

Drawing conclusions
■ Companies that specialize in illustrating lawyers' arguments are growing. **P4**

Legal graphic artists get the picture

Illustrators shift from slip-and-falls to trademark law

BY DAVE MOORE * STAFF WRITER

Lawsuits are heading away from medical malpractice and toward intellectual property law enforcement and copyright infringement. And, despite setbacks, business is good in the legal community.

If there's any doubt about those assertions, Dallas-based legal graphic artist Marsha Drebelbis would be glad to draw you a picture.

Where, before now, the majority of Drebelbis' time was spent illustrating claims such as faulty medical operations and hit-and-run accidents, she now often uses her eye for photography to identify similarities between original products and copies.

Drebelbis and other legal graphic artists use photography, computer graphics, computer animation, 3-D scale models and timelines to illustrate arguments for attorneys. To illustrate violations of trademark laws, Drebelbis uses digital cameras to photograph similar or identical traits knock-off products have to original brands.

Drebelbis, president of Dallas-based **Litigation Graphics**, whose annual revenue is about \$300,000, said the vastness of the Internet gives intellectual property thieves a false impression of anonymity.

"I think people feel they can hide easier, but the evidence is there," Drebelbis said.

Lawyers have always relied on evidence to illustrate their argu-



Marsha Drebelbis, president of **Litigation Graphics**, has found her work gravitating toward intellectual property

ments. But as computers have become more powerful and software has become more sophisticated, Drebelbis and other legal artists have used those tools to more effectively transport juries to the scenes of alleged injustice or bad judgment.

Going strong

While slip-and-fall suits have decreased, other litigation — and related graphics — have taken their place, said Chris Stewart, co-owner of Dallas-based Trial Arts, one of about 10 firms in the Dallas area that Stewart says concentrate on illustrating arguments in legal disputes.

Stewart, whose firm was launched in 1984, said her business took a hit when the economy dipped after the 9/11 terror attacks and again when caps on medical malpractice and injury suits took hold. Now, she said, trial-related business is back in gear.

"This year has been our best of

the last five years," Stewart said. "Our clients have started spending more money in the last five years; it comes and goes in cycles."

Her caseload ranges from multimillion-dollar divorce cases to disputes between municipalities.

Drebelbis has often found herself at the scene of a mishap or wrongdoing.

She once, for example, climbed into a Bobcat front loader to photograph a stone that caused a malfunction that decapitated the operator. And she used photographs to illustrate how a prostitute slipped a tranquilizer into a man's drink while in sight of a bartender, and where the woman and the man were when the woman stole the man's wallet.

Drebelbis, a former middle school art teacher and sculptor, still travels to especially complicated accident scenes, such as one involving a complex, multi-

ple road intersection outside of an Irving shopping center. However, most of her work is done in her office using computers.

Drebelbis used an Equinox International Corp. executive's own hand drawing of a multi-level marketing scheme to illustrate an argument against the firm, which was permanently banned from doing business in any state by the Federal Trade Commission in 1999.

John Cosenza of Litigation Solutions, which also does courtroom graphics, said his firm's business is increasing because of the necessity to search through company hard drives as part of discovery.

"We're moving toward computer forensics — if a corporation has to get e-mails and go through them, it allows them to find what they're looking for," said Cosenza, director of sales and marketing for the firm.

DAVID PELLERIN