

BARTLIT BECK'S ROAD WARRIOR CTO



Tom Mensch
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By Ashby Jones

As the chief technology officer at Chicago's Bartlit Beck Herman Palenchar & Scott LLP, Tom Mensch wears a lot of hats. He makes decisions on software upgrades. He consults the firm's management on the best use of office space. He drives big trucks across endless stretches of highway.

Mensch is a man on the move. A large part of his responsibility at the 38-lawyer litigation boutique is to travel the country setting up lawyers' "war rooms" before their trials begin.

It's a huge job. In the past decade, Bartlit Beck has emerged as one of the country's elite trial firms. The firm's lawyers take plenty of depositions and file a lot of motions back home. But they also spend a ton of time in courtrooms.

A snapshot of the firm on April 30 drives home the point. On that day, close to half of the firm's lawyers were embroiled in four trials all over the country—with hundreds of millions of dollars at stake. Name partner Fred Bartlit Jr. and four others were in federal court in San Diego, arguing for the validity of Bayer A.G.'s patent on the antibiotic Cipro.

In Shawnee, Okla., name partner Phil Beck was arguing against class certification in a case concerning Bayer's Baycol, a cholesterol-reducing drug which, according to the plaintiffs, causes liver damage. Other Bartlit Beck trial teams were in New Jersey and Iowa, defending large environmental and antitrust claims.

Like other firms that try cases out of town, Bartlit Beck rents out hotel space and creates its own offices, ones replete with e-mail, high-speed Web connections and access to the firm's iManage document repository back home. Mensch had to set all of these up.

But his duties didn't end there. He also had to make sure the lawyers had (and knew how to use) all of the courtroom equipment. At Bartlit Beck, that's nothing to sneeze at. In the Cipro trial alone, Bartlit has used a rear-projection screen ("front projections cast strange shadows"), a 40-inch plasma overhead-projection monitor ("everything else is too fuzzy") and a remote-controlled mouse ("they're great for PowerPoint presentations"). In the courtroom, Bartlit even connects his laptop to a color printer, which he keeps underneath his table. "If the judge wants to see [a document], we can bring it up for him immediately," he says.

For trials far from Chicago—like in San Diego—Mensch rents equipment and meets it on location. But for trials closer to home—like in Des Moines, Iowa—he'll pack the equipment into an 18-wheel semi and drive it to the courthouse. And while he's on the road, his duties back home don't stop. "When I'm away, my cell phone becomes the firm's tech support," he says.

Travel and the pressures of high-stakes litigation burn out a lot of talented lawyers, paralegals and other law firm staffers. But Mensch does not seem to mind. "I've been [home] six days in the past six weeks," he says. "It's tiring, but it's also exhilarating," he says.

Bartlit raves about the work Mensch does. "Tom does wonderful, critical work," he says.

Were it not for computers, Bartlit says, the firm would not be able to staff cases so leanly. Trial exhibits are always just a mouse-click away, and all of the lawyers know how to access everything. "Without technology, we'd have to staff 15 lawyers alone on the Cipro matter," says Bartlit. "To stay small and elite, we absolutely have to rely on technology." And on the road warrior, Tom Mensch.

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