

# **Technology Triage**

**By:**

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Note: This article previously appeared in the Oklahoma Journal on October 1, 2005 and is reprinted here with permission. It appears very timely for those recovering from disasters as it may be a wise strategic investment for the rebuilding lawyer to have as flexible and mobile technology as possible. This will serve you better if you have to move offices, as well as taking work home and being able to make better use of time that might otherwise be wasted. This article is Copyright © 2005 Oklahoma Bar Association, but permission is given to make copies of this article to give to lawyers and law firms along the Gulf Coast affected by Katrina or Rita.

## **One Law Office to Go, Please**

**By Jim Calloway**  
**Director, OBA Management Assistance Program**

Dear OBA-MAP:

It has been a great year for my firm. We've settled several large cases, and now it looks like we are going to get the largest settlement of our careers. Some of the partners have decided to retire. I want to keep practicing law, but I'd like to travel. In fact, I saw a special on cable on the top 10 beaches in the world and I want to visit them all. Is it possible to have a completely mobile law office? I wouldn't mind spending a little time working on each of those beaches while I'm there.  
Tall Cotton

Dear Tall:

Certainly it is possible to have a mobile law office. But, the beach is not the friendliest environment for computing with the wind and sand and all. I suggest that you will probably need a full-time legal technologist to travel with you. My resume is enclosed.

While the correspondence on this page is not real, the ability to assemble and carry all of the technology tools that the modern law office requires in a couple of bags is now undoubtedly real. This month we will follow Tall Cotton's request and assemble a completely portable law office without too much regard to price. We will note some more modestly budgeted alternatives as well. But do not take the mention of products here as an endorsement of that particular product. There are often other alternatives. We'll try not mention any poor products, however.

The first piece of the mobile law office is the computer. We are all familiar with laptop computers. Many lawyers use laptop computers. There are many different features available with laptops, and laptops have evolved into two different categories: notebook computers and desktop replacements. There are also inexpensive "plain" laptops between these two extremes.

The notebook computer is, as the label suggests, as small as a notebook. We've seen some very small notebooks. Desktop replacements are generally much larger with screens almost as large as a small desktop monitor. Many of these now have wide screens with the HDTV screen ratio size. Both types of computers have certain advantages and disadvantages, and the selection is more a matter of personal taste and needs rather than a "right or wrong" choice.

Notebook computers are small and light. They are the preferred computer for those who travel a lot and want to work on cramped airplanes. They can easily fit in a small shoulder bag or briefcase. They are more visually appealing. The smaller screen may present problems for those with vision issues. Keyboards can be smaller as well. Smaller size tends to add expense with all types of electronics equipment.

Desktop replacements are larger, often much larger. The significant weight of desktop replacements means that most of us who transport them frequently will want a wheeled computer bag with a telescoping handle. The larger screen and larger keyboards are considered an asset by many, but they certainly do not work well on an airplane when the person in front of you decides to recline. They are certainly superior for those who like to watch movies on DVD or like to do side-by-side comparison of two documents on your screen.

But Tall Cotton is definitely a wide screen desktop replacement kind of guy. I am, too. My eyes appreciate the larger display. But your opinion may differ.

One of the important considerations with a laptop purchase is to get a "name brand" machine. Buying discounted off-brand laptops can prove expensive if replacement parts or service is unavailable or prohibitively expensive.

While Tall Cotton will want to add the media center package and other extras to drive up the price up to \$3,000, \$4,000 or more, most of us can find a very nice unit in the neighborhood of \$2,000 and the patient budget shoppers can get one for much less.

When purchasing a laptop, one should also always buy a docking station or port replicator for ease in hooking up the office network, full-sized keyboard, printer and other devices. These devices may seem high priced, but they are worth it as they save several minutes every time you bring your laptop back into the office.

Once you have a laptop, then you need a bag in which to carry your laptop and the rest of your portable law office. Unless you really want to add weight-lifting to your daily routine, desktop replacement laptops require a laptop roller bag. They are just too heavy to carry briefcase style unless you only carry them infrequently. That's not even including the weight of

the other peripherals. About.com had a nice feature on laptop roller bags that is online at <http://tinyurl.com/bqhyv>. I've admired and am going with the ergonomically correct Kensington Contour Roller, with a recent online price range from \$67.83 - \$127.45. One thing to note as you shop for roller bags is that those with more narrow wheels somewhat under the bag tend to tip much more than the wider wheels placed on the outside edge of the bag.

Mobile printers are a somewhat more complex story. Since I've never owned or used one, I have to rely on hearsay for this opinion. Some of the earlier mobile printers were quite small, but a bit impractical. If you are going to go to the trouble to pack a portable printer, you might as well get one with some decent features, an adequate paper tray capacity and reasonable page-per-minute printing speed. For \$350, the HP Deskjet 450wbt Wireless Mobile Printer delivers several wireless printing options, rechargeable lithium-ion batteries that allow printing of up to 350 pages without plugging into an outlet, a 45-page capacity sheer feeder that doubles as a cover for travel and prints at up to nine pages per minute. The listed weight is 4.2 pounds. With dimensions of 13.3 x 3.2 x 6.5 inches, it is not exactly bulky, but far from pocket size. Budget shoppers can save \$100 or so with less fully featured HP 450 models.

Still an almost shoebox-sized printer may not meet your idea of mobile. There are smaller models, and you might consider alternative printing options.

Of course, vendors like FedEx Kinkos have remote printing services. Send the documents to the service online and pick up the printed copies later. If you are staying at larger hotels, you can always take documents down to the business center on a flash drive. In fact in most cities, you should be able to take a flash drive and locate a copy shop for printing. (Hint to WordPerfect users: Use "publish to PDF" to put the documents on the flash drive since these other computers might not have WordPerfect installed.)

Next the portable office needs a portable scanner. Some may be tempted to scrimp on this item, but the true portable office has to have this, particularly if you have already invested in a portable printer. Having a printer and scanner with you means that you also have the equivalent of a photocopy machine in your arsenal. You make copies by scanning the document with the scanner and printing the number of copies you need with the printer. Plus you cannot truly have a mobile law office without the ability to scan and retain paper documents. Others may fax important documents to your beachfront hotel and you want to save them without carrying them around the world.

Visioneer has offered several models of portable scanners over the years. Their newest version is one sweet machine (from the reports anyway). The Visioneer Strobe XP 300 scans at six pages per minute either single sides or both sides of the paper at once. Measuring only 2 x 2.5 x 12 inches and weighing 20 ounces, this is truly portable with included software to scan directly to PDF with editable text. It can use power from either an electrical outlet or your computer's USB port. True road warriors appreciate not having to carry one more heavy power brick in your bags. Tall Cotton won't mind the \$399.99 price. Budget shoppers can find older models on the Visioneer Web site (all the way down to a factory reconditioned Strobe XP 100 for \$129.99) and other companies make portable scanners as well.

The road warrior will need backup as well and likely would look to online backup providers if expense was no object. But Tall Cotton might be a little leery of sending client data from various hotels and cyber cafes to a backup provider. As I was editing this article, Tulsa lawyer Jody Nathan posted to the OBA-NET information on an online deal she had found: a Kanguru Zipper USB 2.0 1.5GB Pocket Hard Drive for \$39.99. There are many types of small portable hard drives available. Backing up to one of these every night and leaving that drive in your checked baggage guards against the lost or stolen laptop data loss. If you are worried about the plane going down you can always burn a DVD and snail mail it back to the office.

Surge protection is a concern as well. Mobile surge protectors are inexpensive and very small and can be found most anywhere you buy computer products.

Of course you don't want to have to try and boot up a laptop every time you need to check your calendar. A smart phone that combines all of the features of a PDA and a phone will be a "must have" device. We'll opt for the Treo 650 (\$299-\$500), but those who want something a little more compact may look to the Samsung i500 (\$499).

And no road warrior will travel without an iPod for music on the go. Some nice portable speakers will free you from the need to wear headphones in your hotel room.

There are more things you will want to carry on the road depending on your desires: a couple of extra flash drives, an extra laptop battery and some CAT-5 cable for network connections start the list. The bottom line is that you can have a law office to go if you want to do so.