

NEWSDAY

April 6, 2008

By Patricia Kitchen

Law Firm Silences all the Buzz

Yes, attorneys and staff at Meltzer, Lippe, Goldstein & Breitstone Llp in Mineola are expected to hop to it and return client e-mail and phone calls as soon as possible.

But for the past six months the law firm has called for a cell- and BlackBerry-free zone for major meetings to discuss issues, such as key law changes, that might affect clients or significant internal developments.

The "no-device policy" came about, says partner Ira R. Halperin, as the steady buzzes and vibrations signaling a new call or e-mail were increasingly interfering with meeting-goers' focus.

And you're not fooling anyone by trying to unobtrusively thumb out a response as you hold your BlackBerry under the table, says Halperin, co-head of the corporate law group, who admits to having been quite an offender himself. (We won't even get into what his wife says about his scrolling through vacation e-mail while sitting on the beach.)

"We like everyone to be connected to clients and to be very responsive to their needs," he says - but not at the expense of giving full attention to a major issue.

So just how bad had things gotten? "More than what you would want to know," Halperin says.

When it comes to most meetings - those that are a little more routine - partners and staff are welcome to bring devices, though new guidelines have also been established. If it's necessary for someone to respond to an essential call or e-mail, they're called on to step out into the hall to do it.

Says Halperin, "It's more of a courtesy thing."