

Making the Most Out of Digital Dictation: Give It a Try and Get More Done

CASE STUDY

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By Peter A. Jones, Partner, Bond Schoeneck & King

The current wave of digital dictation tools offers fresh options when it comes to mobility and efficiency. Mentioning dictation, let alone dictation combined with efficiency, within the legal environment often results in puzzled looks, especially from younger associates. “I can type faster” is generally the response. The sheer thought of dictating memos, letters and briefs to an assistant for transcription, to be followed by subsequent editing, seems like an exercise in futility, not utility. However, while the concept of classic, tape-based dictation might conjure up imagery straight out of the 1960s set of *Mad Men*, the current wave of digital dictation technology removes former barriers to file sharing and staff collaboration—and it affords new dictation options when it comes to lawyer mobility and efficiency.

Although legal professionals have been dictating for centuries to complete routine document production tasks, an increasing number of them have resorted to taking matters into their own hands, producing their own documents and legal briefs. Hence, the mantra, “I can type it faster.” So, the \$64,000 question for these dictation skeptics becomes, “Why even bother?” The answer? Consider these compelling points in evaluating opportunities to use digital dictation to increase efficiency and improve quality.

Do what comes naturally. We all know that lawyers can talk. Some lawyers, though, don’t type that well. Consider that a person can dictate around 100 to 120 words per minute, which equates to three to four times as much work product by dictating compared to typing. Digital dictation allows a lawyer to focus on content and not spend time formatting, revising and adding notations to create a final work product. This efficiency adds value.

Make your voice heard. The digital age of dictation truly enables productivity—the ability to delegate tasks and provide instructions across the firm, without having to handle tapes or rely on a dedicated support resource to transcribe documents during regular working hours. Instructions can be sent anywhere (either from a dedicated dictation device or a smartphone), over the firm network or remotely, with the reassurance that outstanding tasks go where they need to go.

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Ride the mobile wave. The race for new smartphone applications is alive and well and digital dictation capabilities for your BlackBerry or similar devices is no exception. Most legal professionals already carry a smartphone that they utilize as a task management tool, when tasks and new to-dos are routinely created—on the way to meetings, leaving the courtroom, on the road or at the airport check-in line.

Adding dictation to one's smartphone to record notes and legal drafts, edit bills and time entries, and to be able to continuously track progress of those tasks and drafts, is invaluable to a mobile attorney. The attorney can dictate at a convenient time (evening, weekend, child's soccer practice, etc.) and know that the product will be in process more quickly and then available for editing and finalization. Another big plus of such dictation mobility is the limited "gadget factor," since the smartphone—one device—now replaces the all-too-common scenario of a few years ago: business travelers strapped down with a BlackBerry, plus a cell phone for better coverage, plus a dedicated dictation device.

Ratchet up client service. This is not a cliché! Digital dictation enables legal professionals to be more responsive to client needs; to work on briefs during a hearing recess and then provide the updated document to the client on-site; and enables firm support staff to format documents, add vital footnotes and edits while you are in a meeting. While mobility is often taken for granted, being able to demonstrate true value with nothing more than a mobile device and effective voice and task delegation demonstrates that you respect your clients' time and understand their challenge of cost containment.

Multitask without borders. The introduction of digital dictation to route standard voice commands, tasks and dictation without interrupting established workflows has resulted in an efficient and improved method to provide professional work product for clients. This new method also provides additional options to multitask by enabling more staff to access and complete pending work. Leveraging mobile devices to create documents, delegate tasks and complete time-sensitive client work has replaced the "have laptop, will travel" mantra with the "have BlackBerry, will deliver" promise.

About the Author

Peter Jones is a partner with Bond, Schoeneck & King and practices labor and employment law. He is based in Syracuse, New York, and has been dictating for the past 18 years (digitally since 2005). Peter and his firm use the BigHand digital dictation system.

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