

The ABA TECHSHOW® Survival Guide

By Sharon D. Nelson and John W. Simek
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ABA TECHSHOW, long recognized as the nation's preeminent legal technology show, can be a tad intimidating. There you are in Chicago, perhaps not knowing a soul at the conference or in the city, and overwhelmed by all the choices you must make to effectively use your three days. Fear not – what follows will help you spend your time wisely, learn as much about legal technology that you possibly can, and make some friends along the way.

First, let's talk about some highlights of the TECHSHOW experience. Every year, the conference morphs a little, in response to new technology and attendee requests. For the third year in a row, we will have a wireless cloud available on the conference floor, this time provided courtesy of Intel. For the first time, TECHSHOW registration will entitle all attendees to a 256MB thumb drive – now there's an exciting giveaway that everyone can use! Also for the first time, TECHSHOW will offer a series of roundtables – a great opportunity for informal one-on-one exchanges with TECHSHOW speakers and other interested attendees on such topics as Electronic Discovery in Everyday Cases, Meet the Bloggers and Roll Out Your Own Blog, Small Firm Networking, Adobe Acrobat and the Paperless Office, RSS and News Aggregators, and many more. Last year's Technology Training Institute (TTI) was such a success that it will be repeated this year. At TTI, you can attend training sessions taught by both vendors and speaker/experts focusing on specific software and how to use it effectively. Bring your laptops!

The Keynote speech is always a special event at TECHSHOW and this year we are fortunate to have Robert Grey, President of the American Bar Association, as our speaker. Following the keynote address, we will all adjourn to the Exhibition Hall to enjoy complimentary cocktails and refreshments.

The point of TECHSHOW, of course, is to learn. We have loads of content suited to people of all technology skill levels, beginner, intermediate and advanced. So how do you plan to use your time most effectively when there are over 70 CLE sessions to choose from, and dozens of networking and social activities?

Like most TECHSHOW speakers, we were attendees before we were speakers, so we remember how we planned our time when we first began coming to Chicago. The first thing we would do is take a yellow highlighter and highlight those sessions and activities that interested us. Inevitably, there would be times when we had highlighted multiple sessions in the same time slot. The second time around, now that we had an overview of the entire conference, we would make a decision about the time slot and circle the session we had finally determined to attend. If you are still conflicted, purchase the audiotape of the session you elect not to attend. All sessions are taped and available at a reasonable price. Better yet, come back next year to catch the things you missed.

If you haven't been to TECHSHOW before, you'll get the hang of the conference quickly. It is no accident that there is so much going on simultaneously. TECHSHOW is designed to give a lot of choices to a broad range of attendees – government lawyers; IT support personnel; large, medium, small firm and solo lawyers and staff, judges and consultants. Like a Chinese buffet, there is something for everyone, and everyone goes home sated.

TECHSHOW has established a reputation for the quality of its speakers that is second to none. Our speakers are recognized experts in their fields, and they openly and freely share their knowledge with attendees. We do not tolerate selling from the podium. You will get unbiased and independent information that will help you determine which legal technology products and services are best for you. You will also notice that TECHSHOW speakers are also attendees at many sessions they are not speaking at. All of us try to see one another's sessions, both because of their outstanding quality and because we, like you, are still learning all the time. TECHSHOW speakers are a friendly bunch – they all wear "Speaker" ribbons and are delighted to stop and have a chat. Don't hesitate to talk to them because speaker accessibility is one of the most cherished hallmarks of TECHSHOW.

Every year, TECHSHOW assembles an outstanding group of more than 120 legal technology vendors in the Exhibit Hall. The schedule is structured to give attendees time to roam the hall at length. The vendors are uniformly happy to talk to you at length and answer all your questions about their products and services. With the knowledge you have gained from the CLE sessions, this is a wonderful way to explore in a more informed way all the legal support products and services that are available, and to have the opportunity to explore them hands-on. The vendors are always generous with goodies and giveaways and everyone goes home with a substantial "loot bag."

Also in the Exhibit Hall is a CyberCafe, where you can check your e-mail quickly or just see how well (or poorly) your portfolio is doing. This year, we are bringing in some comfortable furniture too, so you can sit leisurely enjoying conversation with your colleagues and enjoying coffee, sodas and snacks during the mid-morning and mid-afternoon breaks. A welcome reception is always held in the Exhibit Hall Thursday night with complementary drinks and hors d'oeuvres. Friday night will see the raffle giveaways, always a popular component of TECHSHOW.

You will also find the ABA's Law Practice Management booth in the Exhibit Hall. There you can spend some of the "Book Bucks" you will have found in your registration bag upon check-in. Be sure you go through all the papers in that bag – you will find invitations to dinners, receptions, free educational sessions and all manner of other wonderful things as well.

So what do you do if you don't know anyone? First, this is a very friendly crowd. There are plenty of social settings in which it is easy to strike up a conversation with your fellow attendees. If you are at loose ends for dinner Thursday and Friday night,

TECHSHOW always organizes “dinner bashes” led by speakers – signup sheets are posted outside the Exhibit Hall. Everyone goes dutch to a modestly priced nearby restaurant. It is a great way to get to talk to the speakers and make friends over good food and a low key informal setting. Newfound friends, after dinner, often wander back to the Sheraton to enjoy a post-prandial drink in the piano lounge. If you are coming in on Wednesday night, you might consider dining in Shulas, the Sheraton’s famous steak house. This is an annual tradition for the authors, who highly recommend the lump crab appetizer with mustard sauce and the generously proportioned and precisely cooked glorious rib eye steak. Yum. TECHSHOW registration includes continental breakfast and lunch on Thursday and Friday, which will help keep your budget in check, but if you’re still around on Saturday, you might check out the world famous hot dogs at Portillo’s, an expedition the authors make every year, with a growing collection of speakers who have become devotees. It’s a Chicago landmark, and since it’s a fair walk, you’ll have the chance to exercise off some of what you eat!

After three days of TECHSHOW, you will go home utterly exhausted, especially if you have tried to take advantage of all this wonderful conference has to offer. But you will also go home a heck of a lot smarter about many facets of legal technology, and hopefully will have had some terrific meals, networked with old friends, and made some new ones. The last TECHSHOW business for us, and we hope for you, is to go home and mark your calendars with the dates of TECHSHOW 2006 so you won’t miss next year’s conference. We can safely say, if you come to TECHSHOW once, you will undoubtedly come again - this is the case for the majority of our attendees. See you in Chicago!

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Information and registration: www.techshow.com