

I wish a book like this one had been in existence when I went out on my own in 1977. But that would have been impossible, since computers for small firms and solos had yet to make their appearance, word processing was called typing and it was done on Selectric typewriters using copy sets for duplicates, copiers were way beyond the budget of beginning lawyers (I had a nifty little machine called a thermofax that could turn out two or three copies a minute; for big jobs, I went to the Post Office and used theirs if it was working). And there was no one to tell cautionary tales about the IBM representative, who would sell you a \$2,500 “word processor” (I think it was called a Wheelwriter. If you need ribbons or correcting tape, give me a call; I still have a box of them), but who wouldn’t tell you the machine would be obsolete in 6 months and the memory system batteries would go out of production 2 years later.

So having a concise, objective assessment of everything electronic and technical and applicable to the practice of law levels the playing field for solos as much as computerized legal research did. And that is precisely what Nelson, Simek and Maschke have done in this guide.

I am not a techie so the details in almost every chapter describing hardware specs, transmission speeds, compatibility features and the like make my eyes glaze over. But I graduated from law school in 1969. The millennium occurred 19 years ago and a whole generation of lawyers is as conversant with these matters as I am with two and three-pronged plugs on wall sockets and extension cords. What I truly appreciate is common-sense explanations about what equipment is necessary, mandatory or just eyewash. Equally helpful is what equipment needs technical support and what falls into the use it and trash it category.

The chapters on software, case management, time and billing and data protection are fundamental to the ethical and responsible practice of law. A wise old attorney once said “if you can’t afford an accountant, you can’t afford to practice law”. That admonition now applies to data management and trust accounting. This guide does a splendid job of parsing through the major software offerings and makes gentle recommendations on the best of the best. A neophyte will truly appreciate this guidance, even though adding it all up leaves you with sticker shock. If I had to start all over again, I might think twice about my career path.

Perhaps the best information in this book – certainly the most generous – is the offer in the preface for advice concerning purchases and compatibility. The equipment described is as expensive as it is necessary. Any we all know through bitter experience how quickly it becomes obsolete. So the offer from the authors to provide counsel beyond the clarity of their technology guide is truly “priceless”.

Review by George Warren Shanks

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