

Starring You?

Handheld, WIFI, Action!

By Gayle R. Absi

I was thinking about women in the law and a topic involving technology that was specific to women lawyers. You've read many articles with the slant towards lawyers, but they could be written about all women: working mothers, managing work-life balance, networking opportunities, supportive resources, and so on. I am managing a career and a family and know the juggling act as well as any woman. I know that I could not have done what I have without technology. Technology has allowed me to keep in touch with home when I was travelling and with the office when I was home; to do more with less time and reach more people more efficiently. My oldest daughter was born in 1991 and I had a laptop; it was nearly the size of my current desktop, but I could monitor my email from home. It was cutting edge technology! Look where we are nearly twenty years later.

Then I started wondering if they ever *really* portrayed a modern day female lawyer in a movie or TV series. Oh sure, there are movies and series where female lawyers are in leading roles, but I could not recall the use of technology as an integral part of the character's day to day activities – even though technology has become a necessary tool for all lawyers today.

I had a minor debate about this on WMJI radio one morning when I was in the COSE small business spotlight. The game is that you go to the radio station, give Lanigan and Malone a clue about your business, and they get one minute to guess it. I knew they would never guess what I did and I did not want to waste my air time with them failing to guess. I decided that my clue would be, "if Erin Brockovich had a computer, she could have used our services." You may recall that this popular true-life movie portrayed Erin as a paralegal, who was always shown sorting and organizing mountains of documents. You can listen to the clip on my web site at www.absiltd.com/aboutus. They did not like my clue and spent most time debating whether or not she had a computer.

I'm not a screenwriter, but I can think of several scenarios involving female lawyers and computer technology that could be turned into scenes in a movie, a TV series, or even a reality TV show. Here a few of the possibilities:

1. Lawyer juggling her unruly kids and answering emails on her blackberry while grocery shopping or attending parent-teacher conferences or watching a soccer game.
2. The daily drama of a lawyer who telecommutes to balance work and family. The drama comes at her from all sides: the old school attorney who believes work can only be done from the office; the non-working moms who think her delivery of grocery store cookies for the 4th grade bake sale is a faux pas; her husband feeling left out since she works at all hours, even sleeping with her Blackberry in the event of a call or email from that out of the country client.
3. Viewing cameras in her home to monitor the babysitter and kid's activity via her i-phone while taking a deposition.
4. Struggling with how to efficiently produce (or not produce) inappropriate electronic data. (This could involve several steamy scenes!)

5. Constant struggle with the IT personnel, because she confuses her business passwords with her personal passwords, leading to access denial of her email, documents, etc.
6. Her review of electronic data for any multitude of cases: corrupt government episode, serial killer episode, ponzi scheme episode, banking collapse episode, employment discrimination episode, homeland security episode, while multi-tasking and also reviewing her children's' book reports, science projects and current events' article. (Imagine the mix-up these could cause if they became intertwined!)
7. The stories and drama of several contract attorneys who are assisting with the review of a mega electronic document, while dealing with the school bully who is coercing lunch money from her 3rd grader.
8. Episode on how to engage a technically savvy jury, even though the courtroom was built and equipped in 1960.
9. Trial scenes using hi-tech courtroom technology – but the PC fails, no back-up is on-site; embarrassing moments where even though you know how to use the latest courtroom technology, it's not cooperating; late night sessions in war room fighting with the computer to get everything ready.
10. The daily struggles of someone who juggles so much and relies so heavily on technology, can communicate the most complex legal problems in court, but cannot understand a word the IT personnel are saying to them.

Maybe Hollywood hasn't developed these storylines because they don't think it would get the ratings. Or perhaps, they don't see the need to weave these technology details with their lawyer characters. Like it or not, these technology details are intertwined in real lawyers' lives. Mostly we find these tools useful. But maybe after living it every day, we really don't want to use our precious minutes of downtime watching what we do all day long, every day after all.

Gayle Absi is the President of ABSI Legal Technology, Ltd., a Cleveland based consultant that advises attorneys on using technology in the practice of law. She is a CT Summation Certified Trainer and has extensive experience in producing electronic records in litigation and designing and managing databases. Gayle has overseen complex software implementation including case management and multi-location software projects. She has managed large volume document review teams using both CT Summation and web based tools. Gayle is the founder of the Northern Ohio Chapter of The Association of Litigation Support Professionals and as its immediate past President, is serving as board advisor. ABSI Legal Technology, Ltd. is certified as a small and female owned business.

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