

## The Law Office of Tomorrow

by Michael R. Arkfeld

**W**ith so many technological changes occurring, what impact will these have upon the near-future practice of law? We are moving toward a wireless digital world that will see a substantial elimination of paper. How will these changes affect the practice of law within the next 10 years? One thing we can be certain of is that one will be able to practice law anywhere at any time—the physical location of where you practice will no longer be an issue. Another given is that digital information and real-time audio and video interaction will become commonplace as the broadband infrastructure is built out.

The technologies discussed below are already in use or are in prototype developmental phases. This is not science fiction, but the near future. Using these “reality” future benchmarks, how will this impact the practice of law? Looking into my crystal ball...

Frank Young awakens to the sound of music and the smell of coffee in his “smart” house/office as he begins his workday. The pictures on his wall digitally change from Picasso to Monet to reflect his serene, reflective mood for the day.

Today, he slips on a pair of special eyeglasses that have a computer monitor built into one of the lenses. Yesterday, he used his contact lenses that could switch from a prescription lens to a computer monitor. He attaches his wristwatch that contains his miniaturized wireless computer and which also doubles as a telephone, pager, etc. He can move anywhere as he works throughout the day, or he can sit in his easy chair.

With a headset and vocal cord wireless connection he controls the movement of the computer cursor by barely audible voice commands and uses voice recognition for his dictation. He is excited about receiving his new brain electrode command center soon that will read his thoughts

for dictation and other computer control matters.

The new LMDS (local multipoint distribution system) infrastructure has recently been activated in his neighborhood, and his new wireless broadband transmission system is receiving and sending data at more than 2 million bps, compared to his “old” DSL telephone line transmission at 750,000 bps and his dinosaur telephone line that received data at 56,000 bps.

When he turns on the computer, his unified messaging system checks and retrieves his faxes, voice mail, e-mail, pages and cell phone calls from one location: Tornado Electronic Messaging System ([www.tems.com](http://www.tems.com)). From here he checks for client messages, practice area specialty alerts, and court transmissions and updates. Frank checks into his virtual office at JurisdictionUSA.net ([www.jdusa.net](http://www.jdusa.net)) for case management, calendaring, docketing, legal research and other office functions. The case management system alerts him that interrogatories are due and shows various videoconferencing meetings and depositions for the day. After he dictates a letter to a client, he verbally commands the document to be deposited in his digital file cabinet and also by wireless transmission prints a copy using his multifunctional printer, fax and scanner, since this client still prefers paper.

Frank checks the [www.legalopinion.com](http://www.legalopinion.com) Web site for new clients and dictates responses to their questions. He looks over his PowerPoint presentation for his marketing videoconferencing presentation in the afternoon that will be transmitted to London.

He answers a videoconference call from his client, Mary Zakowski, who is located in San Diego. Mary and Frank view new digital pictures of her children and then Mary discusses her personal injury case with him. They decide an additional cause of action should be filed with the court.

Frank logs into his virtual litigation depository center and reviews the Zakowski pleadings, transcripts, other documents ([www.lextranet.com](http://www.lextranet.com)) and his trial notebook ([www.casemap.com](http://www.casemap.com)). Frank locates the original complaint and they both simultaneously discuss changes to the pleading. After the document is finished, Mary and Frank digitally “sign” ([www.verisign.com](http://www.verisign.com)) the amended complaint. Frank automatically assembles ([www.hotdocs.com](http://www.hotdocs.com)) the remaining part of the document,



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including the addresses of opposing parties, and then connects to the court and electronically “files” the amended pleading. Copies are electronically sent to opposing counsel. The court automatically assigns a response date, notifies opposing counsel by e-mail and sets a videoconferencing hearing date for oral argument on the amended pleading. Frank also calendars a virtual deposition for a witness to the accident ([www.legalspan.com](http://www.legalspan.com)). Both review the facts of the accident using digital photographs, maps and a live traffic camera for a real-time view of the accident scene ([www.mapquest.com](http://www.mapquest.com)).

Frank mentions a new settlement offer to Mary and they both go to the [www.cybersettle.com](http://www.cybersettle.com) Web site and review the offer. This is the second round of settlement offers and they are getting close to what is acceptable. After discussions, they submit a new settlement demand and then enter passwords to view Mary’s digital

medical records at her doctor’s office. Her care is proceeding well, but future medical treatment is a concern. On a videoconferencing hookup the doctor answers their questions about Mary’s future treatment. Mary thanks Frank for his prompt attention to the matter and authorizes payment for his actual expenses through her online credit card.

Frank hangs up in time to see his 8-year-old child bound through the door after school with enthusiasm and wonderment at the day’s events. Frank reflects for a moment on his day, and realizing that there are perils to watch out for with these new technologies he is happy to be home with his child. Just then the milk container computer sensor goes off, alerting him that a new carton of milk has just been ordered for delivery tomorrow. He reflects that a child, milk and chocolate cookies are never far apart.

*\*These views do not necessarily represent those of the Department of Justice.*