ABA TECHSHOW® and the Paperless Office
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I attended the American Bar Association TECHSHOW® Conference (The World's Premier Legal Technology Conference & EXPO- http://www.abanet.org/techshow/ ) in Chicago for two and a half days, April 20-22, 2006.  Over 1,200 attended and it was amazing to see that many "techie" lawyers in one place at the same time.  Groups of lawyers were walking around together "beaming" data back and forth from their Treo 650s.  Attorneys were pounding on their notebook computers in the restaurant, at the bar and in the lobby as they accessed the free broadband wireless network in the Sheraton Hotel by Lake Michigan.  I was sure Mr. Spock and Scotty were somewhere in the building and I think  I saw a Klingon by the pool.

The conference was organized around seven areas, Applications, E-Discovery, Solo/Small Firm, Digital Dollars, E-Lawyering, Roundtables and Vendor Track.  Fifty sessions were available, but time permitted you to only attend ten. So,  the most difficult task was picking the ten.  Of the ten I picked,  nine were absolutely worth it.  Three of the sessions focused, at least in part, on Thomas Friedman's book, *The World is Flat* and how computers and the internet are enabling anyone with computer skills to compete with anyone in the WORLD in almost any endeavor, including legal practice.

The most useful sessions related to law office management; "60 Finance Tips in 60 Minutes", "60 Firm and Practice Management Tips in 60 Minutes", "60 Marketing Tips in 60 Minutes" etc.

After the conference, I decided to move my office in a "paperless" direction, to save trees, to  reduce the huge storage problem of old files and most importantly to have access to my files, exactly as they exist, from any broadband computer terminal where I may find myself.

I immediately purchased (online) a Xerox-DocuMate 510 Document Scanner.  It was advertized as being able to scan 10 pages per minute and featured a sheet feeder that allows you to load fifty sheets at a time.  It scans letter and legal size documents. It cost $350, delivered and plugs into a USB-2  port (most newer computers have several of these ports).  The price of this scanner is  considerably lower than similar models because Xerox has eliminated costly seldom used features, like a SCSI interface.

On the issues of saving trees and reducing storage, I archive my closed paper files off site with a document storage service that costs me about $1,000 a year, and I am a SOLO.  When I need a file in storage it costs me $20 to retrieve it and send it back.  I don't need to review many closed files, but I can't chance shredding all the old  files when my crystal ball refuses to tell me which ones I will need for whatever reason in the future.

This scanning paradigm allows me to store the contents of my files electronically, using virtually no physical storage space and enables me to archive old files forever for a very modest price. This is possible because I can scan my documents in PDF (**P**ortable **D**ocument **F**ormat).  The software to do this comes with the scanner. What that means is you can scan your file content exactly

as it exists.  Pleadings, wills, holographic or otherwise, photographs, hand written notes, etc.  And, all can be retrieved and PRINTED later in the same format they were in when the documents existed on paper.

The preferred format for **e-filing**,  which we all must learn how to do, is PDF. If you want a great, **free** program that creates PDF files go to http://www.cutepdf.com/  and download the basic program.  If you want the bells and whistles version you can pay $49.95.

Of course, I will not shred original documents, I still have to archive items which cannot be replaced with a copy, even an almost EXACT copy.  But, these types of documents are less that one percent of my office document content, and I try to not be the document bank for clients who want their original wills, deeds, agreements etc., stored somewhere safe.  Think of the potential liability if the ORIGINAL documents are lost or destroyed while in your custody (Katrina?).

Now the third issue - -  to have access to my files when I am away from them physically.  I use a remote access service called GoToMyPC which costs me $22.45 a month for a two computer system.  I can access my office and home computers from any internet enabled computer.  I have my notebook computer with me at the wireless hotspot courthouse and on trips.  There are many hotspot internet access points around and these areas are increasing daily.  Many are FREE, Starbucks, MicroTels, etc. (531 Free WIFI locations in Texas as of May 10, 2006).  Since I am going to scan my files in PDF format, I will be able to log on to my office computer with a secure connection and look at the content of my files.  And, I will be able to print anything I want wherever I am, so long as a printer is attached to whatever computer I am using.  Security is provided with passwords and secure socket layer  encryption(SSL) technology.

Well, so what?!  Let me go to the next step.  The problem with PDF files is they are "graphic" files, which  means you can't modify them.  There is expensive software that allows you to open a PDF file (ADOBE) modify it and save it as modified.  Now Corel WordPerfect has come out with a new version of its word processing program called X3.  I ordered a copy  for $125 to try it.  X3 allows you to open, modify and republish your PDF document in WordPerfect, Word, XML, HTML and PDF formats, as you choose. There are other inexpensive and free conversion software programs, search for them in Google.

Finally, the most popular session of the 2006 ABA TECHSHOW® was "60 Sites in 60 Minutes".  I will post a number of the links to these websites on the elpasolaw.com website (Link Below) and I will add more links later.

http://www.elpasolaw.com/aba_techshow.htm