

# Rolling With the Changes

## Ann Arbor Bankruptcy Attorney Started Early; Hasn't Stopped

By Lynn Patrick Ingram

**B**ankruptcy can be dirty work, but somebody has to do it. And Ann Arbor attorney Doug Ellmann is certainly up to the task, thanks in part to his willingness to change with the times, especially when it comes to technology.

During his 35 years of practice, Ellmann has handled hundreds of cases, mostly in his role as a U.S. Bankruptcy Appellate Panel trustee. He has seen and done it all.

Ellmann says that while the amount and type of work he handles on a day-to-day basis hasn't changed much, the way he goes about handling it has changed drastically.

"A typical day includes reviewing filings related to my cases, responding or filing motions and other pleadings, overseeing collection of settlements, and various other unexpected items that will pop up," he said, noting that this is nothing new.

However, "with the bankruptcy court's electronic case filing system, I can file pleadings from anywhere at any time," he added. "No more bundling up and running out late on a cold Michigan winter night to drop a large envelope into a mailbox."

When Ellmann began practicing, the personal computer was just on the verge of being available to the average person. Instead, he used a typewriter, a phone (with cord), and the U.S. mail system as his primary methods for conducting business.

At times, he said, there were mountains of work.

"Back in the day, every filing was by paper," he said. "My mail was typically a foot

high. Now the paper has been reduced by about 95 percent."

### Early adopter

Ellmann said that, unlike a few of his colleagues, he did not resist change, but embraced it.

"Because of my work as vice chair of the ABA Small Firm Practice Section's Bankruptcy Committee some 13 years ago, I was able to view the filing system before it was instituted in Michigan," he said. "As such, I was fortunate to preview the cost savings, efficiencies, and ease of filing, and I was not reluctant to change."

He also said it wasn't difficult to continue changing because he was an early adopter and never fell behind.

"It was not difficult to change in 2005 when our local district went to the electronic case filing system," Ellmann recalled. "The challenge was to become familiar with the system quickly and be patient as bugs were worked out."

The one difficulty he had was the prevalence of Windows over the Macintosh operating system.

"Ultimately, I had to obtain a program that allowed me to run specific software that works only on PCs, not on my Macs," he said. "By installing a PC emulator on my Macs, I can use this specialty software. Ultimately, this software is becoming more browser-based, so an emulator won't be necessary."

### It's real and it's spectacular

According to Ellmann, the technological changes in the area of bankruptcy have been "spectacularly good."

"Most communication is done by email now, which is much more efficient than telephone calls," he noted. "The one downside is less professional contact, as I personally enjoy discussing professional issues with other attorneys."

As for his personal devices, Ellmann says he sticks to the basics—Macs, iPad, and iPhone—to keep track of his cases, and remarks that they work "splendidly."

He also says he'll continue to monitor the quickly changing technology available to lawyers and evolve as he goes.

"I look to see further increases in speed and I intend to create my own systems to better keep track of developments in my practice," he said, noting that speed doubles about every six months.

Finally, Ellmann advised avoiding the mistake of become wedded to just one type of technology or one particular device.

"You'll be much more efficient if you become well-versed in several programs, including a database program, and, of course, Microsoft Word," he said. ■

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*Lynn Patrick Ingram is publications development manager and legal editor at the State Bar of Michigan.*

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"Future of Law" is a regular column of the *Michigan Bar Journal*. Articles relating to lawyers using technology in their practices are written by Lynn Patrick Ingram. To submit a story idea, please contact Lynn at [lingram@michbar.org](mailto:lingram@michbar.org).

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