



Lights, Camera, Action

A Guide to Transforming Meeting Spaces
into Virtual Courtrooms

At the onset of the pandemic, law firms nationwide were forced to shift to a virtual environment and quickly adjust to new collaboration technology and new ways of working. Attorneys had to pilot new processes, particularly related to conducting official court matters remotely. And today, things continue to evolve as legal professionals are beginning to prepare for the possibility that hybrid courtrooms—where at least some aspect of trials such as jury selections and deliberations are done remotely—could become a mainstay in the legal field of the future. ¹

Although it is not a given that virtual courtrooms are here to stay long-term, law firms are exploring how best to convert their meeting spaces in order to accommodate jury selections, virtual trials, testimonies, witness interviews, and more in the short-term. In order to do so successfully, IT leaders in the legal industry will need to learn from their past experiences, and keep a few additional considerations in mind to ensure their firm is ready to navigate the legal landscape of the future.

Learn from “trial by Zoom” successes

While initially a scramble, seemingly everyone in the legal field—from lawyers to judges, witnesses to jurors—quickly realized the benefits of a more virtual approach to court proceedings.



Lawyers had more time to prepare because they weren't spending time commuting to court and waiting for the trial to begin



Lawyers had more access to judges without the restraints of in-person scheduling



In-person attorney, juror, and witness interactions were eliminated during breaks, maintaining the integrity of the proceedings



Jurors were more engaged because they had unrestricted views of participants and the ability to take notes



Jurors were less intimidated and stressed by having the ability to join remotely from the comfort of their own homes

¹ AAMC, Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections from 2018-2033

6 key considerations for creating virtual courtrooms

While the pandemic provided a crash course on how to conduct virtual trials and other meetings, there are some considerations firms should be sure to keep in mind as they begin to establish a more permanent setting for their virtual proceedings in law firm office spaces.

1 Auto-tracking cameras put presenters center stage

Camera angles may not be something many legal professionals have ever considered to be a vital aspect of their job; however, the right angle can mean the difference between an attorney (or, crucially, a witness) being taken seriously or not by the rest of the court. When revamping workspaces to support hybrid court proceedings, firms should install cameras that auto-track the active speaker at eye level to help keep participants focused and engaged in the dialogue throughout the proceeding.

2 High-quality, responsive microphones ensure messages are heard

Every word spoken during a legal proceeding counts, so it is absolutely critical that the space is equipped with high-quality microphones that provide crystal clear audio. Firms should invest in microphones that automatically raise or lower the volume based on the speaker's volume to ensure that any point made is conveyed at a consistent level, and that participants are focused on the sentiments being shared, rather than how they're lagging, muddled, or worse, blaring through the computer.

3 Lighting and paint play important roles in keeping speakers in focus

When designing the room, firms should avoid fluorescent lighting and paint that has a glossy finish, as these can work against each other, making the speaker appear shadowy and causing cameras to struggle to auto-focus on the speaker. Similarly, cameras will overcorrect if they detect direct sunlight in the reflection of the paint behind the speaker, turning them into a shadowy silhouette.

4 Furniture should pull double-duty

Flexible office furniture, such as nesting tables, are ideal for virtual legal settings. These adjustable tables can make a space more malleable, transforming from a courtroom-style layout to a board meeting with ease. By utilizing flexible furniture solutions, firms can ensure their meeting spaces are able to handle any scenario.

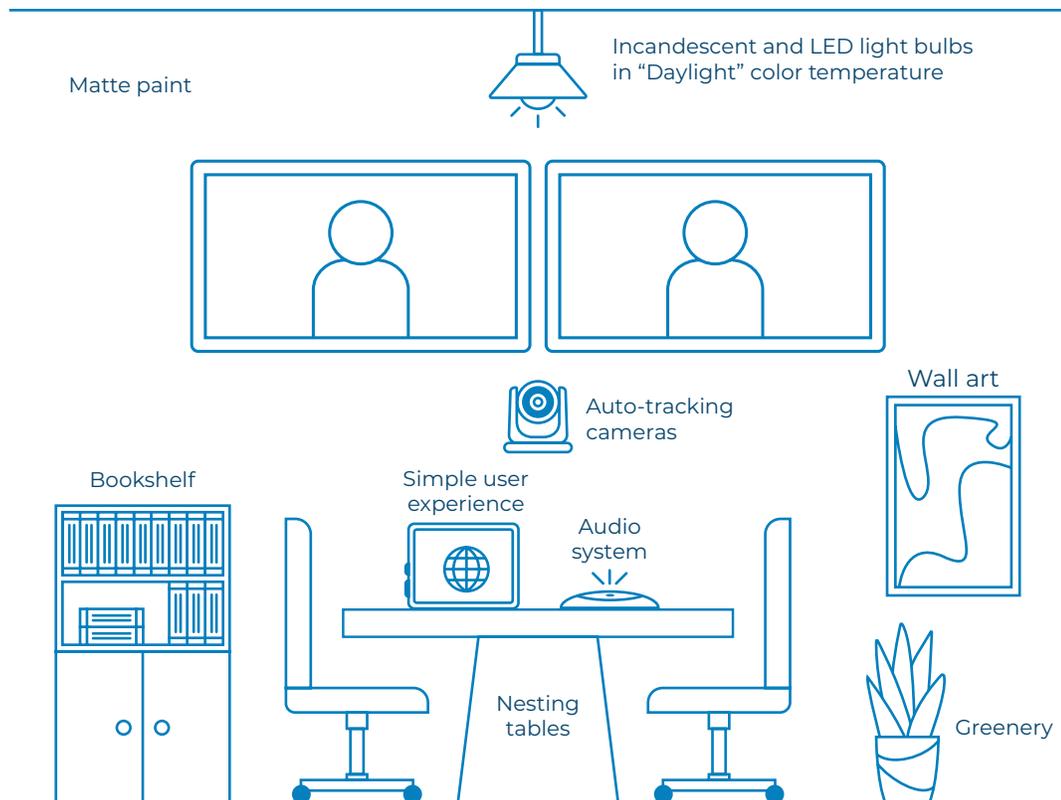
5 Décor should add to credibility, not cause distractions

The room's background should be minimal, but not bare, in order to lend the speaker credibility. It is vital to avoid paintings or photographs with faces, as these can distract auto-tracking cameras. Alternatively, green plants and minimal wall art can add personality without drawing away focus from the speaker. If a bookshelf is in view, it should be neat and not overcrowded—too much clutter can not only be distracting for viewers, it can leave a negative impression of the speaker as well.

6 The user experience should be simple

IT leaders should make sure users can seamlessly connect to the virtual meeting through various UC platforms such as Teams or Zoom when updating their meeting space setup. Proactive monitoring of meeting space technology can give attorneys and IT leaders alike peace of mind that issues will be caught before the start of the meeting, while offering 24-hour support ensures any real-time issues are dealt with expertly and swiftly, no matter when they occur. In addition, archival capabilities are vitally important in a legal setting, giving attorneys and judges the ability to review and reference materials from a case or testimonial videos at a later date.

Courtroom-Ready Meeting Space Design



A word to the wise: Keep it flexible

No one knows with certainty whether virtual proceedings will become a staple of future litigation, but many aspects of remote work are here to stay for the foreseeable future. The best way to ensure meeting spaces can stand the test of time is to make them multi-purpose. Investing in a flexible space can allow for use with virtual trials as courts continue to navigate the wake of the pandemic, but can also allow them to be used in many other capacities in the future. Each component of a space should be thought of in terms of how it will be used and who will be using it. From flexible table arrangements, to high-quality cameras and microphones, to collaborative UC software, every piece should have a purpose. By taking this approach, IT leaders in the legal industry can have confidence their firm will be ready for a variety of needs, both now and in the future.

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