

IT'S MY (LEGAL TECH CLE) PARTY AND I'LL CRY IF I WANT TO . . .

by

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A reader asks:

“I just got appointed to a State Bar committee in charge of planning legal technology-related continuing legal education programs for our members. What can we do to ensure our own financial success and also provide the best CLE experience for our members? It seems that our past seminars have been run by mega-geeks who seem to amuse themselves but bore our audiences. People have stopped coming to our programs and we’re not sure how to change that. Do you have any ideas to help us resurrect technology CLE for our lawyers?”

Any Bar association that would put on technology CLE seminars that are focused on "technology for the sake of technology" deserves to have tiny crowds and shouldn't be surprised to find themselves scratching their heads wondering why no one showed up.

I believe some of the keys to bringing in audiences are (in no particular logical order):

1. **Superb Marketing!** - this means catchy program titles, catchy program descriptions . . . more below on this . . . an idea: consider enlisting your state-authorized malpractice insurers to underwrite the programs and promote to their insureds (e.g. come to this program and see how using technology the right way can help you avoid malpracticing and have happier clients - that sort of spiel) - Be creative! Be inventive! Think out of the box! Just ***DON'T BE BORING!***
2. **Superb Planning!** - you need to know what topics are of real interest to lawyers and legal staffers in your state and which are not. Then recruit solid talent in both the planning process

and from the speaking end. As a corollary to the “old” Internet adage that for website traffic building, content is king, the same is absolutely true for legal technology educational offerings. If you build it, they’ll come. If you don’t, they’ll go out for Margaritas instead.

3. **Astute Target Audience Planning!** - you need to know who you are focusing on as potential attendees. Then tailor the two items above to that audience(s) - this means you need to know the expected firm size, the likely practice focus (or is it “foci?” Why does that word always look and sound bacterial?), the expected lawyer v. staff attendance mix, audience member knowledge level, etc. In other words, if you choose to be blissfully content.clueless, and you offer a program called "Advanced C++ Programming for Lawyers who Use AOL for E-Mail" expect to have an empty room.
4. **Cost and Convenience!** - price it reasonably and make it convenient (timewise and location-wise) for the audiences you want to be able to attend. Always offer lower rates for staff from a firm when one or more of their lawyers attends, as well as discounts for multiple attendees (after the first paid registrant) from the same firm; offering lower-rate "early-bird" registrations can help too.
5. **Great Advertising and Promotion!** - use a mix of traditional mailers, website promotions, “blast” FAXes, e-mails, etc. to get the word out to people in the way they can best be contacted. Repetition helps! Write advance articles in county and state Bar newsletters and/or your local State Bar magazine(s) describing and promoting the conference. If your Bar has member-only webchat forums, be sure the word gets out there as well! And the same certainly applies to listserves that your Bar’s individual practice sections may maintain - spread the good word!
6. **LISTEN! LISTEN! LISTEN!** - you need to listen to your attendees who show up! They’re a veritable marketing goldmine for CLE planners. Encourage your attendees to turn in program evaluations by selecting some forms for a drawing for a prize at the end of the event (and make it more than nominal - yet another “I Love the State Bar” keychain isn’t much of a motivator). **PAY ATTENTION TO THE ATTENDEE COMMENTS AND REQUESTS** and tailor future presentations to what your audience asks for . . . and what they tell you NOT to do.
7. **EDUTAINMENT!** - Yep, that’s a blend of Education and Entertainment! People don’t want to be bored to death at the live program or during the teleconference by a bunch of droning

automaton "talking heads" sitting on the dais. I have found that I get the best success when an audience has fun. Laughter breeds learning! So lighten it up - spoon-feed the technology medicine with a little (or a lot of) humor. People will remember when they're paying attention. They'll pay attention when they're intrigued, involved and having a good time. Laughter turns into retention and rave reviews and the willingness to go out and tell others how great a session it was - your attendees become your best marketers. In other words, choose presenters wisely and EDUTAIN your audiences! (of course, it may be a bad idea to mix really funny content and milk so . . . think carefully about the refreshments you decide to offer).

8. **Have Cool Exhibitors and Make Them Happy!** - if your event is a full-blown legal technology conference v. a purely educational CLE seminar and you will have an exhibit hall, treat your vendors like gold! In fact, they're worth MORE than gold! So many times, exhibiting vendors are considered a "necessary evil" (you know the drill . . . "they're going to try to SELL US STUFF" . . . BE CAREFUL! FOR GODSAKES, NEVER LOOK 'EM IN THE EYE!). How wrong is that??? DUH! They pay the bills for one thing and number two, they're a major attraction for your attendees! Canvas for a good mix of different kinds of companies. Also look for sponsorships so that your attendees can walk away with all sorts of cool free stuff. Everyone LOVES free things regardless of how useless they are the next day; or that they already have 30 imprinted yo-yos. Listen to what your exhibitors want and need so you help them increase their traffic and quality of leads. If they're happy, your attendees will be happy and so will you! A classic 3-way "win, win, win" scenario! And as shocking as it may seem, involve exhibitors in your substantive content planning process - with careful rules to prevent any unsettling selling from the podium, of course. Vendors have lots to contribute either in planning or even presenting (with careful monitoring)
9. **If All Else Fails . . . Bring Out The Magical, Mythical Ethics Credit** - If all else fails . . . throw in an Ethics credit or two if your state requires 'em! People are just plain sick and tired of the usual boring Ethics credit programs! Mix technology and ethics and get approved for these "almighty" and sought after credits! For example, do a session on "How to Commit Malpractice With Your Computer" - it's a favorite ABA LPM Section program that a bunch of us have done over the years, or something like it - it's a great carrot! (especially at the end of your annual or bi-annual CLE reporting periods!)
10. **If All Else Fails, Part Two** . . . get involved in ACLEA if you're not already (Association for Continuing Legal Education) and tap into what's happening with technology CLE in other

states, provinces, counties and cities are doing that works! (and what DOESN'T work!) (www.aclea.org).

11. **If All Else Fails, Part Three** . . . come to events that are proven successes such as ABA TECHSHOW, Legaltech, ALA Annual (Association of Legal Administrators - www.alanet.org) and Glasser Legalworks and observe, ask questions of the organizers, learn, talk to exhibitors and see what they like and don't like, etc.
12. **PMAs are Worth Their Weight in Gold!** - if your state or province is lucky enough to have a bar-sponsored Practice Management Advisor (PMA), by all means, they should always be involved in the planning process, presenting, marketing for you to their audience, etc.! These folks provide practice management and technology guidance to members of their Bar associations. Many of them are former practicing lawyers. They are amazing resources who really have the pulse of the local legal community. As such, they innately know what programs will pack your rooms and which will leave you saying "Check please."
13. **A Radical Idea - How About Using "Affinity Deals" and "Coupons"** to increase the likelihood of people attending.
 - ✓ How about tying in some member benefits like frequent flier miles when CLE is purchased
 - ✓ How about having a "legal technology series" (kind of like a symphony's subscription series) where people can subscribe to a series of programs over the course of a year, pay quarterly, and get a discount for buying the package/pass (even issue a laminated cool looking card) - much easier than having to market and sell each event as a standalone item
 - ✓ How about presenting attendees with a frameable certificate showing the achievement of attendance for the particular session (and REALLY radically, how about even offering a certificate of completion for the entire series . . . like a mini-degree in legal technology-ness <g>)
 - ✓ How about offering free attendance to law students (it's kind of like dealing crack I suspect . . . get 'em hooked when it's free and they'll be addicted when they later have to pay <g> . . . "This is your brain . . . this is your brain on legal technology CLE . . . get the picture?" OK, bad analogy but you get the idea <g>. And after all, it's worked for Lexis and WestLaw forever), etc. etc.

14. **Explore CLE That Works!** Consider coming to technology CLE conferences that are proven successes. The ABA TECHSHOW, held every March in Chicago, is the Mother of All Tech CLE Events - the biggest conference in the world for pocket-protector-wearing lawyers and their staff. It's a fantastic place to see what works and then go back and apply it in your own state. Check out www.techshow.com for info.

I could go on, but the crux of this is that a lot of it is common sense in the technology CLE planning process. This has worked over and over and over again where I've worked with various local, state and national bar associations in event and program planning over the years. . . sometimes it means that the first year, attendance is low and one needs to do a bang-up job once, then get testimonials and use those to promote the next event . . . but it CAN be done!

Ross Kodner is a “recovering lawyer” who saw the light and founded Milwaukee’s MicroLaw, Inc. a legal technology consultancy and systems integrator way back in 1985. He is the Chair of the ABA Law Practice Management Section’s Computer & Technology Division and is a member of the ABA TECHSHOW 2001 Executive Board. While his personal motto is “Friends don’t let friends word process without Reveal Codes,” he does love his Microsoft Force Feedback Steering Wheel.