



Case Study

‘Zoom has Been a Lifesaver’: Smyser Kaplan & Veselka Wins \$158M Trial Over Zoom

Smyser Kaplan & Veselka (SKV) bills itself as “a different kind of law firm” — a talented team of litigators that clients turn to for their courtroom expertise. When courts closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, SKV attorneys lived up to the firm’s reputation by not missing a beat, shifting seamlessly to practicing law remotely instead of in person.

With a leading-edge conference room setup outfitted by AV solutions designer Data Projections, SKV successfully conducted a five-week bench trial virtually via Zoom, resulting in a \$158 million win for its corporate client.

Challenge

Pre-pandemic, SKV used a variety of different platforms like Skype and Cisco Webex, but lacked a conference room system that could integrate everything and serve as a firmwide solution.

A move to a new office presented an opportunity to build the video conferencing system SKV wanted, one that was reliable, adaptable, and easy to use.

“We needed something that was user-friendly for everyone,” said Mohamed Rehman, director of IT at SKV. “Our clients are in different areas with different bandwidths. Not everyone is an advanced tech user with sophisticated software.”

Solution

Rehman chose Data Projections, a Houston-based AV solutions designer, to install and integrate a Polycom



DATA PROJECTIONS

Group Series 500 conference room system with over 160 inches of wall monitors and EagleEye Director cameras that track and zoom in on active speakers.

“Data Projections is the one that introduced Zoom to us, and integrated



Smyser Kaplan & Veselka LLP

Founded: 1995

Location: Houston, Texas

Industry: Legal services

Challenges: Implementing a user-friendly video conferencing solution, maintaining business continuity, and conducting legal proceedings during a pandemic

Solutions: Zoom Meetings

Business benefits: Integrated an easy-to-use conference room system with sophisticated technology, conducted a successful bench trial entirely over Zoom

“The beauty of the [Zoom] trial was that we had not a single delay. Everything was seamless, which doesn’t happen, even in court... Zoom enabled the judge to focus on witnesses, exhibits, and questioning attorneys with fewer distractions than would normally occur in the courtroom.”

- Mohamed Rehman
Director of IT at Smyser Kaplan & Veselka

everything seamlessly,” Rehman said. “Zoom was the perfect fit for us. It was simple to install for users and the interface was so easy.”

SKV completed its conference room upgrade in August 2019, and the coronavirus pandemic hit just a few months later. “We picked Zoom right before the pandemic and it has been a lifesaver,” Rehman said. “Having a video solution to communicate with clients or internally, especially with visual impact, is the equivalent of sending 100 emails while working remotely.”

The ease of use was evident from the very beginning. “Whenever you roll out new software, you get 10 to 20 calls a day for a month from people asking how it works,” Rehman said. “I sent some videos from the Zoom website on how to start a meeting and that was it — people were able to teach themselves.”

Results

“Our clients love it. We’re able to provide the same level of service while saving time and money on travel,” Rehman said. “We can start meetings instantly with one button and our clients can join right away. We didn’t have to stop our business during the pandemic.”

For SKV, part of business as usual involves meeting with clients, conducting depositions, and even litigating cases over Zoom.

In what may be one of the longest Zoom bench trials in Texas state courts to date, and one of the longest Zoom bench trials for a corporate dispute, SKV founding partner Lee Kaplan and a team of attorneys scored a \$158 million judgment for their client, Vitol Americas Corp., in October 2020.

The five-week trial was conducted entirely on Zoom, during which SKV examined 18 live witnesses, presented hundreds of exhibits, and shared several pre-taped depositions. A team of SKV attorneys, paralegals, and legal media experts used the firm’s state-of-the-art

conference room technology to present its client’s case.

“The beauty of this trial was that we had not a single delay,” Rehman said. “Everything was seamless, which doesn’t happen — even in court. [Lead attorney] Lee Kaplan liked that Zoom enabled the judge to focus on witnesses, exhibits, and questioning attorneys with fewer distractions than would normally occur in the courtroom.”

In trial prep and day-to-day client communications, the ability to keep data secure and private, especially in the context of practicing law, has been instrumental to the firm’s adoption of Zoom.

“From an IT perspective, security is my big thing, and I had trust in Zoom from day one. Even when there was negative news, Zoom invested right away and said, ‘We take this seriously’ with its 90-day security plan and encryption,” Rehman said. “As an administrator, I have control. I can route my traffic to any data center I want and restrict certain regions, which is amazing.”

Many firms have learned how effective remote legal proceedings can be, which is why SKV believes they may continue in a post-pandemic world. “Everyone has learned that business can happen without people traveling or being in the same room,” Rehman said. “Virtual trials are more cost-effective and save time, and they also improve efficiency and focus. Our attorneys have said this was one of the most focused trials we’ve had.”

Zoom helps businesses and organizations bring their teams together in a frictionless cloud environment to get more done. Our easy, reliable, video- first unified communications platform for video, voice, content sharing, and chat runs across mobile devices, desktops, telephones, and room systems. Founded in 2011, Zoom is a publicly traded company on Nasdaq (ticker: ZM) and headquartered in San Jose, California.

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