



JAN HILL

Copywriter for Law and Legal Technology

Jan Hill Legal Copywriter: Let Her Words Help Paint Your Picture

The Challenge

For Norman and Elizabeth, it was love at first sight. The historic home in the gold mining town of Lead, South Dakota was big enough to accommodate their growing family, and had the character and charm they were looking for, with ornate crown moldings, wood floors, and stained glass accents in the huge windows.

Sure, the house was a definite fixer upper, but as a traveling contractor, Norman had managed construction projects all over the world. The price was right, and he could work on the house in between jobs. The family settled in the quaint town of Lead, and made some solid friendships with several other families who they met at their church.

When the call came about a job at a condominium development in Hawaii, Norman couldn't turn it down. Construction work during the winter in a town like Lead was slow and practically nonexistent, and with the pay they were offering, he could move his whole family there for the winter and still be money ahead.

The decision was made and the move had to happen almost immediately, so Norman and Elizabeth relied on their good friends to winterize the home. After the work was complete, Elizabeth called the City Water Department to have the water shut off, and her friends followed proper winterizing procedures, draining the water lines and leaving the faucets open. Billie Jo, who took the call at the water department, wrote the shut-off request on a Post-it note and gave it to Bob, the city worker who fulfilled the request and documented it in his work log.

What happened next is not completely clear, but a few weeks later Elizabeth's friend drove over to the house to check on it, as she had several times before. As she made her way up the walk to the front door, she noticed water pouring out onto the steps. A lot of water. More than one million three hundred thousand gallons, according to meter readings taken after the water supply was turned off - again.

According to city records, the water had been turned off at Elizabeth's request, but who had turned the water back on and flooded the home? The logical answer was the city water

department, the only ones with the equipment and access to do so, but Bob insisted he had turned the water OFF, not ON.

The damage to Norman and Elizabeth's house was estimated to be nearly \$100,000. When the City wouldn't take responsibility, Norman and Elizabeth retained an attorney in nearby Rapid City and prepared for a long battle.

The Solution

Jan Hill was the paralegal assigned to assist the attorney on the case. Although the liability seemed clear cut, the City of Lead continued to deny responsibility, and the issue was headed for trial. Jan knew that the damages to Norman and Elizabeth's house were indescribable. They had to be *seen* to be believed, and that is what she aimed to do.

She had some experience with trial presentation software, but had never actually used it in a jury trial before. But this was the perfect opportunity. At her attorney's direction, Jan loaded the software program with numerous digital pictures that illustrated the damage done in the home, along with documents verifying Elizabeth's request to turn off the water, the note written to Bob by Billie Jo, and his notation in his work log stating that he had completed the job.

Using the software's capability, Jan created a timeline of the events and was able to "call out" certain particularly damaging statements right on the screen in front of the jury. Very powerful. To quickly and easily bring up these and other exhibits during the trial, Jan assigned each exhibit a barcode and ordered a barcode scanner to expedite the process. While her attorney told the story of the damage through the testimony of witnesses, Jan would paint a captivating picture of it for the jury.

Knowing that opposing counsel had much more trial experience than she did, Jan rehearsed her presentation for hours in the office. The day before the trial, she traveled to the historic Lawrence County Courthouse in Lead, which was definitely not designed with technology in mind. Electrical outlets were at a premium and she spent hours creating the ideal visual for the jury.

Though there were a few tense moments, Jan's presentation worked like a charm and she was able provide the necessary visuals to bolster her supervising attorney's case against the City of Lead. Opposing counsel had use of the same technology, but provided no photos (for obvious reasons) and their lack of preparation was apparent when more than once, their paralegal was forced to dig through stacks of paper in a banker's box behind the defense counsel's table when she wasn't able to simply project a piece of evidence on the screen.

Jan's presentation helped win the jury over, and as they filed out for deliberations, she told her attorney that she felt good about their case.

The Result

The jury came back with a verdict of nearly \$118,000: large enough to allow Norman and Elizabeth to restore their house to its former grandeur. The judge congratulated Jan and her supervising attorney on their fine work, and wished Norman and Elizabeth well in the reconstruction of their home.

Jan Hill is the right copywriter for you because she understands what legal technology can do. She's been in the trenches, holding her breath when the screen suddenly goes black, and knows what to do to bring it back to life. She has experienced firsthand how this amazing technology can transform an otherwise uninteresting document into a powerful piece of evidence to sway a jury in a way that a flipchart and a marker cannot.

Love it or not, we're a visual society, and to prepare cases and win trials today, lawyers have got to be visual too. Let Jan's legal copywriting skills and knowledge of trial presentation and courtroom technology paint a profitable picture for your organization and your customers.

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