

Three Things That Caught Our Eyes (and Ears) at Legalweek New York 2019

Late January brought the latest installment of Legalweek—a legal technology conference in New York. Having evolved well beyond its humble trade show beginnings in the early 1980s, Legalweek New York today combines a legal technology trade show with five conferences featuring dozens of speakers from across the legal profession.

Here are three things about the 2019 version of the show that caught our eyes (and ears).

A Silent majority

While there was no shortage of expert insights and guidance at Legalweek, there was a notable shortage of speakers from small and midsize law firms, businesses and vendors. In other words, the majority of law firms and businesses in existence today had virtually no voice at a marquee legal conference.

Most Legalweek speakers were from the world's largest law firms and corporations, or from vendors who tend to serve those entities. Those large law firms and corporations typically have a unique set of problems and needs that their smaller brethren do not share. Few law firms outside BigLaw need to be concerned about the threat the Big Four accounting firms pose to their continued prosperity—a topic covered at the show. Likewise, the way BigLaw firms and large corporations use technology to serve their needs will often be vastly different from smaller law firms and corporations.

[We weren't the only ones to notice this phenomenon](#). By focusing on the “upper crust” of the legal market, Legalweek did not give a voice to the law firms and businesses that make up the majority of those in operation today and whose insights likely affect the majority of legal consumers in this country. That, of course, is disappointing to us at LexisNexis® because we operate the [Lexis® Legal Advantage](#) site you are reading for that very reason—to give a voice to the majority of legal practitioners who are often forgotten.

The Struggle with Diversity

Another legal conference, another handful of panel discussions on diversity. Actually, the Legalweek “Legal Diversity & Talent Management Forum” spent two days on the topic.

There have been panel discussions for years about diversity in the legal profession, and yet, here we are still struggling with diversity in the legal profession.

Just two days before Legalweek began, [The New York Times®](#) covered [Paul, Weiss's recent all-white partner class](#) (which the legal industry [had known about since last December](#)).

That same day, [170 general counsel wrote an open letter](#) to law firms threatening that they would take their employers' business elsewhere if their outside law firms did not do better with diversity.

Three days later—and smack dab in the middle of Legalweek—[Don Prophete](#), partner at The Am Law 200® firm [Constangy Brooks, Smith & Prophete LLP](#) responded to that open letter, [calling such efforts](#) “empty PR plays, devoid of any real measures of accountability.”

The struggle with diversity is real and somehow still ongoing. How many more Legalweek conference sessions must be devoted to the problem before it is no longer a problem?

Even the organizations attempting to shine a spotlight on the diversity issue struggle with diversity. Just look at the overall diversity of Legalweek speakers. Women were well represented throughout the show's five tracks, but the same could not be said for minorities.

The only track where minorities seemed to be as well represented as non-minorities? You guessed it—the diversity track.

The Data Disconnect

During a session that focused on how legal services providers can serve clients in unique ways to provide value, reduce costs and stay profitable, one general counsel provided a simple example of how law firms can use data to help their clients—and then noted that none of the outside firms he uses has ever done so.

During another Legalweek panel which focused on what drives general counsels' decision making, a consultant referred to the fact that almost three out of four chief legal officers said none of the top 10 law firms they use provides them with useful data on spending.

These comments, along with others sprinkled throughout Legalweek presentations, show a disconnect between the purchasers of legal services (who want data) and the providers of such services (who are not providing data).

This disconnect is an opportunity for entrepreneurial legal services providers that are willing and able to put data to work for them. They may be able to acquire an early adopter advantage over their competitors who cannot make heads or tails out of the data they are compiling—or who may not even be compiling data to begin with.

On to Legalweek 2020

Change and evolution is coming to the legal industry at a breakneck pace. The industry looks much different today than it did just a few years ago. And yet, we have a sneaking suspicion that by the time Legalweek 2020 rolls around, the topics of BigLaw versus all other law, diversity and data will continue to be on the minds and tongues of speakers and attendees at the show.

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