



CourtCall, LLC

Telephonic Court Appearances

NEWS RELEASE

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Legal Eagles' Phone Service Answers Call of the Filed

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Back in 1995, attorney Mark Wapnick was stuck in traffic, in the middle of a two-hour drive back to his office in Marina del Rey after a five-minute court appearance in Orange County. Billing \$250 an hour would have cost his client \$1,000 for the four-hour trip.

"On the way back I was frustrated about how much money I'd have to charge my client," Wapnick said, "or how much I'd not be able to charge if I wanted to be generous. So I was thinking about telephonic court appearances. They were permitted; I knew I could do them. So I asked myself why I hadn't done them."

The answer: It was too much trouble.

Wapnick turned his traffic trauma into CourtCall LLC. After 10 years, the firm has facilitated more than 800,000 telephonic court appearances for California attorneys. Wapnick and his partner, Robert Alvarado Jr., estimate they've saved more than \$100 million in travel time that lawyers would otherwise have charged their clients. The attorneys appreciate the time it saves them.

Andy Waxler of Waxler Carner Weinreb Brodsky LLP has been using CourtCall for about six years. He represents professionals in malpractice matters and insurance companies in business litigation. By using the service, he says, he's been able to convince clients that he can take cases in more remote courts and it's meant more business for his firm.

"Previously, a client would only want to hire a San Bernardino law firm to handle a case in San Bernardino and they'd use firms they wouldn't normally use," said Waxler. "I get to take my daughter to school instead of driving to San Bernardino."

Dissenting opinions

Not all lawyers are comfortable with the idea of phoning in an appearance.

"We encourage our people to show up," said Jeff Scott, co-chair of litigation at Greenberg Traurig LLP. "I generally subscribe to the view that if you're there, you're showing you care enough to be there, and when you're there it's a little easier to read the tea leaves, the judge's reaction."

Michael Mallow of Loeb & Loeb LLP is a complex civil litigator who defends clients against class action and consumer protection cases brought by the government. He appears in court for his major cases but uses CourtCall for some status hearings.

"The only downside to CourtCall is that it's a continuation of the de-personalizing of the practice," said Mallow, who uses the service for Orange County status hearings and the like. "There's a lack of civility among lawyers, especially in litigation," he said. "And part of that is created because there's less interpersonal contact. We're not face-to-face as much as we were years ago and CourtCall is to an extent a continuation of that. When lawyers have to interact in person it creates more civility."

Legal Eagles' Phone Service Answers Call of the Filed - Continued

In the beginning

Wapnik and Alvarado converted their boutique law firm and its five lawyers into CourtCall gradually and the changeover was completed only this year. Wapnik took cases until 1999 and Alvarado took them until 2000. The company had angel funding for the first 18 months of operations, but didn't turn a profit for the first 36 months.

"So months 19 through 36 got pretty interesting," Wapnick said.

The former lawyers believe they made CourtCall work by streamlining the process for telephonic appearances. In 1995, most judges didn't have a phone that allowed more than one party to be heard on a conference call. And since courts and other legal counsel rarely scheduled telephonic appearances, it made the process more laborious. The partners took on the scheduling for the law firms and urged the courtroom to use more sophisticated telephones. Then they started coaching their attorney clients on phone tips like identifying themselves whenever they spoke to make things easier on the judges. And they provided the judges with state-of-the-art speaker phones free of charge.

These days, they're enjoying more financial success than they did in their law practice. Revenues jumped 23 percent in 2005 and they've seen double-digit growth since 2000. CourtCall now has 83 people on staff.

Some of the courts they service also prosper. The calls cost between \$40 and \$60, depending on the court and area, and the company offers a revenue-sharing program that can translate into \$5 a call for participating courts. Some have made as much \$60,000 in a year.

There are some less obvious perks, too.

Wapnick said his hair started to grow back when he stopped representing clients in courts.