

Experience Is Key: Finding the Best Hot Seat Operator

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A courtroom technology consultant should be an integral part of your trial team—not an afterthought. Complex, high-stakes litigation comes with unique technical challenges, and the person in the hot seat must be capable of handling these demands under pressure. The wrong trial technician can quickly derail your investment in compelling expert testimony and trial demonstratives.

After more than three decades and thousands of cases, we have seen firsthand what it takes to be a great hot seat operator. The following are important traits and skills to guide your selection.

Top Qualities Needed to Fill the Hot Seat

EXPERIENCED IN CRITICAL MATTERS

There is no substitute for experience, the most important requirement for the hot seat. Technical issues will inevitably arise, so when it really matters, be sure your technician has the training to adapt to any situation. They should possess advanced knowledge of courtroom protocol and understand the unique demands of high-stakes disputes.

As with most services, you get what you pay for—and when millions of dollars are at stake, the hot seat is not the place to cut costs.

SOFTWARE AND HARDWARE EXPERTISE

You will likely use several pieces of software during trial prep and courtroom proceedings, and your hot seat operator needs to be an expert in all of them. Most obviously, this person must have mastery of PowerPoint—a trial technician should be a “power user”—and leading trial presentation software like OnCue or Trial Director. You also want your hot seat operator to be proficient with traditional graphics editing applications such as Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator or, better yet, to be supported by in-house graphic designers.

Finally, your hot seat technician must be able to set up and run the necessary audio/visual equipment as well as any existing equipment in the courtroom, including virtual technology. Beyond Zoom skills, a seasoned technician can advise attorneys and witnesses on best practices for [virtual proceedings](#)

(lighting, framing, bandwidth, etc.), perform setup and testing, and handle any connectivity and troubleshooting issues.

MASTER OF DEPOSITION VIDEOS

Video deposition playbacks have become increasingly important to trial proceedings since the pandemic, but issues with video files are especially ubiquitous. With depositions conducted nationwide by different videographers using hundreds of types of encoding software, you need a hot seat operator who is prepared to solve unforeseen issues. Veteran technology consultants will have several applications to deal with troublesome video files.

A real test of your technician's skill is their ability to quickly produce several deposition video cuts in court while everyone is waiting. More frequently, this person will be dealing with a high volume of designations and counter-designations, with counsel needing to know how long their total runtime is. Inefficiency in this regard has economic implications.

INTUITIVE AND PROFESSIONAL

The best hot seat operators resemble mind readers. They think through the trial with you and anticipate your needs so the presentation will be seamless. They are following your witness outlines and the testimony, considering the questions you may ask next, and grouping relevant exhibits and testimony clips on the fly so they are ready at a moment's notice.

Any number of technical problems and glitches can happen during a long trial with multiple co-counsels and expert witnesses. Skilled technology consultants are able to handle these problems calmly and quickly, often without the attorneys realizing there was ever an issue. If something happens that your trial team needs to know about, they will quickly define the problem and offer solutions on the spot.

Ultimately, the most professional trial technicians know how to read lawyers as well as the room. They are always focused on proactively supporting your team and positioning your case for success.

It All Boils Down to Experience

This range of technical skills and professional insights are all components of the key requirement for the hot seat: experience. When hiring a hot seat operator to be a part of your trial team, practical experience should be the top consideration in your decision-making process.

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National Law Review, Volume XIII, Number 353

Source URL: <https://natlawreview.com/article/experience-key-finding-best-hot-seat-operator>