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Home > Internet & Media Law > The Irony of Technology: Takeaways From #ABATECHSHOW 2012

The Irony of Technology: Takeaways From #ABATECHSHOW 2012

By Joe Bahgat on March 31, 2012

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I'm writing this from my Chicago hotel room after just getting back from the final session at ABA TechShow@ 2012, where I spent the past three days learning about, seeing, and trying the latest and greatest technology tools for practicing law. Ironically, despite the myriad gadgets and tech toys from literally all over the world, the best part of TechShow was the *people*. So many of us obsess over having the hippest gear, or the latest-generation iToy—we even justify the expense of it as an investment—and in doing so it's easy to lose sight of how important it is to invest in good-old-fashioned, personal relationships.

These past few days I've had the chance to talk one-on-one with folks whose books and blogs I read, whose apps I use, and with whom I tweet and email back-and-forth regularly, yet never met in person. For example, I spent time talking with Ben Schorr (@bschorr), who literally wrote the book on mastering the Microsoft Office suite in the practice of law. I talked with famed bloggers like Kevin O'Keefe (@kevinokeefe), Carolyn Elefant (@carolynelefant), and Tim Baran (@Tim_Baran). I also hung out with Mac gurus like Victor Medina (@victormedina), Ben Stevens (@themaclawyer), Ernie Svenson (@ernieattorney), and Randy Juip (@rajuip), iPad guru Tom Mighell (@TomMighell), and the original Mac Power User David Sparks a/k/a Mac Sparky. Dave also wrote the books *Mac at Work* and *iPad at Work*, which are like the Physician's Desk References to attorneys using Macs (I'd call them bibles but for fear of reprisal, especially right before Easter).

On the eve of TechShow, Matt Homann (@matthomann) of LexThink hosted a phenomenal forum in which each speaker had just 6 minutes to deliver their message about technology and the practice of law. There, I met Mark Britton (@mark_britton), CEO of Avvo.com, and Jay Shepherd (@jayshep), two incredibly dynamic speakers, both of whom are using their legal training to do great things outside the traditional practice of law. Despite how great Mark and Jay were, my personal favorite was Will Hornsby (@willhornsby), but I think that was because he mocked one of the silliest ethics rules still in effect, in New Jersey of all places.

Throughout the conference I was also speaking to guys like Brett Owens, founder and creator of Chrometa (@Chrometa), Deskspace Attorney's Nick Lightbody (@nicklightbody), and Ian O'Flaherty of Lit Software (@litsoftwareapps). Ian is the developer of one of my favorite legal tools in my arsenal—Trial Pad for iPad. I'm also anxious to try out his latest app—Transcript Pad. It's fascinating to interact with the people who actually create some of the tools I use, and to hear about how complicated it is to bring something like that to the marketplace. (Disclosure: I received a free copy of Trial Pad for purposes of writing a review.)

Although I'd met Ian before, it was great to reconnect with him, just like it was great to hang out with old friends like Andrea Cannavina a/k/a the Legal Typist, Brett Burney (@macsinlaw), Marc Matheny (@Indysoloesq), and Jack Newton (@jack_newton) and Gwynne Monahan (@econwriter5) from Clio. On Thursday night, the Clio crew threw a red-carpet bash at Chicago's Sushi Samba Rio, which was a virtual who's who in legal technology. (Disclosure: My firm uses Legal Typist's services, and I am a regular contributor to the Legal Connection eZine publication; my firm also uses Clio for practice management. I did not receive any benefit for writing this.)






So it's easy to say that I learned a lot about tech at TechShow, but thanks to these relationships, my takeaway from TechShow is so much more (human) than that. I wholly embrace technology in my life, both personal and professional. I believe that technology makes our lives richer—by increasing our efficiency, creating access to information, and enabling us to share things with friends and family we don't see often—but technology is not a substitute for human contact. Texting, tweeting, and Facebook-ing are all fantastic communication tools, but they can't replace handshakes, hugs, or sharing a beer.



ABOUT JOE

Before I became an attorney, I played the saxophone for a living. Over the years, I played with the likes of Grammy-award winners Ray Charles, The Four Tops, and Tom Harrell. I lived in Brooklyn, Manhattan, eventually New Jersey, and oftentimes out of a suitcase. I made the decision to go back to law school, because I felt like I had an incredibly unique perspective to offer to my clients.

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