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Attorneys and corporate officials turn to view a 50-inch plasma screen facing the jurors, who get a super-sized view of documents, photos and other exhibits during the Dow-Lomac trial. The Courtroom also has a variety of flat screen computers to help dispense information

Getting on the same electronic page

Courtroom goes high tech in Dow-Lomac trial

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This is not your father's chalkboard. Muskegon County's legal community HAS been buzzing about the ongoing civil trial over blame for the catastrophic April 2000 explosion at Lomac LLC that injured 10 people and caused millions of dollars in property damage and lost profit.

But the chief topic of conversation among local lawyers hasn't been the case itself.

Instead, attorney attention has focused on the expensive, impressive array of electronic equipment serving as visual aids for jurors in the case of Dow AgroSciences vs. Lomac.



Lomac technology consultant Anthony Bosco works the video-screen computer by operating a keyboard, mouse and control box that look like a concert sound control panel

Since mid-September, the courtroom of 14th Circuit Judge Timothy G. Hicks has been decorated with electronically linked monitors featuring, most obtrusively, a 50-inch plasma screen looming in front of the nine jurors and alternate jurors hearing the case. Smaller but still impressive flat screens face the judge and lawyers for both sides. For the most part, the displays so far have consisted of greatly magnified images of documents, decorated at times with breakout zooms of highlighted paragraphs or sentences.

Sometimes, as during the lawyers' opening statements, the whole setup is controlled by an assistant seated at the table of whichever side is presenting its case at the moment.

Dow's side has a bar-code scanner for instant emphasis of the appropriate document

or breakout quote. Lomac's uses a hired consultant, Anthony Bosco, who manually operates a computer keyboard and mouse and a control box that looks a little like a miniature concert sound control panel.

At other times, the lawyer doing the questioning places a document on what looks like an old-fashioned overhead projector...but the image appears simultaneously on the video screens rather than reflected on a white pull-down canvas screen.

Temporary, taped-down cables strew the courtroom floor. A large paper sign on the door from the judge's outer office into the courtroom warns people to watch their step around the cables.

Both sides of the case are splitting the rental cost of the equipment, and both sides are somewhat vague about the cost when asked. But for the expected five weeks of the trial, all sources agree, the dollars will run deep.

The consulting firm hired by Lomac to do the technology planning and setup, Trial Consulting Services LLC of Tampa, Fla., ordinarily would charge \$3,000 to \$4,000 per week to supply the equipment in use in Muskegon, with some discount for longer trial such as this, said company President Michael Boucher in a telephone interview.

However, in the Muskegon case, the actual hardware rental and support is from a Michigan company that Boucher declined to identify and is charging even more than that, Boucher said.

The Florida firm would charge about \$2,200 per week to rent the 50-inch plasma screen alone, Boucher said. To purchase such a piece of equipment outright would cost at least \$12,000, he said.

Especially during the trial's early days, a number of local lawyers expressed their video envy of the costly equipment.



Attorneys watch their large flat-screen monitors during the Dow-Lomac trial Sept. 24.