

The Essential Lawyer's Toolkit: The Home/Mobile Office

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



This series will focus on using technology in the context of developing a personal and portable kit bag of tools to make our work easier and more fun, regardless of location.

In-house counsel often find that they do a substantial amount of work remotely, either at home or while traveling. So, it makes sense to have both the right equipment and the systems in place to do that as efficiently and easily as possible.

Most of you likely have laptops supplied by your company. But most of you can also access and work on company files through the cloud, meaning you can use a variety of gear to access it.

Since work-from-home or on-the-road situations often occur on a spur-of-the-moment basis, it is sensible to ensure you have strategies to enable you to pack up quickly and do your work comfortably, wherever you may be.

Home office physical requirements

To the extent practicable in your own home situation, you should set aside a specific place to serve as your home office.

Having a designated office space is important because being able to focus on your work — to immerse yourself in a state of flow — is one of the best productivity hacks you can master.

Try to arrange an office space that is quiet, has adequate lighting and ventilation, and, preferably, a door you can close to let housemates know you are at work.

I have a spare bedroom available because our children have moved on. In that room, I have two different “workstations.” One is a comfortable reading chair, where I can do research, planning,

brainstorming and mind-mapping, videoconferencing, and short segments of typing.

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The other is a standing desk, which I usually use in the standing position, and a comfortable and supportive office chair. Placed on the desk is a stand designed to raise my laptop closer to a more ergonomically correct eye level, and a good keyboard and trackpad connected by Bluetooth to my laptop.

Don’t overlook the benefits of freshening your perspective by occasionally taking your work into another room in your house, or your garden, or even at a local coffee shop. I have found this can be an invigorating change.

If you spend any meaningful amount of time working at home, you should look into setting up your workspace(s) in a way that will work best for you.

Gear

Anecdotally, more employers are taking a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) approach to personal equipment.

If your employer allows it, take full advantage; study what is currently available and select gear that not only will make your work easier and more fun now, but will also be future proof for at least three or four years.

If BYOD isn’t currently approved, be patient. I think the BYOD approach will soon become much more widespread.

Laptops

If you have a choice, select a good laptop.

Laptops have become standard issue for most companies, but if you are outfitting your own home office you may be tempted to get one of the new iMacs or similar large desktop computers with a big beautiful screen. Don’t do it unless you are lucky enough to be able to get that in *addition* to a laptop, because you want to be able to take your computer on the road.

While you can use a tablet for many things as a replacement for a laptop, I am always finding things I can do on my laptop more easily. Furthermore, you can get a display for your laptop that will give it

the advantages of a large desktop computer but still allow the flexibility of a laptop.

> If you travel a lot, a smaller laptop may make more sense.

I think laptops with a screen between 13-16 inches are the sweet spot in the tradeoff between weight and bulk on the one hand and useable screen size on the other.

If you travel a lot, a smaller laptop may make more sense because it will be easier to carry and will fit an airline tray better. But if you do a lot of spreadsheets or side by side document comparisons, you may be better off with the larger size.

Of course, a good convertible or hybrid laptop/tablet like a Microsoft Surface or a Lenovo ThinkPad X1 Yoga can serve double duty as both a laptop and tablet. However, I recommend getting a good, dedicated tablet if you can; in my experience these hybrids are not quite as good as a standalone tablet and laptop combo.

Tablets

Why get a tablet? Tablets are great for reading and research, answering emails, DMs, and the like, marking up PDFs, and taking notes. And some things like making diagrams or flowcharts are much easier and more natural on a tactile surface like a tablet. They can also provide entertainment and leisure reading while on the road.

Here too, size matters. I am an unrepentant tech enthusiast, so I have a 12.9- and a 11-inch iPad Pro as well as one of the new iPads Mini because I wanted to see how different sizes might affect my usage.

Not surprisingly, I like the big Pro for watching movies, marking up PDFs and other documents, and doing other more complicated or simply larger work. I like the mini best for reading and mobility — I can fit it in a jacket pocket without any trouble. But if I could only pick one, it would be the 11-inch, as a compromise solution that can handle both the other use cases, though not quite as well as either.

Printers and scanners

For your home office, I recommend getting a good color laser printer scanner to help you address situations in which you need to generate or process paper documents.

I especially like some of the fast sheetfed scanners like Fujitsu ScanSnaps, which can scan stacks of 50 or more pages in just a few minutes and OCR them at the same time. You can couple that with Fax apps on your laptop to meet the increasingly rare times when you might need to fax something.

Headphones

My house is quiet. But if yours isn't, or for occasions when you are on the road and in a noisy airport or other environment, it is nice to have a pair of good active noise canceling headphones or earbuds.

I especially like the ones that offer noise transparency, which manage to do a pretty good job of blocking out background noise but let you hear the flight announcements or conversations you would want to hear.

Smartphones

Finally, make sure you have the best smartphone you can get. These went from being luxuries in 2005 to being necessities now. They are such great utility players, able to do almost anything their larger brethren can do in a pinch. I have typed long memos, scanned documents, modified PDFs, done research, sent email, and so many other things.

In a pinch, even if you have no other tools, you will be able to do your work on a good smartphone.

Travel gear

If you have a good laptop, tablet, and smartphone you are well set, but you will also need at least one bag to carry them.

I don't recommend a satchel or a briefcase with a handle because it will eventually cause shoulder strain. I also don't recommend any bag with one strap, unless it is able to be worn across the body or is very light, for the same reason.

I have a professional looking backpack that I use when I need to take a large amount of gear, and a smaller cross-body bag that I can use with my iPad and Magic Keyboard when I am traveling light.

In each of these, I keep multiple cables, adapters, charging batteries, etc. If you need to go somewhere in a hurry, you will be glad that you had the foresight to consider not only the laptop or tablet you may need, but all the accessories that make them work.

I would enjoy hearing back from some of you on your own recommendations. In the meantime, stay or travel safe.

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