



PRESENTATIONS AND PROJECTORS

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Why use presentation tools? There are many reasons. Studies consistently show that visually reinforced information remains easier to understand and remember — up to 650 times more effective than oral argument alone. Use of visual aids makes a great impact on the client. In court, where first impressions count more than elsewhere, the use of visual aids can help create a favorable impression and “sell” the case. Experience dictates that trials progress more quickly when visual aids are used, thereby saving time and money for courts, attorneys and clients. When visual aids are used during mediation, issues emerge early and with increased clarity, thereby helping the parties assess risks and benefits. And finally, most people today can be described as part of the “TV generation”, meaning we are used to, and often most comfortable with digesting information presented visually.

Visual aids are not just for use in litigation. They can be used in virtually all areas of law to assist the attorney in conveying information to clients and other parties—from estate planning to family law to real estate zoning hearing appeals—visual aids can enhance understanding. And of course, visual aids are essential marketing tools today for attorneys presenting seminars or participating in a “beauty contest”.

As more and more firms embrace the use of visual aids, it becomes essential to have ones own projector. At one time they were affordable only by larger firms. Now that the prices have come down considerably, with leasing easily available, virtually any firm can afford to purchase its own projector. But with prices ranging anywhere from around \$1,500 to over \$9,000, and over four dozen vendors offering many models to choose from, how do you know what to buy?

As with any information you seek, a good starting place is the Pennsylvania Bar Association Solo Section Listserv, or the American Bar Association LawTech Listserv. Post a query to find out what your peers are using and what their experience has been with a particular model. Be sure to ask those who *dislike* their projector to speak up too. Most attorneys like to speak up when they can tell you what a great purchase they made, but are often reluctant to admit when they made a poor purchasing decision. However, their admission can save you a lot of grief.

There are a number of feature considerations to take into account when determining which models of projector may be suitable for you. Keep in mind that there is also a lot of relabeling going on, just like with automobiles. For example, Sanyo projectors are often sold under a different model number with the Eiki label. Epson is marketed under the

InFocus brand. When relabeling occurs, there will likely be differences in warranty service terms and pricing, with the “clone” brand priced lower. Beware of “*private labeling*”, where a relatively small company has no models of its own, and simply relabels another’s projectors. You will be dependant on that small dealer for warranty and support in a marketplace ripe with rapid changes, vanishing companies, and bankruptcies.

One of your first considerations is the *throw distance* you will require. This is the space between the projector and the screen. For example, if you will typically be using the projector in conference rooms, you want to make sure that it has a short enough throw distance to focus clearly. You don’t want the image so large it blurs off the edges of the screen. I do a lot of computer training for firms in their conference rooms. Typically, there is not a lot of distance between the projector and screen, so my projector has to have the ability to accommodate a short throw distance. On the other hand, I also do a lot of CLE presentations at county bar events. When the event meeting room is large, like at a bench bar conference, my projector is usually much farther away from the screen. In those instances it must be able to accommodate a long throw distance. The image must fill a much larger screen and still be sharp and crisp, although much farther away. The more flexibility you need in throw distance, the more expensive the projector will be.

Another very important consideration is the *lumens*, or brightness of the projector. What will determine your needs will be how much light is present in the environment when you are projecting. When you are presenting in a typical conference room with lights off or dimmed, you can get away with 700 lumens. If the lights will be brightly lit, you want 1000 lumens. In larger rooms with bright lighting, where you may need a larger throw distance, such as a courtroom or large seminar room, you will need 1200 to 1500 lumens for a bright, crisp image. When you price units be sure to price the spare bulb, and purchase it when you purchase your projector. Don’t forget to take it with you if you are doing a presentation where equipment failure would spell disaster. Of course, as you increase the lumens, the price increases as well.

Weight and *size* can be important considerations if you must take your laptop and projector with you frequently. If you are taking it to court, you may be better off with a heavier, sturdier unit and a rolling cart. If you are using it primarily at the office, don’t pay extra for an ultralight. But if you must transport it on planes or carry it around town, the extra cost of the ultralight model will be justified. My projector weighs just under 5 pounds, and is very small, so even with a bad back, I can easily carry it on my shoulder with no strain.

Another consideration is the *resolution* of the projector. XGA resolution is 1024 x 768. This matches today’s laptops, and should match the next generation of laptops too. SVGA is 800 x 600, and VGA is only 600 x 400. If the resolution on your projector is lower than your laptop, you’re going to be very frustrated when only 2/3 of the image on the laptop screen projects onto the projector screen! Yes, you can adjust your laptop screen resolution downward to match your projector, if you know how. But often the compressed image that comes out is of a lesser quality than you will find acceptable. Fortunately, XGA resolution is the norm for today’s projectors, so if the model you’re considering isn’t XGA, think twice about the money you may save on yesterday’s model.



Finally, you need to consider the types of *media connections* you will need, and make sure the projector is equipped to handle that media with the types and sufficient quantities of ports available, and the necessary cables to plug into them. There are both input ports and output ports. Input ports support such things as computers, video devices such as VCRs or DVD players, and document projectors. Output connections enable the projector to serve as a connector between the computer and other display sources, such as an ELMO or DOAR device, or to connect to external projector speakers. Some projectors even offer remote control and mousing.

Model numbers change rapidly. However, the leading manufacturers for you to consider include Epson, Toshiba, NEC, Sanyo, InFocus, Kodak, Sony and Boxlight. After considerable research I purchased a Boxlight, as it was the best combination of price and features for my needs. Your needs may vary. For example, if you're going into court frequently, Toshiba may be the brand for you. But I have been impressed that Boxlight technical support reps have made unsolicited support calls to me several times over the past two years just to follow up and see if I had any questions or needed anything. And I carry around their 800 number which provides phone support 24X7.

A good overview of today's projector offerings can be found at www.presentingsolutions.com. Price shopping can be accomplished at www.projectorsuperstore.com or at www.pricegrabber.com or www.cnet.com or www.zdnet.com/reviews/. Boxlight can be found at www.boxlight.com.

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