

Preparing for ABA TECHSHOW

By Jim Calloway

As most readers will know, I am a big fan of the ABA TECHSHOW. This year it will be held March 29 – 30 at the Chicago Hilton. I first attended the event in the spring of 1999. The conference is unique in that there are so many sessions and so many speakers it becomes an annual gathering of legal technologists in a way that no other event is.

OBA members can get a registration discount by using promo code EP1218 (ABA Law Practice Management Section members would be better served to register under their own promo code). The early bird registration deadline is Feb. 17. Visit www2.americanbar.org/calendar/TECHSHOW to register.

I'm writing this message to encourage OBA members to attend ABA TECHSHOW. Several have attended in the past, and it would be great to see you there. As you also know I chaired the event in 2005. This year my presentations are really significant in terms of the future of law practice. I'm looking forward to both of these. Right now, I am cramming just like law students before finals as my TECHSHOW papers are due soon.

My first presentation is with Diane Ebersole, who is a practice management advisor for the Michigan Bar Association. Our topic is "Magic in Minutes: Effective Use of Document



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Assembly.” While I considered myself to be informed on this topic before accepting this speaking assignment, it has necessitated a great deal of homework. There are many methods to automate document production from the slight to the complete automation model. I have been spending a lot of time reading and getting demonstrations from vendors about their various products.

This is probably one of the issues that I have identified as the most critical for the future of law practices. We have all seen the example of book

stores closing because of online competition. The watch word of the future of business now is increasing efficiency and greater incorporation of money-saving technology.

Document assembly is one of those areas where lawyers can spend an investment that will yield rewards in the future.

After ABA TECHSHOW, I will be using this space to discuss document assembly techniques in greater detail and why they are so important.

Another topic that goes hand in hand with the document assembly is alternative billing strategies.

It does not really make sense to invest significant amounts of time and money to automate processes if the only result for the business is that the income is decreased. With appropriate business models, document assembly can result in the win/win situation that we always hear discussed. Lawyers can automate their document processes and institute transparent methods of billing per document rather than just time invested. The net result can be that lawyers enjoy a practice that involves less of their time investment for document production while the clients

receive high quality documents for a lesser fee than under the old hourly system as well.

My other presentation at ABA TECHSHOW will be a plenary presentation on Saturday morning. Plenary sessions are not typically presented on Saturday morning, and it is quite an honor and a responsibility for me to be given this task. One of the reasons why TECHSHOW has decided to do this program is that my topic is "The Future of Law Practice: Dark Clouds or Silver Linings?" Hopefully this will allow some time for reflection on how all the tools that the attendees have been learning about for two previous days can be incorporated into a rational business plan. Lawyers deal with information almost exclusively in their practices. It should be clear to everyone now that for the vast majority of lawyers, their information technology tools are critical functions. When computers first came to the law office, they were mainly used as glorified word processors and calculators for billing entries. Now there are so many more

ways to use computers and so many mobile devices that lawyers can use as well.

There are certainly challenges ahead for our profession. The employment of young lawyers the last several years has been a significant issue. There are lots of recent law graduates who are either unemployed or underemployed and wondering how they are going to repay their student loans. In addition, there are many competitive challenges and many substantive law challenges as we all learn to deal with the impact of technology. Just take something like Facebook, to give a familiar example. A regular user of Facebook over the years is compiling an on-line diary of their activities. In certain types of litigation, this will be discoverable. Today one might ask you what you were doing on a particular day five years ago and likely you would have absolutely no clue, with the only hope of a responsive answer being by combing old calendars or other business personal records. The Facebook generation, however, will have a day-by-day or week-by-week

series of entries outlining exactly what happens. It may become routine to subpoena social networking postings. We will see in the future how much this becomes a routine part of litigation.

ABA TECHSHOW really is the most important meeting of legal technologists each year in my opinion. I'll get a chance to visit with lots of movers and shakers and people who are visionaries. It would certainly be a great year for you to decide to attend your first ABA TECHSHOW. Whether you decide to do so or not in the second half of 2012, expect to hear a lot more about document assembly and other cutting-edge technology tools as they appear to be more important to understand now than ever.

Jim Calloway is director of the OBA Management Assistance Program. Need a quick answer to a tech problem or help resolving a management dilemma? Contact Mr. Calloway at 405-416-7008, 800-522-8065 or jimc@okbar.org. It's a free member benefit!