Fantasy Land, Windy City and Other Exciting Developments You Won't be Learning About, Plus Security

Would you like to learn about various case management systems, time and billing systems, internet marketing, web sites for law firms, mobile computing, computer access to court records, and other technological advances that might make the practice of law easier, cheaper and more fun? Would you like to hear about the ABA Techshow and its hundreds of useful tips, recommendations and exhibitors, many of which you have never heard about? Well, get a grip, gentle readers, as it is not going to happen to you this year. The Memphis Bar Association has determined that no representative needs to attend the ABA Techshow in Chicago later this month, where all these topics (and more) are to be explored and discussed.

In a spirit of sacrifice (which had nothing to do with his desire to wander through acres of electronic exhibits at someone elses'expense), yours truly had volunteered at the last second to go on behalf of the association. And although MBA (call me "Student Council President") hero Bill Haltom pushed hard for the Summers' Travel Initiative, it was not to be. In a vote that was overwhelmingly in favor of saving the members' hard earned dues (and which blew my night at the Sheraton), this critical, important and valuable (my words) fact finding junket was voted down. Sigh. Now I have to make do with a CD full of handout material instead of a live lecture. And, I won't be returning home with a goodies bag filled with useless trinkets, which solves the obligatory "what did you bring me, Daddy" question, and which provides the family with note pads and post its for the next 5 years. And you, fair readers, will not get to read about the wanderings of a jaded, but wide eyed, Memphis lawyer through the ultimate fantasy land for technoweenies, which of course was the main reason for my volunteering to go in the first place. Don't let your tears ruin your magazine. . . .

OK, Elvis has left the building. Time to move on. In other news, it has been pointed out that I have been unfairly picking on Robert Green for his technological prowess (much improved though it is), when there are others who deserve equally whatever public humiliation can be dished out for their refusal to embrace technology in the practice of law. And even though I'm sure that Robert realizes that my gentle prodding is all in fun, and has nothing to do with his stubborn behavior regarding technology for the last 20 years, and even though I am still unhappy with some of his votes at recent partner meetings and believe that he deserves additional grief, I have decided to relent and pick on somebody else. And in so doing, I have decided to institute the RLG Technophobe's Technophobe Award. The first recipient, based upon a phone call I had on Friday, is Jim Lockhard. Lockhard still does not have email, nor voice mail, and thinks the internet is something you fish with in the inland waterway. I'm told he still makes his staff hand letter his documents on a Gutenburg press, but has considered moving up to mimeograph. Compared to Lockhard, Green is a Bill Gates. (There now, Robert, feel better?) Please forward your nominations for this award, along with humiliating anecdotes, to me at jsummers@neelygreen.com. If you send it by snail mail or fax, you are probably setting yourself up for the award, so pretend you are technologically savvy – even if you have to have your secretary do it.

Internet Security

Many firms and individuals have adopted broad band technology to access the internet, and have installed cable modems, DSL connections or ISDN, all of which allow a computer to remain constantly connected to the internet. However, as recent events have shown -- several high profile web sites have been hacked into -- a permanent connection to the internet may be an open invitation to a hacker if certain precautions are not taken. I have just tested my computer at home for security, and have learned that every file on my network is capable of being accessed by any hacker who might be interested. It seems that Windows 95/98 has a built in default setting that allows files and printers to be shared, which of course is what you want if you network your computers. Unfortunately, the "sharing" switches, if engaged, also allow your computer to share its files with anyone on the net who has the knowhow and desire to come looking. Not a good thing if you have confidential information in place. I have learned, however, that this security breach can easily be closed simply by disengaging the switches, so if you are running a permanent internet connection on a Windows95/98 machine, you might want to close this breach.

Want a cheap thrill? Go to www.grc.com and run the security test. If your system is like mine, this will scare the living daylights out of you. The test program played back my name, and a lot of other information about me and my files, along with an explanation as to how anyone on the internet had the ability to obtain the same information. To close this entrance into your computer, go to Start, then Settings, then Control Panel and then Network. After double clicking on Network, click on the "file and print sharing" button and uncheck the two boxes in the window. Then close and reboot the system. Then return to www.grc.com, to retest, and you will find that your system is now invisible, which is what you want.

If you are protecting a small network, then making the described changes will screw up your computer's ability to share printers and files, although the literature says otherwise. I can say this with some confidence as I have just spent the better part of my weekend trying to get my network printer back after having made the ultimate sacrifice for the members of the bar – I tried out on my machine what I recommended for you to try on yours -- I unchecked the designated "sharing" boxes and promptly lost the ability to print to my network printer, which was attached to my desktop in the kitchen. This was a serious crisis as the NCAA was on, I was trying to find a swordfish recipe on the internet, and I did not want to leave the comfort of my den couch to go to the kitchen computer in order to be able to print it.

As the state of my memory is such that I have none, the ability to print whatever I find is critical. It's the only evidence I have that I actually read something. And for obvious reasons, you don't want to drag a printer from room to room, just to be able to print. (For those of you who are real slow, the obvious reason is that I am efficient, or lazy, depending upon who you ask). Digressing somewhat, for those of you who like to cook, go to www.epicurious.com for roughly 10,000 Bon Appetit and Gourmet recipes that can be searched by topic, food, etc.

Meanwhile, back to the crisis. When I tried to recheck the "sharing" boxes and recover my printer, the system just grinned, said OK, and then refused to allow me access to my printer. After approximately one million checks, rechecks, software reloads, reboots, a bottle of Merlot and countless trips around the internet looking for fixes, I broke down and called my chief

technoweenie. He, naturally, fixed it in 5 minutes, and then explained for the hundreth time why we should leave this stuff to experts, and why I should try and hang on to my day job. . . .He still thinks its funny that I write a technology column. Or sad.

He agrees, however, that any computer attached to the internet via cable, DSL or ISDN, is vulnerable if the "sharing" boxes remain checked, as the shared resources provide access to the system from the internet. He points out, however, that most cable services change the IP addresses assigned to subsribers regularly, and that in reality, the open connection is not likely to pose a security problem to most systems at home, as most hackers are not concerned with little Johnnie's saved Doom games. Other commentators have noted that even when the sharing is disabled on a home computer, the computer is still visible because the media access card has a permanent serial number that can be used to identify your machine, if anyone cared to do so.

If you are concerned that the "switch fix" is insufficient, go to www.zonelabs.com and download the free firewall software. Or if you feel better paying for your security, check out Symantec's Norton Internet Security 2000, at www.symantec.com. Another excellent product is Winproxy, which is found at www.ositis.com. Both of these companies offer security firewalls for small to enterprise size systems. Keep in mind that the problem I just described -- the loss of a network printer and the ability of a desktop to share files -- is not a problem if you don't share files or have a network printer, so disengaging the switches makes sense under most circumstances. Confused? Good, I'm doing my job.

Internet Fax Software

Our firm has recently tested Faxmaker software, a nifty program that melds with Outlook and allows the user to fax from a desktop. That in itself is no big deal, but the verification method is. Any document that can be printed can be faxed, but when the fax is successfully delivered, the program sends an email message to the sender, documenting the delivery, or failure as the case may be. The program also allows you to email and fax simultaneously the same document to a group with varying abilities, which is great when some of your recipients don't have email, but have fax machines. (This feature is why practicing law with Lockhard is still feasible -- he actually owns a fax machine, although he does not know how to run it). The program pulls from the Contacts list in Outlook, so one database serves multiple functions. It can be downloaded for free from www.gfifax.com, and gives 5 Outlook users the ability to fax. If you want to expand beyond 5 users, the cost varies from $395 for 10 users on up. While you are at the GFI web site, look at the Languard software and accompanying text, which provides an overview of internet security problems, most of which are internal. More about that later.

Technoweenie Q&A

Q. Why would anyone be dumb enough to spend an hour on the internet looking for recipes when there are roughly 50 cookbooks within 15 feet of your couch, with indexes, so that a swordfish recipe can be found in 5 minutes?

R. Principle. Technical kinds of guys must be able to brag that they pulled a recipe off the internet after a blazingly fast search, geared to the specific food, even if it takes 10 times as long to find it.

Q. Why would anyone be dumb enough to blow a weekend evening, ruining dinner and upsetting the entire family, while trying to fix a problem that a) would not have happened if you had not tried to fix something that was not broken; and b) that your friend could have fixed in 5 minutes if you had simply taken the time to have called him instead of assuming you could fix it yourself in no time?

A. More Principle. Technical kinds of guys don't ask directions when lost and don't call technoweenies until confidence turns to utter desolation and hopelessness, usually after about 5 hours.