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## What Comes Next? Google, Microsoft GCs Share their Views of the Future

BY ELLEN CARNES



At the Association of Corporate Counsel's (ACC) 2010 Annual Meeting in San Antonio, two experts on emerging technology — Brad Smith, general counsel and senior vice president of Microsoft Corporation, and Kent Walker, general counsel and vice president of Google, Inc. — attempted to answer a simple question: "What comes next?"

The meeting's Oct. 26 keynote address, "First the Cell Phone, then the PDA ... What's Next? How Will We Use Technology to Transform Business in 2015 and Beyond?", took place in front of more than 1,000 attorneys eager to hear about how new innovations in technology and data-sharing might shape the way law is practiced in the future. Moderated and hosted by Pat Hatler, the 2010 ACC chair, the session focused on the big picture. "The goal here today is not to present a lecture on technical, legal details," Hatler said, "but to give you a little bit of insight on what's coming next."

Walker opened the address by speaking about the sheer volume of change attorneys can expect to see in the next

few years. Walker cited Alvin Toffler's 1970 book, *Future Shock*, as an example of change coming faster than people are prepared to handle. "You can argue that [change] is especially disorienting to lawyers because we focus on precedent and what's come behind," he said. "The change and the amount of change we are going to see in the next few years is staggering." Walker shared a remarkable statistic about the rate of change. From the whole of human history to 2003, five exabytes of data (an exabyte is a unit used to measure information — one exabyte is equal to 1 million terabytes) were created. Today, we create five exabytes every two days. On YouTube, 24 hours of video content is uploaded every minute — the equivalent of movie studios producing 134,000 full-length feature films every week. Which poses the question, "What do we do with this huge amount of data?"

There are no hard and fast answers, but Walker and Smith were able to identify emerging trends. Walker believes that all information and bandwidth are moving toward being completely free and, in keeping with our mobile lifestyle,



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— Kent Walker

*General Counsel and Vice President of Google, Inc.*

that we will soon have the ability to access knowledge bases from almost anywhere. Smith thinks that users are moving away from traditional ways of using computers, like a keyboard and mouse, and toward graphical user interfaces (GUIs), like the touch screen. The next frontier, according to Smith, will be natural user interfaces (NUIs) — computers that respond to voice and motion cues, like the Xbox Kinect. Walker offered an interesting example of how raw data can be used in new ways. Google works with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to track flu outbreaks by reporting which regions of the country are searching for terms like “flu symptoms” or “flu remedies.” According to the CDC, this is the quickest and most effective tracking method. “The bigger message here is information is everywhere and we’re just beginning to figure out how to use it,” Walker said.

Smith also predicted “what people think of as a document will change.” A document won’t just be text in Microsoft Word anymore, but will incorporate multimedia from programs such as Microsoft Excel and Powerpoint. Innovations like video conferencing with cameras embedded in the screen and real-time translation software could be on the market in as little as five to 10 years, according to Smith. “There will be more seamless ability to move content from device to device,” Smith said. Both speakers pointed out the importance of applying the same principals of search engines’ easy information gathering to information storage within a company.

The availability of data was a theme throughout the address. “Access to information is very important to us as lawyers,” Walker said. Because everyone

has access to legal information and case law, research is something that can easily be outsourced, leaving attorneys free to provide synthesis, judgment, and wisdom. Smith said he is focusing on using the Internet to deliver services to clients. Both spoke about generational diversity and its impact on a company’s technology use. While younger employees who are more fluent in digital technology can be a great resource, they also have a different perspective and set of expectations.

While no one can predict with certainty what will come next in an increasingly global and information-saturated world, staying knowledgeable about emerging technology will give attorneys an edge. As both Walker and Smith pointed out, collaboration and information sharing can create a more open and effective law practice. ✦

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