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At ILTA, IBM Posits AI Is Necessity for Future Business of Law

IBM Watson Legal leaders put AI into context and discussed how it is being used in the legal industry.

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Artificial intelligence is exciting, but [much confusion](#) remains about what it actually is and is not. In the case of law, this misunderstanding is exacerbated by hyperbolic headlines suggesting the end of lawyers. This, says [IBM Watson](#) Legal global leader Brian Kuhn, isn't really helping anybody.

Kuhn and Shawna Hoffman, global cognitive legal co-leader at IBM, delivered the Tuesday keynote at the International Legal Technology Association's 2017 ILTACON conference. In their session, the two discussed how AI actually works in the business of law, and estimated that AI will likely become the norm sooner than we think.

Hoffman said to consider that "88 percent of data is invisible to us." This is because society is producing mass amounts of unstructured data, and those amounts are increasing at unprecedented rates. In the past two years, for instance, more information was created than had previously been for all of time. In 10 years, the amount of data in existence will double every 12 hours.

"We're on the verge of a world where everything we interact with will produce data," Hoffman said.

Processing such data is where AI comes in. Considering the confusion about what AI means practically, Hoffman said that rather than debate between whether AI refers to neural networks, deep learning or a subfield of the sort, it can be considered "an umbrella term".

AI "has no agreed-upon definition. Just like human intelligence, AI has a number of capabilities," she noted. And while AI's ability differs between vendors and the quality of their technology, at its core, it can process data with "human-like knowledge."

Kuhn said that for lawyers, this has tremendous implications, noting that technologies relying on cognitive computing can "read 800 million pages per second and put forward hypotheses and show their homework, if you will."

"In learning, these tools become organic extensions of your practice," he said, noting that for law firms, cognitive computing can be leveraged to learn the particular needs of the firm, its employees and its clients. "This is actually a fairly radical and a complete departure of the 'one size fits all' point solutions of the past. Context and AI go hand in hand."

Kuhn noted that in the case of IBM, whose Watson technology has become widely known for its application of cognitive computing to professions such as medicine and law, the company is pushing

to enable the business user (such as a lawyer) to be the end user.

In his estimation, the future of AI will be the ability to compile information and use it to provide insights. "We're on the cusp of a new social renaissance, and I don't think that's hyperbole. We're now just emerging from the Wild West days of artificial intelligence," he added.

Hoffman and Kuhn both focus solely on the business of law, each underscoring that they don't apply AI to the practice of law.

"Our clients are the ones that actually chose the business of law over the practice of law over and over again," Hoffman said, noting that the technology is used by firms for finding key performance indicators, determining return on investment, and finding business value.

In deciding how to apply IBM's technology for a firm, Kuhn discussed how he and Hoffman would hold workshops where they'd ask law firm employees to identify their client, business and employee pain points; the business value realizable of applying cognitive technology to a legal use case; and whether the content that could fuel the technology to find an answer to an issue has been identified.

Kuhn discussed what he thought the next stage iterations of AI would be as well. He pointed to "cartridges" currently being designed by IBM that can be trained to "think and reason like their trainers." In other words, "not just knowing what they think but how they think."

For law firms, he said that these will allow for new revenue streams, as they can essentially train a piece of technology to think like an attorney. This could help with efforts like access to justice, which is currently limited by costs and business structures.

"It's too expensive to scale access to justice. At this point it's a technology problem," he said. "This is another area where AI could have a positive impact."

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