

Technology and The Missouri Bar — What It Means to You

By Keith A. Birkes

Like it or not, we are in the electronic age, which means that all types of information are shared without the use of paper. Indeed, increasingly electronic communications are the only way that one can communicate, and there is no end to that trend in sight.

Electronic filing in the federal courts is now commonplace, and a pilot project at the Supreme Court level in the state courts will be soon be undertaken to test the feasibility of e-filing. Also, as covered in another story in this issue of *Precedent*, The Missouri Bar will on June 1 begin providing basic electronic legal research capability, at no cost, to all members of The Missouri Bar eligible to practice law.

Using books for legal research is largely a thing of the past, with most of those volumes now simply forming a handsome backdrop in conference rooms and seldom being used for research. E-legal research is generally quicker, easier and will soon become a considerably less expensive alternative.

The Missouri Bar's most frequent and timely publication, *ESQ*, is only avail-

able electronically. Each Friday, our members receive electronically the latest case law hand downs and the most current legal news. The Missouri Bar currently conducts its Economic Survey electronically every two years, and certain other surveys and information are only gathered electronically, absent compelling reasons to use paper. The cost savings in using electronic communications are huge, both in terms of paper and postage and efficiency with which data can be analyzed. Quite simply, paper is becoming a dinosaur.

At least in my lifetime, I suspect newspapers, books and some types of correspondence will continue to be handled using ink and paper. Certainly, I can't conceive of an evening or weekend without news print or a good book to hold before retiring. However, electronic data handling will increase and The Missouri Bar will be considering the use of electronic balloting for elections, judicial evaluation surveys, and many other important transactions that have traditionally been handled using paper. The efficiencies are too important to ignore.

A principal reason The Missouri Bar has been able to operate financially without increasing dues for 13 years has been the utilization of electronic communications. We are now nearing the end of The Missouri Bar's longest dues cycle without an increase. Continued utilization of the best technology available in the future will allow us to maintain a dues structure that is one of the lowest in the country while, at the same time, providing outstanding programs and services to both the bar and public.

Technology is here to stay. E-mail is how we communicate, electronic publications are how we get much of our information, and legal research can most efficiently be done electronically. The Missouri Bar will continue to use paper for some purposes and, as always, we will accommodate the wishes of our members to the maximum extent possible.



Keith A. Birkes is The Missouri Bar's Executive Director.