

# BTA IGNITE Orlando & Elevate

## BTA hosts events March 19-21 in Orlando, Florida

by: Elizabeth Marvel, Office Technology Magazine

The Business Technology Association's (BTA's) IGNITE Orlando event was held March 20-21 at Disney's Yacht Club Resort in Orlando, Florida. In conjunction, BTA hosted e-automate Elevate: A BTA Dealers Helping Dealers Best Practices Event on March 19.

The IGNITE event included four main-stage sessions: a manufacturer panel, "CEO Insights: Marketplace Changes, Tariffs, Tough Choices & the Future of the Office Technology Industry," moderated by BTA Ambassador Bob Goldberg; a dealer panel, "Practical Uses for AI in Your Dealership," moderated by Laura Blackmer, Konica Minolta Business Solutions U.S.A. Inc.; a second dealer panel, "How Is Your Culture?" moderated by Mike Marusic, Sharp Imaging and Information Company of America; and the keynote address, "How Leadership Affects Customer Service & How Customer Service Affects Your Bottom Line," presented by Don Crawley, Compassionate Geek. The breakout sessions included: "Sales vs. Service: The Heavyweight Showdown," with Sarah Henderson, Pacific Office Automation; "The Practical Use of Power BI to Monitor Key KPIs," with Jack Duncan, Jack Duncan Consulting, and Mike Kirkpatrick and Gary Lavin, CEO Juice; and "How to Be a Better Listener," with Crawley.

The event sponsors: ACDI, AgentDealer, Avaniko, Avision, Brother, ConnectWise, Crexendo (lunch sponsor), Culligan Quench, ECI, ecoprintQ, eGoldFax (breakfast sponsor), ELATEC, Epson, FlexPoint, FP, Fujifilm, GreatAmerica, HP, Hytec, IBPI, Impression Solutions, Intermedia, Keypoint Intelligence, Konica Minolta, Kyocera, LEAF, MPS Monitor, MyQ, SalesChain, Sharp (dinner sponsor), Source Technologies, Square 9, Static Control, TD SYNnex, Toshiba, Xerox (drinks sponsor) Y Soft and Zultys (breaks sponsor).

BTA's next event, BTA IGNITE Kansas City (including BTA at 100: A Celebration), will be held Sept. 1-3 in Kansas City, Missouri. For more information, see the ad on pages two and three, and visit [www.bta.org/IGNITEKC](http://www.bta.org/IGNITEKC) to register. ■

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*Clockwise from top left: Crawley presents the keynote address; 2025-26 BTA Southeast President Richie Creech serves as an emcee on March 20; the BTA IGNITE Orlando event featured a keynote address, a manufacturer panel, two dealer panels, three breakout sessions, time to visit with peers and exhibiting sponsors, and a reception and dinner on the first evening.*



*Above: Goldberg (far right) moderates the manufacturer panel with executive panelists (left to right): Mary Hart of HP Inc., Mike Marusic of Sharp Imaging and Information Company of America, Karl Boissonneault of Xerox Corp., Jim Coriddi of Ricoh USA Inc., Larry White of Toshiba America Business Solutions Inc. and Laura Blackmer of Konica Minolta Business Solutions U.S.A. Inc.*

## Executive Insights

The first day of BTA IGNITE Orlando kicked off with the manufacturer panel, where five OEM executives shared their insights on the current and future state of the industry. The panelists included Laura Blackmer, president of dealer sales, Konica Minolta Business Solutions U.S.A. Inc.; Karl Boissonneault, president of North America channels and partners, Xerox Corp.; Jim Coriddi, chief dealer officer, Ricoh USA Inc.; Mary Hart, head of the U.S. Commercial Print Channel, HP Inc.; Mike Marusic, president and CEO, Sharp Imaging and Information Company of America; and Larry White, president and CEO, Toshiba America Business Solutions Inc.

The first question put to the panel revolved around manufacturer consolidation. Most of the executives agreed consolidation is coming, but that it will likely take the form of behind-the-scenes partnerships. "I think what we will experience some in the next 18 to 24 months will be a bit quieter [than the Xerox/Lexmark acquisition] ... I think it's a good assumption that there's a lot of conversations happening," Blackmer said. "It'll be a little bit more back office, similar to the Ricoh/Toshiba [partnership], which ... was a very good thing for the dealers."

Despite potential consolidation, the executives emphasized their commitment to the dealer channel. "Whether consolidation happens or doesn't happen, I think one thing that dealers can count on is that the folks who are sitting up here at this table are committed to this channel and making sure that we are bringing the best products forward to help you be successful," Hart said.

"What you're hearing more than anything is that the dealer channel is going to be more and more important to the manufacturers as we go forward," Coriddi said after being asked about dealer versus direct sales forces and territories. "When I look at Ricoh, in 2017 we did something relatively unprecedented and eliminated 1,700 direct salespeople and sold off the lion's share of the MIF, plus opened up all of our dealers to really being our major play in SMB."

"We've been publicly saying that 80% of our print business will be fulfilled through the channels," Boissonneault said. "In the U.S. we also transferred four states from a [direct] service and sales coverage model to a dealer model ... we're going to do the same thing in five other states ... Even though our enterprise reps might be engaging in accounts, the print fulfillment will move through our dealers as we go forward."

All of the executives emphasized the importance of growth beyond print into IT services, software, A/V and other technologies, as well as artificial intelligence (AI). "For all of us, I think AI's going to be the biggest driver," Marusic said. "You see a gigantic investment in AI, which is able to drive software development. So a lot of our coding now is done with AI — coding drivers, security platforms and things like that. The biggest albatross we had in our business was our former LCD plants ... a couple of those now have been converted into AI data centers."

"We're investing a lot into AI in our business to support our customers," White said. "One of the things that we're doing is creating an AI agent that will be able to capture meter reads for non-cloud devices ... We'll be producing that soon and spending money on our own DCA ... So our predictive analytics and our AI tools on that side are paying off tremendously, and our dealers can use those to have a really close idea of when a product's going to break. In fact, our predict rate right now — and it's learning more every day — is 80% within two weeks." ■

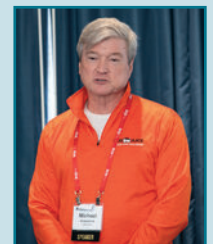
— Elizabeth Marvel



*Above left: Blackmer (far right) moderates the AI dealer panel with panelists (left to right) Chelsea Bode, CEO, Pearson-Kelly Technology, Springfield, Missouri; Lauren Hanna, president, Blue Technologies, Cleveland, Ohio; and Jenna Stramaglio, channel development manager, ConnectWise. Above right: Marusic (far right) moderates the culture dealer panel with panelists (left to right) Anthony Cucco, COO, Impact Networking, Lake Forest, Illinois; Anthony DelGrosso, vice president and general manager, Milner Inc., Peachtree Corners, Georgia; and John Lowery, CEO, Applied Innovation, Grand Rapids, Michigan.*



*Above left: Kaylie Williams (left) of Kyle Office Products, College Station, Texas, visits with Jennifer Muller of ecoprintQ during a break between sessions. Above right (left to right): Nick Augeri of Toshiba visits with Erik Skadberg and Michael Skadberg of CPI Business Solutions, Lafayette, Indiana, during a break.*



*Above: The breakout session presenters were (clockwise from top left) Henderson, Duncan, Kirkpatrick, Lavin and Crawley.*