

Tips on preventing technology failures in the courtroom
Based on suggestions made by the Administrative Office for the U.S. Courts

Electronic equipment failures are very similar to every other kind of failure that occurs in a courtroom - failure of a witness to show up, failure of a lawyer to find the right exhibit. The effects of most equipment failures are ameliorated immediately by backup. The most important factor in this regard is adequate planning. Management by the court can ensure this happens.

Many potential failures can be avoided, particularly when lawyers bring equipment to the courtroom, by allowing adequate time for set up and testing. Pretrial testing and practice in the courtroom should overcome most of these difficulties. Obtaining representations from the lawyers about installation, testing, compatibility, reliability, and positioning of equipment also helps focus the lawyers on preparation.

Practice with the Equipment

- * Lawyers make the best use of the equipment when they are allowed to practice with it in the courtroom in which it will be used.
- * Beginners may not understand the difference between an orientation session at a vendor's office versus their own facilities, as well as the demands of using the equipment in the courtroom setting.

Things to consider during preparation and testing

Different Controls	Controls are not always immediately intuitive. Lawyers should practice with the controls ahead of time.
Different Effects	Displays on small monitors or a large projection screen in the courtroom space may be quite different from the image on a regular desktop computer monitor.
Sufficient Audio	Testing ahead of time to determine if audio level will be sufficient in court
Identification of Operators	Each party should be asked to identify anyone who will be operating the party's equipment in the courtroom. These equipment operators may need to be sitting at the counsel table and it is useful to know who they are.

Backup plan in case of equipment failure

Evidence Camera

Backup: Acetate transparencies on an overhead projector or paper copies of exhibits.

Laptop

Backup: (1) a second laptop loaded with the same files that can be substituted in event of failure; (2) paper copies used on the evidence camera; (3) acetate transparencies used on an overhead projector; or (4) paper copies used in the traditional manner.

Annotation Equipment

Backup: There is a software alternative (the drawing function) built into presentation software that works, but less flexibly. Any laptop that has presentation software on it will have this capability.