



Here's to the First — And Next — 100 Years

It is difficult to put 100 years into perspective, but after gathering Sept. 1-3 in Kansas City, Missouri, to celebrate the Business Technology Association's (BTA's) centennial, I came home thinking less about the number itself and more about what it represents: generations of people who believed our industry was stronger when everyone came together. That was the idea behind BTA when independent dealers first gathered in Kansas City in 1926 and, 100 years later, it is still at the heart of the association. Our businesses look very different today, but BTA has remained a place where dealers can learn from one another, build relationships, share what is working and figure out what comes next.



That spirit was everywhere in Kansas City. We were there to celebrate our history, but what struck me most was how much of the conversation was focused on the future and the skills we need to keep moving forward.

During the BTA IGNITE Kansas City event at the Westin Kansas City at Crown Center, keynoter Jim Kwik challenged us to think about our ability to learn and focus in an age of constant information and distraction. One of his reminders, "Brain before browser, mind before media, intention before interruption," has stayed with me.

At a time when technology can answer almost any question instantly and artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly capable of doing work alongside us, Jim's message was a useful reminder that curiosity, judgment, attention and our own capacity to learn still matter enormously.

West McDonald's breakout brought the conversation directly to AI. His advice was memorable because it was so practical:

"Find the work that sucks." Rather than starting with AI, he challenged us to start with the work itself. Look for the repetitive task, the bottleneck, the process that consumes too much time or frustrates employees and customers, and then determine whether technology can make it better.

Pablos Holman asked us to look farther ahead. His session focused on the value of thinking on a longer timeline, beyond the headlines and anxieties of the moment, and toward what people can accomplish over decades and generations — much like how BTA has endured because generations of people were willing to keep learning and adapting.

That connection between the past and the future came to life in a very literal way during the Sept. 2 BTA at 100: A Celebration event at Union Station Kansas City. Throughout the evening, we looked back at the people and moments that helped build the association, and AI was used to bring historic photographs to life and help create music for the celebration. I thought that was a wonderful way to mark the occasion — we were celebrating a 100-year-old organization while using a technology that would have been unimaginable to its founders to tell their story in a new way. In many respects, that is what BTA has always done: Honor what came before us while continuing to look ahead.

For me, the biggest takeaway from our 100th anniversary was that technology has changed enormously, but relationships are what have carried the association through all of it. If we continue to share what we know, stay curious, challenge ourselves, adapt and help each other succeed, I believe the qualities that brought BTA through its first century will carry it well into its second.

That is the legacy we inherited and, now, it is our turn to build on it. Here's to the first 100 years — and to the next 100. ■

— Mike Boyle

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