

Florida Criminal Law Newsletter

First Annual Law Office Technology Review Issue

The latest in law office innovation

This special issue of the *Florida Criminal Law Newsletter* will help you close the technology gap without breaking the bank in the process.

Gateway CX Convertible

Worth every penny

With the ability to sign documents directly on the screen and a starting price under \$1,200.00, the Gateway CX convertible notebook is one piece of office equipment you definitely want to consider when you replace your current computer.

The model I bought and tested has an upgraded processor and as much memory as Gateway could put into it. I also added a second battery and the faster 7200 rpm hard drive. The result? A blazing fast notebook with a battery life of six-plus hours under heavy use.

The battery life was a pleasant surprise: I have used notebook computers since before law school in the mid-1980's, and I've been disappointed with notebook battery life more than once, so I'm tough to please.

One feature I never like is the unavoidable pre-installed software. For example, I had to uninstall AOL and

Trivia Answer: Yes, but be careful! An Axis II Personality Disorder may aggravate the sentence.

McAfee Anti-virus software. Worse, the Microsoft VPN connection doesn't work, so communicating with a remote server using a virtual privacy network is impractical with this unit. Since we replaced our Dell Server with SpringCM, this doesn't affect our law office operations.



The Gateway CX allows you to swivel the display, close it flat, and write directly on the screen. The author regularly signs pleadings directly on the screen.

After several months of use, I can easily say that this convertible notebook is *ideally* suited to the practice of law. For example, imagine this: An Assistant State Attorney calls and agrees to a stipulation you've been seeking, but with a minor change. You are out of the office, but the Gateway CX makes it no problem – you simply change the document and *sign it directly on your screen* with the digital pen sitting under the left hand side of your Gateway. For me, the real beauty of this convertible is the ability to practice law *from* anywhere. You can now sign any document on your PC – at home, a CLE conference, anywhere – and send it to your staff, opposing counsel or even the Court. With the Gateway CX, I routinely handle more of my casework production out of the office rather than in the office.

My review? This is the best notebook I have ever owned.

The Law Firm of Tomorrow, Today

Grandpa's law office technology is designed for the traditional 'big box' firm model: All of the lawyers and staff are in one building. If the firm is big enough, there is an IT staff. If not, there is an IT technician on call.

If you work in a traditional firm with grandpa's technology, the law office network always has problems, even if you are not aware of it. After all, the IT staff – internal or on call – is there to keep fixing the problems.

We faced this problem in a big way when we began to go to a more modern business model using decentralized telecommuting. So we did what many firms do – we contacted the Florida Bar Association Practice Management specialists for a vendor reference. The vendor, who will remain anonymous to protect the guilty, set us up with a Dell Dual-Xeon Server with remote access. Without the geek speak, it basically means that our firm invested in a top of the line computer that should have allowed us to securely store and access all of our data from anywhere. However, every month, accounting was informing me of hourly bills going to this vendor. Secretarial staff was telling me about the system going down on a regular basis. When I would inquire as to what the problem was with our network, I would frequently hear two things: 1) Why it went down, and 2) How it wasn't their fault.

Now, I really don't care *why* something won't work. I care about *how* to fix it. Yet month after month, excuses and downtime were eating into productivity.

Why was this happening? Mainly because most firms are designed for every member of the firm to be in the

same 'box.' When everyone is in the big box firm, there are few network problems that are readily apparent. When big box firms add new offices, they create an IT department and incur a larger technology expense.

If the big box model works for you, great. But it wasn't working for us, and it doesn't work for many law firms, large or small. So without criticizing the Florida Bar, or Grandpa's Law Office Technology Vendor, I have just one word to say when it comes to upgrading your network system: SpringCM.

SpringCM solved all of our problems with secure data storage and retrieval. In fact, all of the common problems with data retrieval are *gone*. We don't have on-call technicians or an IT department because we do not need one.

All of our files and data were uploaded to our account at springcm.com. We can access our firm's data and files from anywhere where we have an internet connection. When we want to open a new case file, – we log onto our springcm.com account and get right to work. *We can even receive faxes no matter where we are!*

Today, telecommuting is a reality at our firm. We have saved both time and money by our 24/7 access to all of our data. We can download forms and change them or we can change them right in our browser window – in Word, PDF, or other formats.

I have negotiated plea agreements on the phone, called my client, read it to the client, checked off each applicable section by writing directly on my Gateway CX convertible screen, signed the document on my screen, sent an e-mail attachment copy to the client, and forwarded a signed e-mail attachment copy to the ASA, hard copy signed by my client to follow.

Directly Speaking

By Stephen G. Cobb
Editor, FCL Newsletter

I have carried notebook computers since the mid-1980's, and I have been online *since 1983* – long before the Internet was created. In law school, I was the first student to carry a notebook computer to class. So when it comes to law office technology, I am an 'early adapter' to new technology.

In 2003, I had a vision of being able to scan all of my files into a remote location and accessing entire files from anywhere in the world. This vision included the ability to sign documents electronically and electronic filing of legal pleadings.

I falsely believed that this was a common goal of law office technology, so when I wanted to upgrade our networking infrastructure to accomplish this goal, I called the Florida Bar. The Florida Bar was very helpful and recommended the best IT vendor they knew. Thus began my saga where I called the IT vendor and spent tens of thousands of dollars on technology and service that just didn't work.

In retrospect, I should have known something was wrong when the best company the Bar could recommend was surprised by my desire to locate our data server in another city: "We've never had anybody do that before – they always put the server in the building where all of the attorneys are located."

This internal server system works well for your grandfather's law firm, or a 'big box' firm. However, the law firm of tomorrow is already here today: Lawyers need to be able to access their data securely through the Internet from anywhere in the world. Moreover, smaller law firms can't afford an IT person on call 24/7, much less an IT department. Larger firms *shouldn't* have

to make the large expenditures necessary to make cranky modems, firewalls, and Virtual Privacy Networks (VPN) work. Downtime equals a double loss: The law firm loses productivity *and* incurs an IT expense.

That's why I produced this issue of the Florida Criminal Law Newsletter. You deserve more than the antiquated technology of grandpa's law firm. You deserve an unbiased source of information about information technology.

The modern law firm needs to be interconnected with key personnel whether they are at home, on the road or at the office. Electronic document signing is going to be the *usual* way for lawyers on the road – or in the office – to sign documents. Paper – including the paper used for this newsletter - is the production method of the past.



Stephen G. Cobb is a Board Certified Criminal Trial Law Specialist and Editor of the Florida Criminal Law Newsletter.

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Florida Criminal Law Trivia:

Can mental illness justify a downward departure under the Florida Punishment Code? *Answer on page 1.*

NEXT FACDL-OW MEETINGS:

6 p.m., October 26, 2006 at Sculley's in Fort Walton Beach, Florida.



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