

CHAPTER 7

MICROCOMPUTER USE IN ARBITRATION

I. USING A DATABASE TO GET MORE OUT OF YOUR COMPUTER

BARBARA W. DOERING*

Although I firmly believe that the convenience of word-processing fully justifies the additional cost of investment in a computer as opposed to a typewriter, one can't help but feel, having paid the price for a computer, that it ought to do more than just type. Filing and record keeping is an area of obvious potential. The question is, how to find the software that will best suit the kind of work we do as arbitrators.

Most of the advertising is geared towards businesses with inventories and mass mailings, or towards people who want to put their investment information on spread sheets. While all this is fascinating, particularly the graphic representations, it does not seem to have much relevance to an arbitration practice. For instance most of the mailing programs only contemplate a single addressee per letter, whereas most of my correspondence has two per letter and sometimes more. The ability to create pages full of mailing labels is far less attractive to me than the ability to address single envelopes quickly and easily.

Of course letters can be written and addressed fairly easily through a word processing program and can be saved to disk in a file under the case name to expedite future correspondence with the same parties. So why bother with a filing or database management program?

I can only offer my own reasons. One major reason was that I have a space problem in my basement storage cabinet—too many old case files. I decided that if I could store most of the potentially useful information on computer I could throw away

*Member, National Academy of Arbitrators, West Lafayette, Indiana.

a lot of paper. Moreover, a sortable database could be very useful in researching a particular issue either when faced with a new case on that issue or in preparation for a speaking engagement. It would also make responding to surveys depend upon whether I thought the survey were worthwhile rather than whether the information requested was easily available. Finally, it would allow easy preparation of lists—a summary list of cancellations to give to FMCS so they could close their files, or a year-end list of case income and reimbursed expenses for tax purposes. One could also use it to track cancellations, source of appointments, or anything else of interest.

Part of my reluctance to throw away old case files was that they contained the names and addresses of the parties. Since these are a function of the correspondence, it seemed logical to find a computer program which would allow me to file this information along with other case information. When I started thinking seriously about handling correspondence from a filing program, I realized that much of my correspondence is repetitive and would lend itself to the use of form letters.

After several false starts I eventually located some software which does much of what I had in mind. We'll talk a bit about software options in a moment, but first let me show you how my current program works.

The first thing you do is develop a form in which to keep your information. My form is shown below:

Database: CORRESPONDENCE

_____ / _____	Status: _____
Docketed: ___/___/___ #lets: _ Appt by: _	#: _____
Filings Due: _____	Dt.let/canc/bil: ___/___/___
C.contact: _____ Last Name: _____	
C.Adr: _____	Phone: _____
	Salutn: _____
2nd Comp: _____ Last Name: _____	Phone: _____

U.contact: _____ Last Name: _____	
U.Adr: _____	Phone: _____
	Salutn: _____
2nd Union: _____ Last Name: _____	Phone: _____

Av. Dates in: _____
 Scheduled Time/Date: _____
 Where: _____
 ISSUE: _____ CCL: _____
 Hrg Days: ___ Fee: ___ Study Days: ___ Fee: ___ Total Fee: ___
 Travel: ___ Fdlodg: ___ Other: ___ All Exp: ___
 Total Bill: ___ Cmpy Sh: ___ Un Sh: ___ AdjF: ___ PPD\$: ___
 Disc.Date: _____ CP: ___ UP: ___ DataGrp: ___

Having set up your database record form for correspondence, you compose your various form letters with your word processor, using field tags from the database where appropriate. Each letter is filed on the database disk for later use. I use file names based upon recipients, with a file extender to designate content of the letter. For example: CRPURP.OFF means a letter offering dates to the company rep and union rep. CATURP.CON means a letter confirming dates to the company attorney and the union rep. CRPUAT.BIL means a bill to the company rep and union attorney. You obviously have to set up several permutations for each letter. This is not difficult if your word processor can insert files into a text. You simply set up the address for each of the four possible recipients and store it in a file with the extender ENV for envelope. You can then write the body of each of your letters and insert the appropriate inside addresses for each possible combination.

In addition to correspondence you can create all sorts of lists from the case files you will develop. For instance you can track cancellations.

For example:

Cancellations With Fee

<i>Case</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Hearing Date</i>	<i>Filing Due</i>
ZIN5	C83	May 10, 1983	c. 7 days
CFD2	C83	February 11, 1983	c. 11 days
GTN3	C83	April 6, 1983	c. 1 week
UAL2	C83	May 17, 1983	c. 3 days
ILP3	C83	February 18, 1983	c. 3 days
GTN4	C83	April 27, 1983	c. 24 hours
LBLF	C83	April 20, 1983 at 9:30	c. 5 days
DVPT	C83	May 16, 1983	c. 4 days

Cancellations—No Fee

<i>Case</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Hearing Date</i>	<i>Filing Due</i>
MMM2	W83		8. w-no date s
SETC	W83		8. w-no date s
STP4	W83	January 28, 1983	9. w-date set
ILP4	W83		8. w-no date s
ZIN4	W83	April 8, 1983	9. w-date set
OVD3	W83	March 18, 1983 at 10:00	9. w-date set
ESYS	W83	February 28, 1983 at 10:00	9. w-date s
SLG1	W83		8. no date set
ILB6	W83		8. w-no date s
MBNO	W83	June 29, 1983	9. w-date set
KNOD	W83		8. w-no date s
YRAD	W83		8. no date set
SIEM	W83	June 10, 1983	9. w-date set
GBAT	W83		8. no date set
RATH	W83		8. w-no date s
GRTE	W83	September 8, 1983 at 10:00	9. w-date set
TRA3	W83	October 13, 1983 at 9:30	9. w-date set
RLS2	W83		7. w-no reply
WLN2	W83		8. w-no date s
JNA2	W83		8. w-no date s
CNTL	W83	on November 29, 30 and Dec. 1s	9. w-date set
LKH1	W83		7. w-no reply
FTB2	W83		7. w-no reply

You can list open cases or cases where payment is due. You can track your appointments from a particular source or review your caseload by issue. If you want more exhaustive information about your past cases than will fit on the 70 fields of the correspondence database, you can create an additional database to which you can transfer some of the information from your correspondence and have space left for more substantive concerns. Since this second database is more academic than immediately useful, I have spent less time with it. Also, it is hardly worth the effort until one is sure of staying with the filing program in use. Although Perfect Filer is quite adequate for correspondence, I am not sure it will be my final choice, and I am currently experimenting with Condor, a relational database.

Considerations in Shopping for Software

Now that you have some idea of how my current database works, let me offer some points you might want to consider in shopping for a database program.

1. *Number of Fields per Record.* With a relational database this is not necessarily a major limitation. In a straight filing program, like Perfect Filer, it is very important because it determines whether you have to keep related information in more than one place. My feeling has been that I would prefer to establish a master file for each case and not be bothered flipping disks around while trying to enter information. Even with a nonrelational database, you can create smaller specialized files from a master set if you want to.

2. *Characters per Record.* This is important for the same reason as the number of fields. It is surprising how quickly you can use up a thousand characters.

3. *Single Screen.* A single screen limitation makes for a crowded record form. It is hard to look at and you need a lot of abbreviations or codes.

4. *Tabular Summaries.* Some programs do not come with the ability to print tables—"Jack" did not in its original form—and rather than just creating a list you wind up having to look at the individual records each time you sort.

5. *Columns per Table.* If you spent the money on a wide carriage printer it is irritating not to be able to take advantage of it in tabular summaries.

6. *Print a Partial Field.* Most programs I am familiar with won't do this, but it would be nice. This way you could start with a code number for sorting purposes and also include a written explanation. In some tables all you might want would be the code number and you could format it just to show the first 3 spaces of the field.

7. *Characters in I.D. Field.* Many filing programs use the first field as an identifier and each record must be unique in this field. The 4 character limitation in Perfect Filer makes a case numbering system difficult because there is not enough room for a year designation as well as up to three digits for the case number.

8. *Search/Index Fields.* It would be handy to be able to look for a particular name or party. Perfect Filer does not provide this. You have to format a list.

9. *Move & Merge Records.* Most programs allow you to do this by creating identical fields in a different database. It is also useful if you decide you need more than one record per case.

10. *Copy Portion of a Record.* If the program allows copying entries from one record to another you can save retyping of names and addresses which come up frequently. Perfect Filer lets

you copy from a record entered immediately before the one you are working on. With a relational database you may be able to use a separate address file and avoid the duplication.

11. *Templates (dates)*. Perfect Filer provides several preformatted templates, most of which took up too many fields to be useful for me. But the date template is terrific. You enter the numbers and it writes out the date when used in letters or reports.

12. *Create Templates*. It would be wonderful if you could create your own templates for coding and decoding purposes. So far I haven't found a way to do this.

13. *Computation*. Computers ought to be able to compute, right? A lot of filing programs do not have the ability to do arithmetic. It would be nice if the computer could add up your bills and do a year-end calculation of your arbitration income and expenses.

14. *Tabulation*. If your program does not do arithmetic, or even if it does, it may still be set up to count the number of records in a sort. This is a plus if you are simply interested in finding out how many of a particular sort of case you have had.

15. *Good Documentation*. Until someone comes out with an application program, the chances are you will have to create your own set of files. Clear instructions and a good tutorial are a must. Also, if the filing program works in conjunction with a separate word processor, make sure it works with one you have or are familiar with. The commands may reflect to some extent the other software the program is meant to work with.

For arbitrators I think the most useful software would include the capability of handling most correspondence and also the ability to generate tabular summaries and quick indexes. After those two criteria, it would be nice to be able to search the data without necessarily formatting a list. It would also be nice to have a computational ability and the ability to simply tabulate the number of records with a certain characteristic.

Perfect Filer can do the first two. It does not include a simple search function and it can't do arithmetic. While it doesn't tabulate as a separate function, it does tell you the number of records in any list before displaying the list. Relational databases like Condor, DBase II, Knowledge Man, and Personal Pearl are more powerful and much more expensive. In a relational database you can create a set of records or files for each case related through a common identifier such as the case name or number. Addresses might be in one record while due dates and/

or billing information would be in another, and substantive case information would be in yet another. Because each record is smaller, sorting is quicker. For correspondence purposes, letters still have to be composed with a word processor, and most of the relational databases seem to be geared toward WordStar and Mailmerge.

II. COMPUTERS FOR ARBITRATORS?

C. CHESTER BRISCO*

An appropriate title to my portion of this panel might be "One Arbitrator's Approach To Computer Literacy."

If you have delayed purchasing a computer or are considering upgrading your present system, perhaps my experience will be of some use. Each passing month brings improved software and hardware to the market, usually at reduced prices. The computer market is, however, chaotic. A private university in southern California decided that commencing with the 1983-84 school year, each student would be required to purchase a computer upon matriculation. The consultant they had hired carefully reviewed the market and, based upon price and performance criteria, recommended the Victor 9000 computer as the standard. A few months ago, Victor filed Chapter 11 bankruptcy, and the Victor 9000 is of a doubtful future, although it is an excellent machine.

First Considerations

We are constantly reminded that we are in a computer-ruled world. A former IBM employee who left to form his own software company was recently quoted, "Computers are in the process of changing our society, our economy and our everyday lives. That's going to accelerate more dramatically and significantly than anything we've seen in the past. Things that were virtually impossible to accomplish in the past are now trivial tasks to computers."¹ Well, that's easy for him to say, but just what does all this mean to an arbitrator?

*Member, National Academy of Arbitrators, Santa Ana, California.

¹Klaproth, *Basic Computing Interviews Chuck and Debbie Tessler*, Basic Computing, Vol. VII, No. 1 (Jan. 1984), 14.