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— CHANGE . . . RESULTS . . . SUCCESS —

NEWS FROM TECHSHOW 2026

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Each year, God willing and the creek don't rise, I head to cold and windy Chicago to attend the American Bar Association's Techshow Conference and Expo. I've gone almost every year since 1999. This year was the 41st year of the conference. My compliments to our own Daniel J. Siegel, co-chair of the PBA Technology Committee and chair of the PBA Legal Ethics Professional Responsibility Committee, who was this year's conference chair. Marvelous job. Bravo!

The annual event is not for those with limited stamina. Each day features a non-stop multi-track of seminars featuring distinguished speakers, from 8:00 am to 5:30 pm. A huge exhibit hall houses over 100 vendors. Daily social events encourage relationship-building and sharing of information among attendees. And, if that isn't enough, there are competing late-into-the-evening vendor-sponsored dinners, parties and after-parties at amazing venues throughout Chicago. It's typical to be on the go from 7:00 am to midnight or later and to walk multiple miles in the process. Oof!

In the old days, I would attend the parties and after-parties. Ah, sweet youth. I would not return to my room until sometimes 2:00 a.m. or later. Only to have the alarm blast me awake by 6:30 am the next day. Nowadays I skip the after parties entirely. I am usually back to my room by 10:00 pm. And I needed a mobility scooter for the second year in a row just to make the half-mile trek to and from the hotel and the conference location deep inside the huge McCormick Place convention center.

I always have a number of "missions" when I attend, and I am obsessively diligent about accomplishing them. At the top of the list is to learn as much as I can about new and significant trends in law practice management. I fill every possible slot with an educational session. I know that PBA members depend on me to bring

that information back and share it with them in articles, seminars and through the hotline.

Another mission is to meet every single vendor I can, especially the new ones. I am searching for all who might be of interest and benefit to our members. There is no way to look at detailed demonstrations and get the job done. But I make the connections necessary to follow-up with vetting and demonstrations once I get back to the office. The follow-up will stretch over the next six months or more.

For most vendors, their top sales management person attends the event. So, my visit can have deep impact. As I travel (scoot) throughout the exhibit hall, I regularly stop to chat, share industry information and discuss member needs with vendors, especially the new, eager ones.

A year rarely goes by when I don't also have to advocate for a few members who are experiencing problems with one vendor or another. Depending on the severity of the member's vendor situation, my tactics are adjusted. I may have a quiet conversation on the side. I try not to embarrass vendors or create a distraction when they have a crowd at their booth. After all, they pay huge money to exhibit at Techshow.

I will admit, though, that not all vendors are equal where integrity and/or performance are concerned. In that rare instance, I wait until I find a crowd at the booth to raise my concerns.

Yes, I have verbally bloodied a few vendors over the years on behalf of members. And I'm proud of it! Because the member benefits by getting desired results. I know that as a Practice Management Advisor, my criticism carries weight; I therefore have greater leverage than most members. I use it when I feel it is appropriate to the situation.

An important precursor to the conference occurs the day before Techshow starts. That is when my colleagues and I — the Practice Management Advisors of North America (PMA_NA) — have our annual retreat. It is generously hosted by the Chicago Bar Association.

We share what challenges are emerging in our U.S. states and Canadian provinces. We share about resources we create at our bar associations. We share knowledge about products in the legal marketplace. We invite thought leaders to deepen our understanding of what lies ahead. And we provide an established vendor or two with the opportunity to vet a new creation. We never hold back on providing meaningful feedback, hoping it positively influences the final product.

Throughout the conference, we PMAs reconnect to share new insights, exciting new or improved vendors and exceptional speakers. Oh, did I forget to

mention which vendors have the best show swag? Within hours of the opening of the exhibit hall, one of our PMAs won a new Apple iPad at a vendor booth! Yours truly has never won anything meaningful but always enjoys having a chance.

I knew the first day back from Techshow I would be on deadline to write this article. So let me sum up the experience this year in two words: ***Artificial Intelligence***. Yep! Educational sessions discussed AI from every possible angle, except one. Speakers on the topic included judges, litigators, technologists, PMAs and thought leaders.

The exhibit hall was heavily weighted toward AI; new products in abundance, and lots of upgrades in existing products. Now before I share a few of these new products I encountered, I need to provide a disclaimer: I have not personally evaluated these products yet. This article is not meant to be an endorsement of any particular product or vendor. Not by myself, nor by PBA. But I want to give you a taste of the diverse range of new shiny AI products available.

I have to start with Ajax (www.joinajax.com) which is a new AI-powered automated timekeeping tool. If it lives up to the hype, even moderately, this may be a game-changer for lawyers who struggle with recording their time. They claim that 97% of the firms that pilot their software wind up subscribing and promise to help you capture 12% more of your time. Ajax captures your screen activity, calendar events, chats, and emails in real time. It claims it will capture time across all your apps and devices. It writes client-ready narratives, picks matters and activity codes and surfaces polished entries to you as you work. All automatically. Review entries with a single click, make any adjustments and sync to your billing system. The company has completed a SOC 2 Audit. They feature zero data retention.

There were a number of new offerings in the litigation area.

Immediator (www.immediator.ai) is a package for plaintiff counsel which is described as an AI and data-science platform that identifies when personal-injury cases are ready to settle. The company is SOC 2 compliant. (Note that SOC 2 is the current standard for cloud-based products.) According to their website, the product was developed by leaders in law, insurance and data science, so it reflects real-world litigation and claims experience.

Secondchair (www.second-chair.ai) is a deposition assistant. Ava, the AI assistant in secondchair, provides real-time lie detection on even the smallest inconsistencies between live testimony and case documents; while providing a reference link to the document name and page number from which the inconsistency arises. It analyzes your case documents and crafts powerful questions and objective outlines in minutes for deposition preparation, and it works during

the deposition to provide you with transcripts and summaries on the spot. You may be amazed at the affordability.

AI.Law (www.ai.law) is a case management, customer relationship management, drafting, research, intake, and docket control platform for litigators. It promises to draft complaints, discovery, and motions in minutes that are structured for real court use, not just readable text from an AI chatbot. You enter the case facts, then AI.Law provides the structure, legal elements and formatting to produce a court-ready document in about three minutes. They promise to save over 120 hours per litigated matter.

Don't think all the new products are for litigation. There are too many other offerings for one article. But the following is one taste of some of the other types of tools.

Celestial Divide (www.celestialdivide.com) is a cleverly-named tool which helps executors and professionals run a clear, repeatable process for complex estates. Capture what matters, explore defensible allocation scenarios and document decisions so families can move forward. It will compare multiple outcomes and choose the approach that best fits the estate's priorities. It reduces confusion and side conversation for beneficiaries. It produces a clear record of what was considered and why. The product can also assist divorce attorneys in asset negotiation.

So, there you have it: my snapshot of Techshow 2026. A realization that AI is the first technology to ever be so rapidly incorporated into virtually every aspect of law firm life. It must be used ethically and checked thoroughly for accuracy. It won't replace lawyers, but it might make professional life easier, more enjoyable or more financially rewarding. Oh, and if you were wondering what was the one aspect of AI which did **not** get discussed, it was how to bill for the value instead of the time.

I have my antenna up for any viewpoints and real-case practices in billing for AI-assisted work. Any of you who are willing to share what you've figured out should contact me. After all, I can't do the heavy lifting without help!

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