. We explored the idea of removing the monitors but the Court as a whole told us to leave them in place. We looked into a replacement, fold-down monitor but we were not happy with the current market designs and we were not prepared to expend additional funds on this project.
- **Carts** – The final product, fully loaded is rather large and heavy. Yes, it is portable but you have to put some weight behind it to get it in and out. We did measure clearance and such before installation however straight numbers are not a replacement for the actual, physical object. Movement of this equipment was a bit more difficult than anticipated. Once in place, things are okay. The other problem with the carts is in the available space and design of individual courtrooms. It seems to work fairly well for some courtrooms but is somewhat cramped in others.
- **Components** – When we designed this system, we settled for the use of a Proxima projector and set it up to project on to the existing pull down screens that are located behind the witness stand. Note that the recommendation from ExhibitOne was for the purchase of high resolution screens, however, at the time it did not fit within the budget or the scheme. After the system was in place, some of the attorneys wanted to shoot the image to the wall opposite the jury box (this is a 90 degree rotation). However, the distance was too great for a good image and the cabling was too short for realignment. This falls into the “you can’t please everyone” category.
- **Utilization** – Initially, the systems were underutilized as a result of the low numbers of attorneys who were trained. Subsequently, all of the ELMO carts are scheduled although there have only been a few occasions when a cart was not available. At the present, it appears that the equipment is getting more criminal court use verses civil. As more and more attorneys become trained and proficient with this technology, a new demand may occur for more carts. The ideal situation would be to have all of this equipment built into each and every courtroom as an integral part of the PA system.
- **Parts** – A word to the wise, have sufficient parts on hand to solve the majority of problems, e.g., spare cables, bulbs for the Proxima, maybe a backup monitor, and so forth. The contractor for the program should be able to identify the various items that are prone to fail at the most inopportune time.
- **Storage** – When the carts are not in the courtroom, they have to be stored somewhere. We still have not finalized a permanent home for this purpose. With five carts in the HOJ (two on the 4th floor, two on the 3rd floor, and one on the 2nd floor), we need three rooms to store this equipment. Right now this product is in shared space that is not really



appropriate. Leaving the equipment in the hall is not a good idea and leaving it in the courtroom is not practical.

Are you satisfied with ExhibitOne's services?

ExhibitOne has been very helpful and cooperative throughout the project. All of the contacts and installers were professional and knowledgeable. During the design phase they walked through the project with us and coordinated with the County's General Services Agency. Our design created a bit of a difficult scenario because we chose to bury the main wiring that connected all the peripheral items to the cart. This resulted in saw cutting the concrete flooring and removing some wood paneling at the jury box and the bench. ExhibitOne's people were very cooperative in working with all the various contractors to make sure the project went together correctly and in a timely manner.

Upon completion of the installation, they did a good job of providing instruction to key people and providing overview presentations to various judges and staff. When they were done with their training we did not feel like the proverbial dad with a box full of bike parts with no tools or instructions on Christmas Eve. Also, if we had questions, we were able to call or e-mail ExhibitOne and get some answers in a timely manner.

The training represented the end of the contract however we have gone back to ExhibitOne to get quotes and advise on various aspects of the system. They have been cooperative and accommodating, even when it did not result in a purchase.

Has the system lived up to your expectations?

This system has in fact lived up to the expectations in terms of use and benefit to the parties and the court. The ability to display evidence, documents, graphics, and so forth appears to be invaluable to the parties and the court. And, it does so in a very compelling way.

The expectations that we had about the portability are essentially true. The carts can be moved in and out of the courtroom, etc., however, it's all a bit more cumbersome than we imagined. It can be considered "agile" to the extent that it can be maneuvered through tight areas but it does take strength to do so. Movement through confined spaces works best with two people. Personally, I would not discount the overall benefits due to this minor struggle.



Is there anything else that you would like to pass on for consideration?

Here are some thoughts that may help you in making your plans and decisions.

- If you have the money and can invest in some major construction, build the system into the courtrooms, anything less is a patch or Band-Aid. Santa Barbara Superior Court in

California has one courtroom where the jury has a monitor mounted between every two seats – that’s very cool and very effective. If you had an ELMO dais instead of the cart, you avoid the clutter factor and the labor associated with that. Right between the counsel tables is the ideal location for this equipment. Note that the custom carts tend to rock or roll a bit, especially if the floor is a bit uneven; a built in dais would avoid that.

- Although all of the courtrooms look the same, there is probably a wide range of differences and dimensions. Make sure you get full measurements of all the affected courtrooms and develop the range of tolerance for movement of the cart and various components. Just because the layout is the same, you may find the system doesn’t quite fit.
- Sight lines are critical in the planning of this system. Do whatever you have to do to get a good understanding of where the components are going to be setting and how those items affect the sight lines of everyone in the room: judge, clerk, witness, bailiff, jury, parties, etc. One of the problems we encountered was with the monitors blocking the view of the person at that location, particularly the witness. If we had an unlimited budget, I would recommend recessing the monitors into the work surface.
- Our cable connections and jacks are mounted on the face of the counsel table base or the face of the jury box rail/wall. As a matter of convenience, I would mount those on a top surface, however, if you do that, you should also have a dust cover/plate for it.
- Identify your storage location up front. Although the equipment carts come with locking doors, these locks are not exactly high tech, foolproof security devices. Even if the carts are in a “secure corridor”, be careful. This is a very costly investment that should be provided with proper storage.



Closing Comments...

It should be noted that the Superior Court of California, County of Ventura does not have any agreement and/or arrangement with ExhibitOne for testimonials or anything else. This document is really about the use and importance of the TrialView concept. The fact that ExhibitOne is mentioned is because they were awarded the contract for development, purchase, and installation of this system for our court. Any comments that were made should be viewed as either positive or negative elements to the contract or contract implementation. For example, that fact that ExhibitOne’s people help the other vendors in a positive way is a good thing on their behalf but more importantly, that’s the way it should be regardless of who the contractor is.

In any event, ExhibitOne did a good job for us and I would use them again.

Thank you.