

iPad brings new connection to lawyers, clients

By Jahna Berry, The Arizona Republic

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PHOENIX — Across the country, relatively few lawyers use tablet computers extensively to practice law, though they are beginning to take hold. While the devices show a lot of promise, they can't completely replace laptops yet.

CHRISTOF STACHE, AFP/Getty Images
Attorneys are using iPads for presentations, video interviews and more.

But two Phoenix personal-injury attorneys are using tablet computers to help solve an age-old complaint attorneys hear from clients: I can never reach my lawyer.

Marc Lamber and James Goodnow have given Apple iPads to 20 of their major clients.

The tablet PCs — which are given back to the law firm when a case is over — are used as so-called "red phones" that allow clients to contact either attorney if they have a question or want more information about their case. The iPads also help the attorneys build high-tech presentations that they use to help settle cases before they end up in court, the lawyers say.

The Phoenix attorneys say that the tablet PC technology has been particularly useful for personal-injury cases. While wealthy corporate clients have BlackBerrys and other technology to keep up with their lawyers and track their legal affairs, working-class personal-injury clients often do not.

"We pride ourselves on being available 24 hours a day, day or night," Lamber said.

Melissa Frankel, 40, of Phoenix was surprised when she got an iPad shortly after she hired Lamber and Goodnow.

"It was nothing that I ever expected," said Frankel, who was injured in a collision last year. She has taken a video of her injuries and she has had Skype video conferences with the lawyers. That means that she makes fewer trips to the lawyers' downtown Phoenix office and she can reach her legal team wherever there is a Wi-Fi connection, without a laptop.

The iPad "is brilliant," Frankel said. "It is the best way, the easiest way to communicate with them."

Tablet PCs

The iPads are an outgrowth of other ways that the duo uses technology to reach clients, such as [Google Voice](#). Lamber and Goodnow, who were already using iPads for legal presentations, began experimenting with iPad and iPod touch devices with some clients last year. Recently, they decided to purchase iPads with their own money for all of their major clients.

Lamber and Goodnow, who work at Fennemore Craig, Arizona's second-largest law firm, say they aren't aware of other attorneys at the firm who have given iPads to clients. Many firm attorneys, however, use iPads for routine computer tasks.

Phoenix-area mediator Scott Skelly says that he has been impressed by the way that Lamber, Goodnow and other lawyers use tablet computers to make presentations. Mediators help both sides of a legal dispute settle a case before it gets to court.

For some cases, attorneys have handed him an iPad that's preloaded with video interviews with experts and witnesses, case documents as well as animation re-enactments of accidents. Instead of using footnotes, the documents also have embedded links that call up the text or case law to which the documents is referring.

When tablet PCs are used expertly, "it's pretty slick and pretty effective," said Skelly, a former Maricopa County (Ariz.) Superior Court judge.

Courtroom trend?

Tablet PCs are popular because they weigh less than a laptop, they make it easy to view documents and videos and they have access to the Internet, said Tom Mighell, a Dallas attorney who wrote a book about using iPads for the [American Bar Association](#).

For a quick court appearance, attorneys can use a tablet PC to look up legal rulings, access case documents, check e-mail and manage their schedule, he said.

But there are drawbacks: Unlike traditional computers, right now it is difficult to create a formatted document, such as a legal brief, that can be submitted to court, on a tablet PC, Mighell said.

There also are some legal concerns, Mighell added. Lawyers who give tablet PCs to clients would have to find ways to make sure that the information on it remains confidential. The lawyers on the opposing side may look for ways to argue in court that they have a right to view some of the information on the device, the expert said.

Goodnow said the issue hadn't come up, but he believed that all of the information exchanged with clients on the iPads is covered by attorney-client privilege.

Joseph Kanefield, president of the State Bar of Arizona, said that he wanted the organization to help lawyers use technology more effectively.

When attorneys go to court, they often feel compelled to bring more information than they need, in case a judge asks a question, Kanefield said.

"You will see lawyers going into court with pull carts and boxes full of binders," the lawyer said. "The future is to have all of that available on a tablet PC."

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