
The 'Net is NOT Just the Web! Legal Tech Discussion Via E-Mail

by

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If your personal quest for the Holy Grail relates to tracking down the hottest new laptop information or searching for the latest info on case management system, you're reading the right article. Need to know how other law firms are addressing the laptop v. desktop PC issue for their lawyers? Wondering if the latest crop of voice recognition systems actually works? Chomping at the bit to get into the fray on the hottest legal technology "religious wars" (*i.e.* Mac v. Windows, WordPerfect v. Word, Netware v. Windows NT Server, etc.)? Then you need to subscribe to one (or more) of the legal technology e-mail lists, or Listserves (careful—you might see the spelling as "Listserv" without the final "e." That is the trademark of L-Soft, a company that makes Listserve software - <http://www.lsoft.com>).

Aside from the ever-proliferating raft of substantive law e-mail lists, those oriented to legal technology topics are some of the most heavily trafficked, and most useful. Literally thousands of lawyers, legal technologists, law firm administrators and IS staff, and legal librarians populate these lists. From solos, to small firm practitioners, to lawyers from 50 attorney firms to those from megafirms, they're there in force. From corporate legal departments, from district attorney's offices, from law schools, from state and federal agencies, you name it, you'll meet them on-line. From the perspective of a heavy and regular participant, the net effect is that the "conversation" taking place on legal technology lists comes from a very realistic cross-section of every kind of lawyer, practicing in every kind of setting imaginable.

A Listserve, sometimes also referred to as an "e-mail list", is the ultimate in online information, delivered to your virtual mailbox. Postings to a list are sent just like e-mail, except they go to every subscriber to the mail list instead of just one recipient, all of whom are put right in the middle of the ongoing discussion. Subscribe to a legal mailing list on, say, legal technology, and you'll find the latest discussions of e-mail privacy, what's new with Windows NT, which laptops NOT to buy and more, right there in your e-mail inbox. Given that there are tens of thousands of mailing lists in all, there's likely to be a mailing list for just about everyone. What's more, longtime subscribers to a given list get to know one another, moving in some small way toward the "virtual communities" we're always reading about.

Important Points About Mail Lists:

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- ✧ **Mail List Addresses:** Mail lists typically have two addresses: one for posting messages and one for subscribing, unsubscribing, and other housekeeping tasks. Don't confuse the two, or your subscription request will be posted for all to see--a classic newbie blunder. Messages sent to the subscribing address go either to the person managing the list or to an automated computer program that responds to commands it receives via e-mail.
 - ✧ **Signing Onto Mail Lists:** First you need to find the Listserve you are interested in. The best place to look is Lyonette Louis-Jacques "Law Lists", a compendium of law-related mail lists with literally hundreds included. It includes full subscription instructions for each list. Her terrific "list of lists" can be found at the following address: <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/~llou/lawlists/lawlists.txt>.

Let's say you want to subscribe to the ABA's "Solosez" Listserve. You find on the Louis-Jacques list, the following:

SOLOSEZ@abanet.org (open forum for lawyers practicing alone or in a small law firm setting, particularly firms with five or fewer lawyers; sponsored by the American Bar Association)

Send the following message to Listserver@abanet.org:
subscribe solosez Your Name
(related site at <http://www.abanet.org/discussions/home.html>)

It's not terribly complicated--messages from the group should start to appear in your mailbox shortly.

- ✧ **Mail Volume Can be Stunning:** Some lists generate dozens of messages daily. So many, in fact, that you can hardly sort out your personal e-mail from the pack. Just remember, be careful what you subscribe to; you may get far more of it than you ever imagined. Rather than receiving scads of separate messages each day from your mailing list, you can ask to receive them in digest form--a single e-mail containing all that day's or week's messages. Only automated lists can create a digest for you. It's usually as simple as typing digest or a similar command into an e-mail and sending it off to the list administrator--check your list's instructions to see exactly how.
- ✧ **Sorting Your E-Mail:** Having all your e-mail--from individuals, from mail lists, etc. all jumbled together in one "in box" can be confusing at best. More sophisticated e-mail programs like Eudora Pro can sort incoming e-mail into topic-

specific, or source-specific mailboxes. Using a process called “filtering” you can create a mailbox for each mail list you receive mail from. The filter knows to route mail from that particular mail list into the specific mailbox setup to receive those messages. Highly recommended!

- ☒ **Unsubscribing from a Mail List:** Signing off a list is accomplished by sending an e-mail message to the same address you've used to subscribe to the list (not the list's posting address). If it's an automated list, follow the instructions you were originally sent, which will likely ask you to type in signoff or unsubscribe, followed by the name of the group and your name, in the body of an e-mail message sent to the list administrator. If the list is run by a human moderator, send the same request in a brief note to his or her attention. Consider stopping your e-mail subscriptions for any period like vacations when you will not be checking your e-mail and then resubscribing upon your return. Why? Otherwise you might find several hundred new e-mail messages waiting for you!
- ☒ **The Basics--How Do I Post a Message?** It's as easy as sending electronic mail. Just address your e-mail message to the posting address provided for your group and fire away. Some lists let you post responses to messages posted in the list just by hitting your e-mail Return button--your e-mail will be posted to the list itself, not the individual.
- ☒ **Learn the “Tone” of the Group Before Becoming a Bull in the China Shop!** If you're new to a mailing list, make sure you read it for a while or “lurk” (read without responding or initiating a post) before posting to pick up its tenor. Try and learn something before adding your two cents. This is good advice for most lists. Similarly, don't clutter up everyone's mailbox with lots of comments such as "thanks" or "I totally agree," which can be sent to specific individuals by private e-mail. This is a sure way to tick off other participants.

Also keep in mind that conversational threads that end up being between you and one other person might be better taken to private e-mail. It's the same with situations where you end up involved in a heated argument. And try to remember the list's charter when you post--no one appreciates a participant who tries to hijack an established list to meet his or her own needs. If you really feel the need to do that, start your own mailing list. For tips on Netiquette, you can get advice from someone who has become known as the “Emily Post” of the Internet (amusingly, the title bar when viewing her Website used to say “I am NOT the Emily Post of the Internet!”--don't believe it . . . she is!), Arlene Rinaldi--point your web browser to:

<http://www.fau.edu/netiquette>

You can also look at the article written by yours truly and fellow Corel Legal Web Page columnists, Susan Ross and Courtney Kennaday, entitled "A Lesson In Netiquette: Mom Was Right -- Manners ARE Important--Even for Lawyers!" available on-line at http://www.corel.com/products/lawtalk_columns/netiquette_lesson.htm. In that article the authors point out some very useful things about e-mail list netiquette, with an example by Ms. Kennaday, Ms. Ross and Yours Truly as follows:

"Case No. 1: Terrorism by Autoresponse

An example of a good idea gone seriously awry. Attorney (picking a name out of the blue . . . we'll call him "Simon") goes on a three-week vacation to Europe. An avid e-mail user, Simon wants to be courteous and let his friends and clients know that he is out of the country and won't be able to respond to his e-mail until he returns. So, using his e-mail software, he sets up an "autoresponder." With the autoresponder, whenever someone e-mails him, they get a cute e-mail response that says: "Hi . Simon sez: I'm in Europe for three weeks, but when I get back, I'll respond to all my e-mail in the order it was received."

Unfortunately, like many, many people, Simon who is subscribed to a number of legal-specific e-mail discussion lists, . . . forgets to unsubscribe to all the Listserves to which he belongs before setting his autoresponder. So, every time he gets a message from a Listserve (and he gets dozens a day), his autoresponder sends out a message indicating his whereabouts to everyone on the Listserve. This causes an endless loop - Simon's e-mail sends an autoresponse to the Listserve, which goes out to everyone, including Simon! Of course, when Simon receives the e-mail from the Listserve, his e-mail autoresponder function kicks in and sends another autoresponse that he is out of the country, which goes to everyone on the list, including Simon, causing Simon's e-mail autoresponse ... well you get the picture.

After the eightieth or ninetieth automatic response from Simon, clogging one's e-mail inbox and obscuring all the "real" messages from the Listserve, the message seems neither cute nor courteous. After the two hundredth message from Simon, some recipient's mail servers are groaning from the stress. Soon, he's been removed from the Listserves and his Internet Service Provider (ISP) suspends his account because of the volume of mail his autoresponder is sending. When Simon returns from Europe he is labeled forever (well, at least by some unforgiving sorts) as an e-mail terrorist . . . In fact, a new term is coined to describe the feeling of being on the wrong end of a wayward autoresponder: one has been "Simonized." And what would proper netiquette have dictated? Simon should have unsubscribed to all his Listserves temporarily to avoid this problem.

To compensate for the lack of visual body language, mail list participants have developed little characters called "emoticons" which when embedded in one's message text, convey the emotion that the raw text itself cannot.

Commonly Used Emoticons	
: -)	Smile, Grin
: - (Sad, Unhappy, Frown
; -)	Wink
: - 0	Surprise
# -	Under the Influence

Acronyms also abound as quick ways to type lengthy phrases. Some of the most commonly used are:

BRB	be right back
BTW	by the way
FAQ	frequently asked questions
F2F	face to face
FWIW	for whatever it's worth
FYI	for your information
<g>	grin
HTH	hope this helps

IMO in my opinion
 IMHO in my humble opinion
 LOL laughing out loud
 ROTFL rolling on the floor laughing
 RTFM read the f***ing manual
 TIA thanks in advance
 <vbg> very big grin

Popular Legal Technology Listserves

There are literally hundreds as a quick glance at the Louis-Jacques list of lists will show but these are several with a legal technology bent that are especially popular:

- Network2d** (the ABA Law Practice Management Section’s very active list)
- Netlawyers** (similar to the above but privately run by Legal Internaut Lew Rose from the Arent, Fox, *et al* firm)
- Lawtech** (run by the Legal Technology Resource Center of the ABA)
- Technolawyers** (run by Neil Squillante - info at www.technolawyer.com)
- Solosez** (a list for solo/small firm lawyers sponsored by the ABA with lots of technology threads)

*Subscription instructions for all the above are available
at the Louis-Jacques list of legal lists Website:
<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/~llou/lawlists/lawlists.txt>*

There are four and a half primary e-mail lists for lawyers chomping at the bit for serious tech-talk:

- 1) **Network 2d** - This is my personal favorite and one of the busiest of the legal technology lists. Network 2d is a companion list to the ABA Law Practice Management Section’s flagship “Network 2d” newsletter. One of the older legal technology Listserves, there are about 700 subscribers, many of whom are regular participants. Well-known legal technology personages abound here including Bruce Dorner (who doesn’t know Bruce?), David Hirsch (one of the co-

columnists of “In Re Technology” in the ABA Journal, Dan Coolidge (co-author of the A Survival Guide for Road Warriors, Jerry Lawson (author of the new ABA LPM book, the “The Lawyer’s Complete Guide to the Internet”) and even occasionally Burgess Allison (of the original The Lawyer’s Guide to the Internet fame).

The list is unmoderated. This means that periodically the “signal to noise” ratio runs a bit on the high and frivolous side but the list denizens are particularly good at policing themselves. Messages per day can vary dramatically. On busy days, there can be 10 to 20 messages.

Perhaps the greatest attraction to Network 2d is the feeling of shared camaraderie and community among its members. This undercurrent seems to promote familial conversation, enhances the communication and is just plain fun.

Visit <http://www.abanet.org/discussions> and follow the instructions and scroll down to the listing for the LawTech list, click on subscribe, fill in the information and away you go! Alternatively, you can subscribe via e-mail.

To subscribe via e-mail: send an e-mail message to:

Listserver@abanet.org

With body text as follows:

subscribe network2d Your Name (or substitute “unsubscribe”)

- 2) **LawTech** - this is another ABA list sponsored and managed by the ABA’s Legal Technology Resource Center (LTRC). For anyone who has visited the ABA Center on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago, a trip up to the LTRC facility is well worth the effort. Former head David Hambourger and his staff assembled an impressive collection of law office-oriented hardware and software for hands-on exploration by visitors. Similar in tone to the Network 2d list, the volume of messages is somewhat lighter, averaging 10-20 per day typically. Lively discussion, sometimes rising to the level of being “heated” as did a recent fracas regarding everyone’s favorite legal billing “TABS v. Timeslips” makes LawTech a must-read.

Subscribing is easy. Visit <http://www.abanet.org/discussions> and follow the instructions and scroll down to the listing for the LawTech list, click on subscribe, fill in the information and away you go! Alternatively, you can subscribe via e-mail. Send a message to:

Listserver@abanet.org

With body text as follows:

subscribe lawtech (or unsubscribe)

For questions about subscriptions, contact Gabriel Rothrock, List manager at grothrock@staff.abanet.org.

This list has roughly 900 subscribers and is semi-moderated, meaning that if the legal technology wars get too heated, the ever-vigilant and amazingly tolerant list manager, Gabriel Rothrock from LTRC will step in and subtly referee the combatants.

- 3) **Netlawyers** - arguably the largest of the legal technology lists. Run by veritable legal technology/internet folk hero Lew Rose, a lawyer at DC megafirm, Arent, Fox, Kintner, Plotkin & Kahn, Netlawyers is generally focused on issues related to law, technology and the Internet, but topical coverage tends to be a bit broader in practice.

There are reportedly well over 2000 subscribers to this busy list. Message traffic is sporadic, likely due to the fact that this list is completely moderated by Lew Rose himself. He reviews all messages sent to the e-mail list and determines those that should be posted to the group--the messages seem to come in spurts--some days very few, other days 20 or 30 or so appear.

The tone of this group is more no-nonsense, let's pass on the information and move along. For those wanting to cut to the chase, this is an interesting list to monitor. For those looking for an equal mix of fun, collegiality and technology, the former two lists may be more to your liking.

To subscribe, go to <http://www.net-lawyers.org> and follow the instructions.

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- 4) **Technolawyer** - a private list run by New York lawyer and Netpreneur Neil Squillante. This is a large list with over 2000 subscribers (and may have surpassed Netlawyers already), according to the list manager. While un-moderated, there are specific topics for discussion that are posted and approved for each week. This tends to keep the discussion very substantive and informative. Interesting tidbits include Neil's TechnoPosts (awards for best postings), TechnoFeatures (articles submitted) and TechnoReleases (press releases from legal technology vendors) are especially useful—and innovative. Annually, there is a TechnoAwards ceremony for best legal technology products and providers.

To subscribe go to <http://www.technolawyer.com>.

- 4.5) **Solosez** - another great ABA list; focused on the solo and small firm lawyer, this group has become one of the most interesting virtual legal communities around. While topics include plenty of substantive and procedural threads, technology topics are always floating about (thus the “4 and a half” description as this isn't solely technology-oriented in focus). Message volume is fairly high at about 30-50 messages per day. The tone is fun, friendly and members are most helpful. Some well-known LPM and GP/Solo-Small Section people are here like Jennifer Rose (the list manager, affectionately referred to as COTE - Creature Of The Ether), Bruce Dorner, Reid Trautz and Ed Poll.

Subscribing is easy. Visit <http://www.abanet.org/discussions> and follow the instructions and scroll down to the listing for the LawTech list, click on subscribe, fill in the information and away you go! Alternatively, you can subscribe via e-mail. To subscribe via e-mail, send a message to:

Listserver@abanet.org

That says in the body:

subscribe solosez FirstName LastName

To unsubscribe, substitute for the line immediately above:

unsubscribe solosez

So, whether you have questions related to the great legal technology “religious” wars that are raging (*i.e.* Word v. WordPerfect, PC v. Mac, Windows NT v. Netware) or more non-secular

topics such as how to reduce GPF or Invalid Page Fault errors in Windows or how to automatically number paragraphs in WordPerfect, these e-mail lists are the places to get the quick answers from real people out in the trenches of average law practice. And the experience is far more pleasant, and typically more enlightening than the all too typical “permahold” one can experience on software and hardware makers’ technical support lines. So remember, paraphrasing Ed McMahon, you can’t win if you don’t subscribe!

Ross Kodner is a lawyer who some say “saw the light” when he founded Milwaukee, Wisconsin’s MicroLaw, Inc. in the early years of the PC age, back in ‘85. He spends all his time working with his team of 13 professionals have helped over 450 law firms and legal departments across North America integrate technology into their practices. He is also the developer of the ground-breaking “Paper LESS Office™” concept and co-writes a regular column for the Law Office Computing magazine called “The Circuit Court”. He is very active in his own State and County Bar’s technology groups and is the Chair of the ABA Law Practice Management Section’s Computer & Technology Division as well as serving as a member of the Executive Board for ABA TECHSHOW 2000 and the ABA Program Planner for Legaltech Dallas, Legaltech New York and Legaltech Chicago. His personal motto, which appears at the end of all his e-mail messages is “Friends don’t let friends word process without Reveal Codes.” He can be reached at rkodner@microlaw.com and via <http://www.microlaw.com>.