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# BOOK REVIEW: Piercing the Computer Veil

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# BOOK REVIEW

## Piercing the Computer Veil

LAW OFFICE GUIDE TO SMALL COMPUTERS. By Forrest Dean
Rhoads & John Edwards. Shepard's/McGraw-Hill: Colorado
Springs, Colorado. 1984. Pp. 431. No price given.

*Reviewed by Vincent F. Aiello* [*]

It would seem that the *Law Office Guide to Small Computers*[1]
would be a worthy resource tool for the attorney who finds his time
to be valuable, precious, and a commodity which he never has
enough of. In this world of changing and sophisticated technology,
the computer is the ideal time-saving machine. In theory, and per-
haps in practice, it is the instrumentality to handle the busy work
load, which hangs over an attorney's head like the Sword of Damo-
cles,[2] saving what the legal profession finds in such short supply—
time.

*The Guide* offers much promise in its attempt to acquaint the
legal community with a working knowledge of computers. It sets
the stage by drawing an analogy between operating a computer and
driving a car.[3] One does not have to be aware of the theories of
internal combusion in order to drive a motor vehicle. By the same
token, a person should not have to be knowledgable about what is
going on inside a computer in order to use it. The premise is ideal
for the attorney who is more concerned with the end product rather
than the science that went into achieving it.

This practical concern can be coupled with the two other consid-
erations when dealing with any addition to the law office: (1) What
size or kind of computer does my law practice need? and (2) How
much would this computer system cost? One of the main flaws
with *The Guide* is that it takes a shotgun approach in attempting to
answer these questions. It delivers a widely spread pattern in
describing the science and hardware of computer technology while
avoiding any mention of which computer is better in a particular

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nia Western School of Law, 1985.
   1.  F.D. RHOADS & J. EDWARDS, LAW OFFICE GUIDE TO SMALL COMPUTERS
(1984) [hereinafter cited as THE GUIDE].
   2.  A term from Greek mythology referring to an impending disaster. *Webster's
New Collegiate Dictionary* 1171 (1973).
   3.  THE GUIDE, *supra* note 1, at 2.

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law office setting. The book goes through a brief overview of many computer companies,[4] ranging from Apple[5] to Eagle Computers,[6] without any specific negative comments and only a minimal emphasis on comparing and contrasting of different models. *The Guide*, in this regard, reads more like a catalog of computer companies; this notion is enforced by the fact that each discussion of a computer company ends with an address for which to write for more information.

The brilliant analogy that is first drawn between the car and the computer quickly dissipates with the first chapter dealing with how computers work.[7] It must be noted that the discussion of the workings of the computer are informational, but the depth of detail is unnecessary. Terms such as byte,[8] interface,[9] and RS-232C[10] do little to aid the average attorney in understanding this subject matter unless he prides himself on having the trivial knowledge for figuring out difficult crossword puzzles.

Perhaps what *The Guide* does best is to explain the range a potential computer can have in the law office. It brings to light the time-saving efficiency a computer can give in terms of research, billing and word processing, thus allowing smaller firms to stand on a more even footing with their larger competitors. *The Guide* points out that computers must be understood in the context of the rapidly changing technology that surrounds them. For example, any system that is purchased must be done with foresight as to what the science of tomorrow might bring. An attorney does not want to purchase a system that may become obsolete overnight, therefore, whatever system that is purchased must have expandable capability.

In terms of price range for the law office computer, *The Guide* addresses this concern by placing the emphasis on fulfilling your needs first, with price as a secondary concern. The prices given for the hardware and the software are in wide ranges, a shortcoming of the shotgun approach of this book. In dealing with more sophisticated computerware, the authors make the statement that, "if you have to ask the cost, you probably cannot afford one."[11] The authors also seek to warn attorneys not to buy computers with joysticks, game cartridges or those advertised on television by an actor who played a Korean War Army Doctor.[12]

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4. *Id.* at 25-46.
5. *Id.* at 25.
6. *Id.* at 45.
7. *Id.* at 2-21.
8. *Id.* at 408.
9. *Id.* at 413.
10. *Id.* at 416.
11. *Id.* at 54.
12. *Id.* at 23.

*The Guide* deals itself a fatal blow when its final chapter advocates finding a computer dealer and having a salesman reiterate what you have just read for the past 367 pages.[13] This book seems to best serve the needs of large law firms with ample resources to hire a computer programmer. A programmer's main concern is with the computer, the attorney's main concern is with saving time, not wasting it. The best, although perhaps obvious, piece of advice *The Guide* offers on the purchasing of a law office computer comes from a term in its glossary: GIGO — Garbage in, Garbage out.[14] You get what you pay for.

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13. *Id.* at 367.
14. *Id.* at 412.