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Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus: How to Sell Legal Technology on Venus

By Seth Rowland & Rose Rowland

LIFE ON MARS

The legal profession is heavily dominated by MEN. According to the ABA Market Research Department, 1,116,967 licensed lawyers resided in the United States as of June 2006. The large majority of those lawyers are male (73% in 2000). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has a count of 961,000 lawyers in 2005 (70% male). Men similarly dominate the computer profession. According to BLS statistics, only 27% of those in the category of computer and mathematical occupations are female.

Because of these statistics, many assume that MEN make (and will continue to make) the buying decisions when it comes to purchasing computer hardware and software. For that reason, most legal software and technology vendors market to men.

Look at the way companies sell computers. Notice the word choice, in particular the adjectives, in a recent e-mail from Alienware, makers of high-end gaming laptops, advertising a "Limited Edition Superman" line of computers: *"Extra! Be the **first to own** a Limited Edition Superman Notebook and Desktop. More **powerful** than a Locomotive... The Area-51 Superman Returns Edition Notebook powered by **Intel Centrino Duo** will **put your competition to shame**, with **unearthly speed and power"** and "Faster than a speeding bullet... Loaded with the **latest and greatest** hardware, the Area-51 Superman Edition Desktop with **Intel Viiv** Technology will provide **unbelievable performance** with stunning chassis artwork of the Man of Steel."*

When this advertisement came in, the "male" partner of Basha Systems LLC wanted to buy.

My current four-year old Alienware Area-51 Laptop was on its last legs, and no longer represented the "latest and greatest". The "female" partner of Basha Systems LLC wanted to hit the "spam" filter button to dump it in the waste bin as a useless purchase. Instead, we decided to save the e-mail into Time Matters so that we could use it for this article.

LIFE ON VENUS

The reality is quite different than the perception. The trend towards male domination of legal technology purchasing is changing rapidly. According to the ABA, the enrollment of law students for 2003-04 was 51% male and 49% female.

When one goes beyond the "purchasing" to focus on the adopters or users of legal technology in a law firm, the percentages are actually reversed — Venus is ascendant. The true return on investment or the people multiplier in investment in technology comes not from the purchasers but the users of technology. By far the greatest users of technology in a law firm are the paralegals, word-processors, and legal secretaries.

According to BLS data for 2005, there were 353,000 paralegals and legal assistants in the U.S., of whom the large majority (86.4%) were female. Add to this number a separate category of "miscellaneous legal support workers" totaling 229,000 people, of whom the large majority (75.3%) were female.

"Bigger, faster, harder, cutting edge, burning hot..." — these terms evoke little interest in women on Venus. The iPod Nano displays the classic Venus-centered sales pitch — *"So small, it will take your music*

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places you never dreamed of". And this device has a measly 1 Gigabyte of Flash RAM. Apple sells the iPod Nano as "with 1GB (240 songs)"; note the focus on usage in terms of songs.

On Venus, terms like "reliable, dependable, consistent get the job done, affordable, and easy to setup" hold the key to unlocking the purse. On Venus, the comfy dependable chair replaces the hard burning edge. When you sit on a chair ALL DAY, you don't care how "cool" the chair looks, you care about comfort and good back support. Similarly, when you use a computer all day, every day, you want it to boot up quickly, and not crash. The monitor, keyboard and mouse often prove more important than the CPU.

OUR RESIDENT EXPERT

In this TechnoFeature, I introduce my partner, Rose Rowland. Rose worked as a paralegal for 15 years before joining Basha Systems LLC. As a paralegal, she sat at her desk and used computers every day, all day. And, in a typical, male dominated law firm, she did not have the cutting-edge fastest computer (the one to which she would have been entitled to if you gave out computers on the basis of who would make the most productive use of the technology). Rather, she was forced to contend with the least powerful computer in the office.

Nevertheless, she was viewed as the resident computer power-user in the office. Her expertise extended to the "use of the computer," for she knew how to use the computer to get the work done. She found the efficiency tricks in the programs she had, whether learning keystroke recording macros, effective use of tables in WordPerfect, or the ability to search the then nascent Internet for information. In fact, she trained the office staff, including the partners, on how to really use the software. And in this time, she observed closely how average women users interact with their computers.

The balance of this article presents a discussion with Rose, to elicit her views of life on Venus.

THE INTERVIEW

SETH: When making a computer hardware purchase, what do you look for?

ROSE: I see — starting off with a typical male question! Frankly, I don't make hardware purchases. It is not my thing. I know what I want. I want an incredibly reliable computer. I want a computer that can handle a multitude of programs without running into problems; i.e. lots of memory. I don't really care about the brand of computer, so long as it does the job.

SETH: Why don't you make the purchases?

ROSE: I don't have the time, patience, or inclination to plough through all the books and articles that I would need to go through to make an informed decision that would allow me to get the best computer for my needs. I would worry that, because of my lack of knowledge, I'd get a poor computer, and be blamed for it. Basically, I'm terrified that I would make an expensive decision based on only partial knowledge.

SETH: What is the solution?

ROSE: It is worthwhile to consult someone who has already done the background research and can translate the techno-speak and explain to me what I need to know to make the right decision. The role of a good technology consultant to focus on the actual user requirements, and then deliver the appropriate technology.

SETH: What are your key criteria?

ROSE: Reliability and speed. When I turn on the computer, I want it to boot up quick. When I retrieve a file or save it, I want it to save quickly. And most important, I don't want the program to crash. I am sick of hitting the save button every five minutes.

SETH: Why don't women seem to care much about hard drive size, disk speed, RAM Speed, processor cache, VGA RAM?

ROSE: I have no idea what you are talking about. You have been reading way too many copies of PC Magazine.

SETH: If you cared in particular about a hardware purchase, besides reliability, what would you care about?

ROSE: In a laptop, I want it to be lightweight with a large wide screen. If I have to lug it about, I don't want bruises on my shoulder. And I hate touchpads that are placed in the wrong location because, when I type, the mouse jumps around.

SETH: What about desktops?

ROSE: I like flat panel screens because they don't take up too much desk space. I need room for piles of paper. And I especially like double-screens, because they enable me to multi-task better. This is also the one area where size counts — I like a large screen. And don't forget keyboards, they need to be ergonomic to relieve stress on the wrists and placed at the right height. By that I mean the basic tilt, not one of those newfangled keyboards that looks as if it is ready to launch.

SETH: What about file servers and DSL routers?

ROSE: Don't know anything about them, but I hope that they work. I want a fast Internet connection that doesn't time out.

SETH: Which is more important: choosing the right hardware or choosing the right company to support the hardware?

ROSE: The later. As a female, relationships mean more to me than hardware. The best hardware in the world will not be attractive unless I feel that there is someone behind it that I can speak with to iron out any difficulties, someone I can rely on, so that I am not stuck out there by myself at midnight trying to figure out what has gone wrong.

SETH: Are women willing to pay extra for this service?

ROSE: Definitely, but not any more than we have to. (Women are frugal, i.e. cheap.) But we understand that trying to do it yourself with computers is idiotic. You should have someone on call, even if it is a shoulder to cry on or a person to yell at.

SETH: Women seem very reluctant to spend money on the latest technology, cutting edge devices and best of breed, all the cool stuff. Why is that?

ROSE: Why on earth should we buy something new, when what we have already works? Besides the time and money to purchase, there comes the pain and agony of learning a new system and the tedious process of bringing it in. I already know how to work with what I have — why should I kill myself to get something new? I just need to get the job done; how I get it done is not that important.

SETH: How should women find out about new hardware and software for their firm?

ROSE: From their consultants. Seriously. Most women don't think about purchasing new hardware or software until their old stuff breaks down or they get frustrated with the limitations of their software. At that point, they want straight, clear concise answers on what to purchase to keep the business moving along.

SETH: When purchasing software, what do you look for? Would you switch software when a new and better product comes out?

ROSE: I purchase software because I see a definite current need that will be fulfilled, not because there might be a need in the future and I want to see if I can fill a niche with an interesting piece of software. I purchase software that makes my working or personal life easier and more organized. As a generic woman buyer, I am attracted towards case management software like Amicus Attorney and Time Matters to keep me organized, document assembly software like GhostFill and HotDocs to help me to prepare lots of documents quicker and faster, accounting software like QuickBooks, and

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Internet search engines and tools that enable me to accomplish tasks like shopping faster. I will switch software if you can prove to me that it will accomplish something definite for me right now.

SETH: When evaluating software to recommend to a client, what do you look for? Training material, support services, network of consultants?

ROSE: All of the above. I want to know that resources exist out there that I can tap. When it comes to computers, I don't want to go it alone. Remember, I'm a woman. Relationships are important to me. I want to have a relationship with the people I'm relying on in my day to day work environment.

SETH: Doesn't the focus on relationships and support mean that you pay more for technology and support services?

ROSE: Yes in the short term. Not in the long term. It evens out because if I had to figure out everything on my own, I would either drop the technology or the project would turn into an ROI disaster.

SETH: Whenever I have implemented new systems, I have found women very skeptical. Why do women resist adopting new technology and software?

ROSE: For many of the reasons I have stated above. Women are task-focused. They need to get a lot done, they need to get it done fast and they need to get it done right. If they have a system in place that already works, they don't want to abandon the tried and true. Women have been through software changeovers. Usually, at the end, they're glad they did it. However, let's be honest here. There is a rarely a change in technology that is not accompanied by some degree of pain. Many women are just not that eager to step in front of the techno gun and take the first bullet — they don't see the advantage.

SETH: Isn't that short sighted? Resistance to change perpetuates inefficiency.

ROSE: Yes, it's short sighted and probably not the best approach. As embarrassing as it is to admit,

if women users had been in charge of the computer revolution, we'd probably all still be on DOS, because "Hey, it works." The truth is we need both kinds of users to bring the best technology to market. We need innovators willing to try new things and we need skeptical female users to weed out poorly executed programs.

SETH: What can be done to make technology more appealing?

ROSE: There are lots of ways technology can appeal more to female users: through improved user friendliness, greater reliability, and comprehensive tech support.

• First, software must be easy to understand and use. Companies and consultants who customize software need to make sure that you can use their interface with minimal training.

• Second, if your software crashes, fix it. Software that loses data does not get the job done and your female user will abandoned it.

• Third, and most important, is quality tech support. To a female user, this means hire lots of tech support people.

SETH: Tech support is very expensive to maintain. What in particular do you mean by quality tech support?

ROSE: A few points to make about quality tech support:

• At the very least, train your tech support people and make sure they know the program inside and out. Escalation to another person who will call back several hours later or maybe the next day just does not give the female user the assurance that you back the product.

• Hire tech support people with good people skills and a reassuring manner. They should communicate in good plain English — tone down the technobabble with your female computer users. They are NOT impressed.

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• Don't time tech support calls. If the female user creates a relationship with a company, she will stay with the company and buy the upgrades and new software sold by that company.

• Give access to tech support pre-sales. Women trust tech support to give them the truth and suspect salesmen. Tech support is your main line to the female computer user.

SETH: How do you expect to pay for all this tech support? Should a company offer premium tech support for an extra fee, including the untimed calls and unlimited access described above?

ROSE: You are missing my point. Tech support is a vital part of the core product, and not an add-on service. The software itself is a service, and tech support is your cheapest route to finding out whether the service works. The price of quality tech support should be built into the product. It may make the "software purchase" seem more expensive, but female purchasers will note the commitment to quality support and factor that into the purchase decision. And particularly when it comes to version updates, they will stick with a well-supported product, and also buy additional licenses. Look at your tech support as a relationship builder rather than a cost center and you'll realize that good tech support actually helps the bottom line.

SETH: What if you can't afford a large tech support staff. What do you do?

ROSE: Create a network of value-added consultants to help develop custom implementations and training on the software. This is the model followed by Bob Butler in building out Time Matters. You then support this network with the resources to deliver value-added services to your customers.

A consultant network is a win-win-win situation. The female user benefits from a close relationship with a consultant who understands her needs and finds the appropriate solution. The company benefits from a large network of unpaid (except for nominal commissions), but well-trained consultants motivat-

ed to move their products. The consultant gets access to advanced training and as the primary tech support, gets an opportunity to offer value-added services. With the advent of quality remote technical services such as GoToAssist, which enable the tech support to link up directly with the user's computer and determine the problem, consultants can now offer quality support without expensive on-site visits.

CONCLUSION: BRINGING VENUS AND MARS TOGETHER

As you can see, Rose's views on how to get women to adopt technology in a law firm can apply to and benefit all of us (including the men). There is a lot to be said about a commitment to tech support and a focus on what technology delivers in terms of productivity and process improvements.

Raw power, size, and oomph, in fact, is on the way out. Computers are more than powerful enough to deliver our work tasks at lightning speed. What now differentiates large sales is the service component and the implementation. If you look at the average laptop, the processor speed has actually gone down, as dual core processors, running at lower processing speeds, taking less power, dominate the sales cycle. Dual cores are a response to the Venusians, who, when multi-tasking, just don't want to wait until the CPU finishes its task.

Help and support are valued on Venus. Computer Manuals, buying guides, and magazines need to be written in plain, understandable English with clearly defined terminology. Computers and software are no longer a secret club; they're a serious business tool. At Basha Systems, we have a company policy of creating step-by-step guides, with concise instructions in standard English; far preferred over manuals with a catalog of functions and properties.

You can bring Venus and Mars into the same marketplace; but Mars needs to give up some of its old notions of technology adoption to make it happen.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Recovered attorney, Seth Rowland, was recently named Finalist for TechnoLawyer Contributor of the Year in 2006 (thanks guy and gals) for his contributions to TechnoLawyer. Rose Rowland, a recovered paralegal, chief operating officer and head of software support at Basha Systems LLC. Together, Rose and Seth, designed and rolled out Nebraska Probate System V.

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