

Chapter 6 - Computer Concepts and Legal Applications

Spreadsheets

Spreadsheet.

Application software that simulates a paper work

Spreadsheet application programs provide the user with the immense capability to perform simple and complex mathematical calculations automatically. The data is generally arranged in a table of numbers in rows and columns. They have long been used in business, and were one of the first applications that started the use of personal computers in this field. The primary reason is that in spreadsheets, you can change one number in your business calculations and it will automatically change the rest of the numbers. This is important in a business or legal “what if scenario”, or other financial calculations. Spreadsheet packages have excellent text, data and charting formatting capabilities that rival table functions in word processing packages and graphics packages. The spreadsheet should be one of the most use tools in a law office.



For example, you can use a spreadsheet to calculate a structured settlement offer to determine the present day value of the money that needs to be invested. If the amount per year or per month increases or decreases during your negotiations, then a new amount can be instantly calculated. Spreadsheets can be used to calculate what if scenarios involving your case and keep control of the damage and administrative case costs of litigation. Graphs can be easily prepared showing the different settlement positions of the parties.

This data can also be automatically displayed as a graphical representation that would be great for demonstrative exhibits. This kind of capability permits the rapid change of exhibits based upon the testimony of numbers of witnesses at trial. There are many templates (predeveloped worksheets where just data needs to be entered) available for legal professionals either given away or can be purchased.

Legal Applications. In the practice of law, spreadsheets can be used to calculate:

- Personal injury - lost wages, past and future medical damages, structured settlements, loss of enjoyment of life, pain and suffering; and negotiation settlement "what if"

scenarios;

- Litigation Support Costs - abstracting, coding, imaging, conversion to full text, paralegal, associate and partner costs, and task oriented billing;
- Domestic Relations - child support, property division, and alimony payments; and
- Real estate - closing statements, truth in lending statements and mortgage payment, loan calculations and amortization schedules.

Word processing programs have limited capability to create tables that have some spreadsheet functionality. You may find it easier to use tables since you are familiar with the commands and it may be appropriate for one-time, simple calculations, but any significant calculations should be done on a spreadsheet. Sorting and manipulating data are done better by a spreadsheet. You can normally drag and drop part of the spreadsheet directly into your word processor and/or link the data from the spreadsheet into your letter for automatic updating.

One of the best books on how to use spreadsheets in the practice of law is The Lawyer's Guide to Microsoft Excel 2007, John C. Tredennick, Esq. (www.abanet.com).

Some spreadsheet products to consider include; Microsoft Excel (www.microsoft.com) and Lotus 123 (www.lotus.com).

Specialized calculation packages to consider include Personal Injury Economist, Wrongful Death Economist, Wrongful Termination Economist and Structured Settlements Economist - Advocate Software (www.advocatesoftware.com).