

Tips for First Time Attendees

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Former ABA TECHSHOW Chair, Sharon Nelson, and former ABA TECHSHOW Planning Board Member, John Simek give first time attendees the lay of the land and some tips for attending ABA TECHSHOW, March 25-27, 2010!

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Welcome First-time Attendees!

ABA TECHSHOW® has long been recognized as the nation's preeminent legal technology CLE conference, but it can be a tad intimidating for first time attendees. Just like the government, "We're here to help you." We'll try to impart some information to help you with your decision to attend and how to make the most of the experience.

ABA TECHSHOW is a wonderfully busy experience, but there are so many tracks and CLE sessions to attend that sometimes it's difficult to make up your mind about what to see or how to begin.

Some first-time attendees report feeling a bit lonely not knowing a soul at this overwhelming Chicago event. Read on and learn how we can make sure you leave Chicago with new friends.

Preparing For ABA TECHSHOW

How can you make the most effective use of your time if you decided to take the plunge and register in time to take advantage of the Early Bird and Event Promoter discounts to substantially reduce the cost of attendance? Don't worry – we'll give you some advice on how to spend your time wisely, learn as much about legal technology as you possibly can, and make some wonderful friends while you're at it.

If this will be your first time at ABA TECHSHOW, there are just so many things to do. The ABA TECHSHOW Planning Board starts planning for each year's show the day after the last one ends. Each year, ABA TECHSHOW morphs a little, as a result of attendee feedback and newly developed technologies that are fed into the planning process.

Tracks and sessions are finalized by the Board during the summer and early fall, and you will be able to see the grid at www.techshow.com/schedule. Speaker selections are made in the late fall, and are available at www.techshow.com/faculty.

The point of ABA TECHSHOW is, of course, to learn, and the CLE content is as wide as it is deep. Although the planning for ABA TECHSHOW 2010 is ongoing as this is being written, we can say with confidence that the show will include the ever-popular E-Discovery, Solo/Small Firm and Paperless Practice tracks, and new additions from last year, such as SmartPhones and the Mobility Track will be back by popular demand.

We strive to feature content suited for all technology skill levels (beginner, intermediate and advanced) and for lawyers in both transactional and trial practices, so there will be plenty of sessions to interest you, regardless of your level of technical sophistication or the current level of automation in your practice.

How to Navigate the Program Schedule to Optimize Your Experience

How do you begin to plan your days when there are over 50 CLE sessions from which to choose? To make it even more challenging, there are dozens of social and networking events to fit in too.

Even though we are now ABA TECHSHOW speakers, we still attend sessions of our colleagues and we started out as first-time attendees, so we remember how we approached the massive task of dividing our time. Attacking the ABA TECHSHOW grid requires a multi-step approach.

First, we take a highlighter and identify every session and activity that interests us. This, invariably, leads to looking at each other and noting ruefully, "Houston, we have a problem." Of course there are always multiple highlighted sessions in the same timeslot.

The second step is to pick one of the highlighted sessions for a particular time period and circle it. Finally, we mark the sessions that we can't attend and make a special note to review the CLE materials flash drive that all ABA TECHSHOW attendees receive. Perhaps a similar session will be on the grid for next year; hence we might get another shot at attending. After all, we knew as soon as the first ABA TECHSHOW was over that we were hooked and that we'd be back.

It doesn't take long to get a feel for ABA TECHSHOW, even if you're a first-time attendee. It is no accident that there is so much going on simultaneously. ABA 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. The problem is not picking what to attend...it's picking what not to attend.

Don't Miss the Experts!

ABA 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 freely and willingly share their knowledge with attendees. Selling from the podium is not tolerated, so you know you will get unbiased and independent information that will help you determine which legal technology products and services are best for you.

ABA TECHSHOW speakers are a friendly bunch – they all wear "Speaker" ribbons so you can spot them easily and they are delighted to stop and have a chat. Don't hesitate to look them up at the TECHSHOW Conference Concierge desk because speaker accessibility is one of the most cherished hallmarks of ABA TECHSHOW.

ABA TECHSHOW EXPO Offers Hands-On Experience

Another major highlight of ABA TECHSHOW is the EXPO, which features an annual assembly of more than 100 legal technology vendors. The show schedule is intentionally structured to give attendees free time to roam the exhibit hall, visiting the various vendors and collecting the tech goodies many of them give away. The vendors are uniformly happy to talk to you at length and answer all your questions about their products and services, and they will even give you a demonstration. With the knowledge you have gained from the CLE sessions, this is a wonderful opportunity to explore in a more informal way all the legal support products and services that are available, hands-on and in person.

Appreciate the Great Venue

Last year, ABA TECHSHOW was hosted at the elegant Hilton Chicago hotel, and it will be held there again this year! In contrast to prior years, the EXPO and many of the educational sessions are on the same floor! No more riding the escalators constantly to cover multiple floors. WiFi will be available again, so make sure you bring your laptop or other wireless device.

The welcome cocktail reception will be on Thursday evening outside the Grand Ballroom. The Versailles-inspired Grand Ballroom has hosted kings and queens, not to mention every United States President since Truman. It's a wonderfully elegant setting and the perfect place to kickoff ABA TECHSHOW.

ABA Law Practice Management Section is Your Host for ABA TECHSHOW

You will also find the ABA Law Practice Management Section booth in the EXPO Hall. There you can spend some of the "Book Bucks" you'll receive as a part of your registration package upon conference check-in. What a great way to get some excellent books at super prices! Be sure you go through all the papers in your registration bag carefully – you will find invitations to dinners and receptions, free educational sessions put on by participating vendors and all manner of other wonderful, useful things as well.

Take Advantage of Networking Opportunities

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, including the Thursday night reception. If you are at loose ends for dinner Friday night, you can always sign up for one of the "Taste of ABA TECHSHOW" dinners. These topical dinners are "Dutch treat" and are intended to cover specific subjects. These small groups (8-10) will be hosted by various ABA TECHSHOW speakers and other legal technology experts. The "Taste of ABA TECHSHOW" dinners were a wonderful success the last two years and will back by popular demand of the attendees for 2010.

Ask Questions!

Also back by popular request is the successful Conference Concierge booth, which will again be located by the main registration area. It will once again be staffed by speakers, ABA TECHSHOW Planning Board members, past ABA TECHSHOW Chairs and others familiar with the sessions and technology topics of ABA TECHSHOW.

Looking for recommendations on sessions to attend? The concierge booth is the place to go. Need help with your technology or have a question about something from a session you just attended? The TECHSHOW Conference Concierge is your "one stop" for all your ABA TECHSHOW questions. Experts will also be available to assist with any technology questions. Think of it as a "help desk" for ABA TECHSHOW. The concierge booth is also the place where you sign up for the "Taste of TECHSHOW" dinners.

Be forewarned that ABA TECHSHOW will wear you out with so much to do over three days that the time will fly by. You will be utterly exhausted from attending the CLE and Lunch 'n Learn sessions, EXPO, and social events. Though you'll be tired, you will go home a lot wiser about legal technology and how it can help increase productivity and profitability in your practice. Hopefully, you will also meet new friends and be able to spend some time with old ones too.

See You Next Year!

The final task as a first-time attendee of ABA TECHSHOW 2010 will be to mark your calendars with the dates for ABA TECHSHOW 2011 (April 11-13, 2011), which will be here before you know it. We can safely say, if you come to ABA TECHSHOW once, you will almost certainly come back again! This is the case for the majority of our attendees, and we're confident you'll feel the same way, too. See you in Chicago, and be sure to say hi!