



## **Communication and Collaboration Tools - Legal Profession Methods of Use and Vital Benefits**

### **Introduction**

Time is an increasingly scarce asset. The economy and the competitive nature of business have forced the legal profession to seek new ways to improve revenue and client satisfaction by expanding client retention, manage increasing case loads, and providing current clients with more personal attention - with reduced costs. This has resulted in intense pressure to make every hour count by streamlining current legal processes that are tedious, repetitious, or inefficient.

There is a better way — electronic visual communication (EVC). EVC technology comes in three forms: video conferencing, web conferencing and streaming. Finally, we have a choice of technologies that can actually deliver on the promise of enabling business professionals to get more done in less time — at a fraction of the cost. Much like e-mail and faxing, EVC facilitate the remote communication of two or more people in real time. Yet they are also dramatically different than the more traditional technologies for two reasons. First, EVC is interactive — in the case of video conferencing, you can see and talk to someone as if you were in the same room and work jointly together on documents, exchange information, and more. Web conferencing allows for audio conferencing and visual collaboration while streaming allows you to either share a live video meeting with multitudes online or store a recorded video conference for access at a later date and time. All EVC technologies can ensure complete confidentiality of conversations and data at all times.

Perhaps the most tangible benefit for law firms using electronic visual communication channels is namely that, attorneys, legal aides, administrators, the courts and potentially every part of the justice system saves money since in lieu of having people traveling around the country to attend routine meetings, conferences and court proceedings, the majority of these "face-to-face" transactions are conducted just as easily via an e-conference link. These law firms also benefit from visual communications tools in their office-to-office communications, trainings, education and recruiting processes. Greater client trust and enhanced services, such as access to experts and increased global presence, have further made visual communications — specifically videoconferencing, Web conferencing and streaming — indispensable tools for law firms.

This white paper will discuss the three communications tools: videoconferencing, Web conferencing and streaming — and their many uses in the legal profession. The tangible benefits of using these tools will also be covered, as well as a list of additional resources.

### **Three Visual Communication Channels**

Videoconferencing, Web conferencing and streaming are state-of-the-art visual communications tools that are being widely adopted by today's legal community. In fact the last five years have seen video communications hardware prices fall and, perhaps more importantly, become much more reliable and less expensive connectivity available through IP-based networks instead of legacy ISDN solutions.

Videoconferencing, a technology that allows for live, interactive video communications, is finally coming into its own. The price of equipment is comparable to the cost of a high-end server, and the widespread adoption of IP protocol for connectivity has vastly improved the quality of the videoconferencing experience. After years of over promising and under delivering, today's improved videoconferencing technology can offer broadcast quality audio and video with the same reliability you expect from the telephone. A real advantage to video conferencing is that complete confidentiality of conversations and data is secure at all times.



Web conferencing offers the ability to be able to show as well as tell from your desktop, by coupling an audio conference with online viewing of an application (typically PowerPoint slides) through an Internet browser.

Streaming, on the other hand, is the most recent technology tool to be introduced to the market. Streaming technologies enable a video or audio conference to be transmitted over a private or public network to allow for literally thousands of attendees to view an event over their browser. Streaming can occur in real time or with recorded and stored video used for playback at a later date.

## Methods of Use for Law Firms

The ability to read facial reactions, body language, and eye contact can be as important as the words that people speak to one another. For an attorney, the ability to see a client face to face and observe the nuances of facial expressions can make a crucial difference in the outcome of a case. This is why law firms the world over are finding videoconferencing, Web conferencing and streaming extremely easy-to-use and valuable in all facets of their work — and in many cases far more productive than a telephone conference. Applications include consultations with clients, case preparation, obtaining depositions, accessing worldwide experts, gaining national and international clientele, communicating with firm partners, training staff, sharing presentations, conducting ongoing education, and recruiting employees.

- **Conferencing with clients.** First and foremost on the list of law firm uses for videoconferencing are consultations with clients. Offering attorneys the ability to communicate with their clients face-to-face in real time and at anytime has proven to have multiple benefits – including servicing clients better while saving time and money on in-person meetings for both parties. As one Miami-based lawyer commented, “The first and foremost benefit has been our client contact.” To that point, the Legal Technology Insider also reported that many lawyers in the United States are now supplying more important commercial clients with videoconference systems as a goodwill gesture. The logic here acknowledges that while an attorney’s time is a chargeable asset, clients also value their time and would rather be getting on with their business than attending meetings with their legal advisors.

For multi-district litigation, videoconferencing and Web conferencing (including interactive document collaboration which is detailed further in this document) are proving extremely helpful at bringing together parties in three or more locations. These methods, as well as streaming, are also valuable as vehicles for rehearsing with clients and evaluating their best courtroom presence, whether in real time or recorded for later viewing.

- **Depositions and testimony.** The three communications tools are also valuable for obtaining deposition statements in real time and securing a videotaped record of the proceedings for later streaming. Videoconferencing in real time is also being used more frequently these days in the justice system. In the U.S. alone, more than 500 state courtrooms nationwide, 900 federal courtrooms and a small but growing number of correctional facilities have jumped on the video bandwagon within the past decade.

The potential for more uses of this technology in trials has been seen in extensive research at William and Mary Law School. Laboratory trial cases were held at the school that experimented with using remote testimony in a mock terrorist case, as well as allowing three courts in three nations to meet concurrently in real time via videoconferencing.



- **Accessing experts.** Another attractive benefit of videoconferencing, Web conferencing and streaming is the chance for law firms to secure and evaluate the best remote experts from anywhere in the world. Expensive and in-demand experts become accessible with video communications, whether they are working at a different location or just happen to live on another continent. A New York City attorney explains, “A few years ago, we had a high-profile case that required the use of a top expert in security and crowd control. The leading expert was across the country managing security for the Democratic National Convention. But via videoconferencing, he was able to be in two places at once”.

The use of streaming also allows for more detailed work with experts, such as evaluating recorded mock testimony of multiple experts to determine which will be perceived as most credible on the stand.

- **International communications.** For many law firms with offices across the world, a boon of videoconferencing and Web conferencing has been the ability to communicate with firm partners and clients in different international offices. According to a U.K. attorney, “We (in London) were able to meet with a client in New Jersey without travel. The client was able to receive the best possible service from both sides of the Atlantic”.

Gaining international clientele is a nice perk of videoconferencing as well. Specialty law firms, in particular, can easily gain remote clients from around the globe in locales where such specialists are not otherwise available.

- **Office-to-office communications.** Firms who use videoconferencing and Web conferencing for their partner and conference meetings, staff trainings and human resource functions enjoy a tremendous savings of time and money. Law firms with multiple offices around the country and around the world have watched their travel expenses lessen and firm productivity rise as their employees meet more frequently right from the comfort of their own desks for conferences, collaboration and more.

After investing in videoconferencing technology, a Detroit law firm representative said his firm now regularly conducted firm-wide continuing legal education classes, HR meetings and presentations, and general get togethers, adding, “The firm is united. Intellectual resources among the attorneys have expanded”.

- **Continuing education.** The ability to complete required continuing legal education has also made videoconferencing, Web conferencing and streaming valuable to law firms. Some firms use the technology to conduct real-time, ongoing education for all attorneys in the firm, even in multiple offices. Such education often times requires some interactive collaborating amongst the educator and attorneys, at which times Web conferencing is employed. Other firms take advantage of streaming to record ongoing education sessions and make them available to firm attorneys when it’s most convenient for them. There is also the duplication aspect as you can reinvent yourself with recorded archives. Any repetitive training can be recorded and used over and over again.
- **Recruitment.** Law firms also have another efficient use for videoconferencing, Web conferencing and streaming: interviewing potential employees. Primarily used for interviewing higher-level staff, IT employees and new attorneys, videoconference interviews enable law firms to save time in the hiring process as well as the candidate’s travel time and expense (whether covered by the firm or not).

Another bonus for law firms is the ability to mine for new talent at dozens of law schools that the firm would otherwise not have the time or money to visit individually. Law firms recognize that the videoconference interview displays a cutting-edge technological aspect that is appealing to many candidates and saves the firm time and money



## Legal Document Creation

### From First Draft to Final Approval in Days, Not Weeks

Law professionals create more documents than any other profession. Legal document creation and approval cycles are another legal process that can be streamlined with video and web conferencing technology. The average legal professional deals with massive volumes of documents. Add that to a shrinking support staff and much of the process for finalizing those documents rests on the attorneys' shoulders. In a typical scenario, an attorney needs to gather input from multiple colleagues, clients, and witnesses or outside experts all over the country in order to arrive at a final legal document. Typically, the legal professional uses a variety of communication methods, such as express mail, regular mail, fax, or e-mail to send copies of this sensitive document to these individuals. The legal professional then idly await their comments and revisions. Within several days, the legal professional receives back multiple copies of the contract with everyone's comments and revisions in separate documents. Next is the arduous and time-consuming process of trying to merge the documents and choose between conflicting revisions and multiple drafts. More meetings are held to discuss changes, matters of opinion, etc. and the whole process recycles multiple times. The total time from start to finish for this multi-draft revision process is typically a minimum of 10 days or more.

In contrast, a meeting which utilizes video conferencing or Web conferencing provides for joint document editing and allows the legal professional to edit a document online among as many people as necessary — all without the expense, hassles, or downtime of travel. Since the document is stored online, it can be edited either in real time with all parties present or at each person's leisure. There is only one central version of the document that allows all parties to enter their comments and revisions, so it eliminates the need for tracking multiple versions or worrying that someone is working off the wrong draft. Meetings can be quickly arranged to deal with last minute changes and all revisions can easily be merged into a single definitive final copy. When the revisions are complete, you simply accept or reject all edits to generate the final document. The total time for this online process is five days.

## Choosing Your Visual Communications Provider

There are many different visual communication applications and services, and competition is fierce. Don't get caught up in the features war with products/services in the marketplace. Take a step back and understand what your requirements are to "get the job done." Then go out and ask the vendors: "how would you best accomplish my specific goals?" And make them show you.

But first when developing your requirements is for electronic visual communications and collaboration, tool, ask yourself the following questions:

- **How often do I really need face-to-face meetings?** What level of interaction is needed between participants? Is it an initial meeting? A simple status update? A document editing session of a contract or other legal document?
- **What capabilities are included?** Can the e-meeting solution offer the capabilities you need (audio, video, document editing, instant messaging, total security, etc.) for an effective meeting?
- **Is the technology easy to use?** Is it user friendly? Does it require complicated firewall configuration? Does it require special equipment? Will it run on your operating system? Does it work the way you work?



- **Is the communication secure?** Not all e-meeting services are secure and some only provide security as an option or partial solution. What security measures does the service employ? Are online documents protected? How are passwords handled? What are their privacy and security policies?
- **What are the associated costs?** How much does the service cost? What is the vendor's billing scheme? Do the rates climb or fall as more people attend meetings? Can you customize the billing codes? Is there a simple, low-cost way to get started to find out if e-meetings will work for you?

## The Bottom Line

Along with saving time, disruption, plus the fact travel is charged out for costs and legal aid at a far lower rate than other types of legal work, by not having to leave the office, the attorney has the opportunity to handle other more profitable work. Travel expense savings is also substantial when using videoconferencing, Web conferencing or streaming for client and firm communications.

While attorneys who have used video conferencing say that although initial meetings can be awkward, once both sides become familiar with the technology and accustomed to some of its foibles (there is still a slight delay between you speaking and the other side hearing what you say) the productivity quality is actually better than what can be achieved during a conventional telephone call.

This increased productivity resulting from decreased travel, and according to some attorneys improved communications is a measurable plus. A recent study by Alertness Solutions has shown an increase in fatigue and a decrease in productivity resulting from business travel... as much as a 20% drop-off in productivity (Glowpoint Web site).

As for the bottom line, the chart below compares the cost of traveling to an out of state meeting versus holding that same meeting online:

|                              | <b>Face-to-Face Meeting</b><br>(One attorney, one legal aide<br>traveling for day-long meeting) | <b>EVC Meeting</b><br>(Two people meeting<br>online for 5 hours) |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Airfare</b>               | \$350   | \$0  |
| <b>Hotel</b>                 | \$1,100   | \$0  |
| <b>Ground Transportation</b> | \$45  | \$0  |
| <b>Meals</b>                 | \$145   | \$0  |
| <b>Downtime</b>              | \$1,150   | \$0  |
| <b>EVC Meeting</b>           | \$0   | \$200  |
| <b>Total Costs</b>           | \$2,790   | \$200  |

As the chart shows, a single out-of-state meeting could easily reach four digit expenses. Had that meeting been held online instead, the legal team would have incurred less than 90% of the cost - a savings of over \$2.590 for one business trip.

The improved partner communications within a firm certainly boosts moral and strengthens unity in the organization. Improved access to experts and colleagues can also lead to more productive case work, resulting in more winning cases by law firms, which can lead to a stronger reputation and attract new clients from around the country or around the world. For one Florida law firm, using videoconferencing as a competitive advantage to attract clients was a plus point. "The fact that our clients can meet with any of our expert attorneys on any subject at any time – that is the true benefit we see," commented a partner (Jones). Most certainly, better client service, more efficient case reviews and increased client trust equal happy customers that could return in the future or send referrals to a firm.



And finally, using videoconferencing for employee recruitment saves even more time (increasing billable hours) and travel expense. And the increase in geographic scope to gain the most capable and highly qualified candidates can mean a stronger team of talented, successful attorneys at work for a firm. In the end, the firm definitely benefits in more ways than one.

## Summary

Videoconferencing, Web conferencing and streaming are three vital visual communications tools that can offer law firms measurable and immediate benefits by increasing billable hours and productivity for attorneys while saving time and money. EVC can improve your bottom line by improving client service and cutting document approval processes in half. To get these benefits, legal professionals must ask themselves each time they schedule a meeting: Must this meeting be done in person or is it more efficient to hold it online? In many situations, the latter will be the case.

## Additional Resources

- **Glowpoint** – [www.glowpoint.com](http://www.glowpoint.com)
- **Law Technology News** – [www.lawtechnews.com](http://www.lawtechnews.com)
- **InfoWorld.com** – [www.infoworld.com](http://www.infoworld.com)
- **Courtroom 21** – [www.courtroom21.net](http://www.courtroom21.net)
- **Law Technology Insider** – [www.lawtechnology.com](http://www.lawtechnology.com)

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## Footnotes

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## Links to More Information

For more information about Glowpoint video communications tools for law firms, visit: [www.glowpoint.com/solutions/legal.asp](http://www.glowpoint.com/solutions/legal.asp) or call us at 866-GLOWPOINT.