



## UTILIZING THE VIRTUAL PARALEGAL IN LITIGATION

By Denise Annunciata

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The use of career paralegals in litigation has risen exponentially over the past fifteen years. Clients are becoming more sophisticated in the use of paralegals and now routinely ask, when reviewing bills, if a charge for work done by an attorney could not have been done by a paralegal at a lower billing rate. Most large firms have highly experienced paralegals on staff who manage cases under the supervision and guidance of the partner in charge. These senior paralegals are responsible for overseeing and creating the structure and protocols for the case from document organization and productions, to witness files, and trial preparation and assistance.

Many smaller firms and sole practitioners are not in a position to have on staff a career paralegal with this level of experience. However, the need for this level of assistance is still there for small firms and sole practitioners. This is where a highly experienced virtual paralegal can enhance the attorneys practice and add value and cost efficiency for the client.

### Utilizing the Virtual Litigation Paralegal

The following are a just a few of the ways a highly experienced virtual litigation paralegal can enhance your practice and give you the edge in a case that the more heavily staffed law firms command.

- **Motion Practice:** Accuracy of legal citation and correct format is very important in every filing before the court. The virtual paralegal can cite-check and proofread all motions, oppositions, and replies. S/he can also provide factual research and supporting documents for factual assertions while the attorney drafts the brief and does the legal research in support of the motion.
- **Research:** Factual research for cases can sometimes be time consuming and very costly at attorney billable rates. However, it is the thoroughness in ascertaining the facts surrounding a case that can make or break the presentation before a jury. A paralegal can provide cost effective and thorough factual research for the client under the guidance of the attorney. This is often the area where the more heavily staffed law firms gain the edge in a case. Using the virtual paralegal allows the small firm and/or sole practitioner to achieve the same level of thoroughness while saving the attorney's time and the client's money.

Expert witness and witness background searches are another area where the virtual paralegal can be of great assistance.

- **Document Organization and Review:** These days the cost of scanning documents is almost the same as copying. So when documents are being copied and numbered in response to a request for documents, rather than making that second safety copy set, have them scanned and put on CD's. The CD's can then be sent to the paralegal who can create a searchable database linked to the document images. Once the database is complete, witness files can be organized electronically, chronologies can be developed, and exhibits for motions and trial can be assembled and organized by the paralegal at a different location than the attorney.



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- **Deposition and Transcript Summarizing:** Deposition summaries are very useful tools for the attorney. As a part of a witness file, they can be a quick reference for that witness' testimony and save hours of attorney time searching for testimony on specific topics. Summaries of the transcripts of proceedings can often save time during motion practice, trial preparation, and during trial itself.
- **Public Records Research:** More and more agencies, courts, and governments are making public records available on-line. This is another area where the virtual paralegal can give you the information you need for your client's case in a cost effective and timely manner, while your time is freed for the legal and substantive work on the case.

### Conclusion

For the small firm and sole practitioner utilizing a highly experienced virtual litigation paralegal can level the playing field with the larger firms. The client receives top notch cost effective services that supports the attorney's substantive work on the case. The attorney can access paralegal services for cite-checking briefs, witness preparation, document organization, factual and witness research, public record research, and transcript summarization as easily as the attorney at the large firm without the attendant costs of having a senior level paralegal on staff.

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To learn more about Virtual Paralegal Services and how it may strengthen your litigation practice, contact Kim Chrisom at [kim@virtualparalegalservices.com](mailto:kim@virtualparalegalservices.com).

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### About Denise M. Annunciata

*Denise Annunciata has been a paralegal for 21 years working in law firms and in-house legal departments. Denise is the founder and coordinating paralegal for Virtual Paralegal Services, LLC ([www.virtualparalegalservices.com](http://www.virtualparalegalservices.com)), which offers on-demand paralegal services™ to in-house legal departments and solo or small firm practitioners. Prior to founding Virtual Paralegal Services and LeapLaw ([www.leaplaw.com](http://www.leaplaw.com)), Denise was the Corporate Paralegal Coordinator at Ropes & Gray LLP, Boston, Massachusetts.*