



Adventures in LegalTech Land: Technology Overwhelm

February 9, 2011

At 11:45 am on Wed, the last day of [LegalTech NY 2011](#), I had an appointment with the editor of a legal technology publication. Both of us had been at the show all three days, although I admit on this particular day I was really only half there. The rest of me was back in bed, sleeping soundly and resting an overstimulated mind. The editor looked pretty much like I felt.

We exchanged pleasantries (which were fortunately quite pleasant) and then got on to the business at hand: what have you seen at the show that captured your attention?

He asked first, and my mind went blank. I so needed to act like I remembered something, anything to just get my scrambled brain defragmented. Finally a particular vendor came to mind primarily because they had wined & dined me the night before. And bingo, I scored big brownie points: it was one of the vendors the editor wanted to review. The conversation continued on as more vendors came to mind, but it was a struggle – for both of us.

Apparently we were not alone. In [Fear and Loathing in LegalTech](#), Gabe Acevedo says:

Daniel de Juan, a sales engineer from [Mitratch](#), summed up perfectly what [LegalTech](#) was like for me this year: “Being at LegalTech is almost like being at a casino, in the sense that you lose all track of time.”

Two years ago, I found the conference to be pretty intimidating, and that was when the conference was much smaller due to the weak economy. Last year, LegalTech New York was much bigger, and I found it slightly overwhelming. This year, due to some bad planning on my part, I came home from LegalTech utterly exhausted.

It seems I [wasn't the only one](#) who felt this way. After a quick search on the Internet, I have seen only a few things written up about the conference, so I'm guessing many people went through the same experience. (For example, I spoke with members of [The Posse List](#) on the first night, and they told me that they were gearing up to do 36 interviews during the two and a half day conference — so it must have been a whirlwind for them as well.)

Since then, I have been thinking long and hard about the effect of this onslaught of technology on us as human beings, and on practicing lawyers, who are already overloaded with information on changing substantive law, procedure and ethics. Yes, technology has produced fantastic tools that enable us to streamline our practices, produce documents at a speed just under light, from undisclosed locations. It has simultaneously created a global component to our jurisdictional practices and addressed the challenges raised by it. Simply said, it has enabled our profession to keep pace with the evolving tech-based business world so we can meet our clients where they are doing business: some IT space, cloud or otherwise.

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But there is a price to pay, primarily with our brains, and it was visibly present at the LegalTech show. The Exhibit Hall Floor was crowded; no, it was packed with vendors, some stuffed in tiny, almost undiscoverable locations. The hall buzzed with visual and auditory cacophony, combined with simultaneous cellphone conversations and the frenzied need to get to every vendor in what was really a short period of time. In this electronic atmosphere, concentration on a product demo with the ability to retain new information took a lot of energy and more than the usual dose of tylenol.

All whining aside, there were some awesome new products on the floor with visible advancement of the power to assist lawyers in managing the explosion of electronic data and streamline legal processes that is essential. But the job of understanding your needs in light of what technology has to offer becomes ever more complex as products become more functional.

Although the show was dominated with eDiscovery themes, there was also an emerging trend toward development of applications solely for the iPad. The word is that trend will continue, with no thought toward developing applications for other tablet devices. One in particular, [TrialPad](#) (to be reviewed) was so functional it actually made trial work look like fun.

Two other gems stood out in the crowded marketplace: [MyCase](#), dubbed the “social practice management” product based on its social media and client communication integration (I’ll be writing a full review for [LJN’s Legal Tech Newsletter](#) next month), and [Onit](#) (to be reviewed), a legal project and spend management application designed for simplification.

As our world catapults into an age of technology that is morphing into some sort of weird futuristic existence, the legal profession is not exempt from the ride. On one hand, it’s scary to be able to download your airline boarding pass onto your smartphone that can be directly scanned at the airport. On the other hand, it is awesome to have one less (very important) piece of paper to lose in the airport shuffle. Likewise, the ability to circumvent a panicked search for a lost report in front of an impatient judge and befuddled jury can save your day, and maybe even your case.

How to take advantage of what technology has to offer and remain human? I haven’t solved that mystery yet. I’ll keep considering it, though, and let you know if I come up with anything useful.