

Legal Tech Meetups launched

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An exciting new series of meetups has been launched for tech and legal experts to share thought leadership ideas on how to practically explore the sheer number of opportunities which legal technology enablement and new design thinking can bring to the industry.



Speakers at the first Legal Tech Meetup in Johannesburg, sponsored by LexisNexis South Africa, included (left to right) Robert de Rooy of the Comic Contract, Webber Wentzel's Chief Development Officer/Chief Information Officer, Warren Hero, and Artificial Intelligence Team Lead at LexisNexis South Africa, Craig Wymer.

Sponsored by LexisNexis, the first Legal Tech Meetup took place in Johannesburg's Tshimologong Precinct on 20 May under the theme 'Perspectives' and was attended by over 50 professionals ranging from lawyers and alternative legal service providers to developers and IT specialists.

The gathering considered aspects such as human-centred design, access to justice and new legal delivery processes, with the common thread being that technology development and advancement do not work without collaboration.

LexisNexis said the events offer a free of charge platform to network and share insights.

Artificial Intelligence Team Lead, Craig Wymer, shared insights as a speaker. A member of the developer team that won the South African leg of the Global Legal Hackathon, Wymer explained how LexisNexis is using technology to make sense of data.

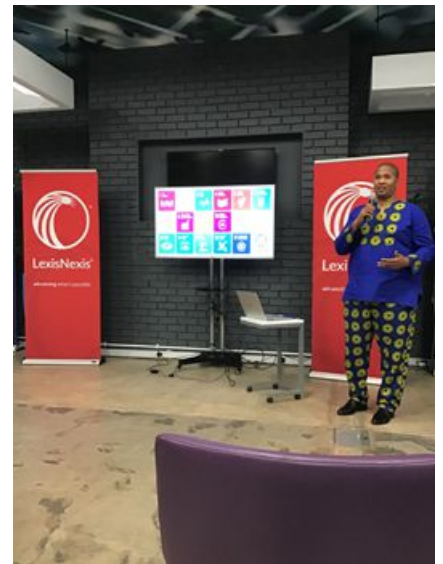
"We're deploying Artificial Intelligence to draw knowledge, actions and conclusions, while enriching the data to serve clients and make the practice of law more efficient," he said.

"We use Natural Language Understanding as a branch of AI to teach our computer systems to understand and identify aspects of the text or content. This trained Natural Language Understanding model can now identify entities, relationships and can drive concepts or topics. We then feed this data into visuals and search processes for further enrichment. You still need human input but the impact on the client's workload is huge as work and time are significantly reduced for them," he added.

Wymer said LexisNexis has been processing many Southern African cases and judgments at a fraction of the cost. An example is a pilot project for Botswana in which LexisNexis processed 5,000 documents, taking just three months as opposed to a year, with only one legal expert and giving cost savings of 90%.

LexisNexis is also on a big drive to extract insights for clients using its legal technology through the use of visualisations. Robot Process Automation is another area the company is focusing on to streamline processes that involve highly repetitive tasks, thereby adding value, and reducing cost and risk during legal research.

Also on the line-up was Warren Hero, presently Chief Development Officer/Chief Information Officer of Webber Wentzel and former Chief Technology Officer for Microsoft SA.



He said: “Digital transformation is about business blurring the line between digital and the human element.”

He added that to grow an organisation in the future it is important to get people to understand that failure is acceptable and an important aspect of developing technology and innovation.

Hero said data should be used as an asset to tell stories and to enable decision making for the future. This would allow any organisation to integrate within the boundaries of what the target audience can absorb.

In looking at the possible lawyer of the future, Hero identified them as ‘cyborgs’ and said they would be as intimately knowledgeable about technology as they are about legal processes.

The final speaker in Johannesburg was Robert de Rooy, a commercial attorney based in Cape Town with 20 years’ experience, who developed the Comic Contract, the world’s first fully illustrated contract that illiterate people can understand and sign.

De Rooy said when people sign what they don’t know or understand they are cheated of a basic necessity which might cripple them later. This was the main idea behind the creation of the Comic Contract, which now affords vulnerable people the dignity to understand what they are signing through pictures and visualisation, making the rule of law more accessible to all.

To date more than 2500 comic contracts have been signed at farms and schools, mainly on employment contracts. Comic Contracts has also partnered with Yes for Youth to educate the youth about contracts. There is also an app designed for delivery, signing and review of the contract on mobile devices, supported by a voiceover which can be translated into different South African languages.

Durban Legal Tech Meetup

The next Legal Tech Meetup takes place on Monday, 27 May, at LexisNexis South Africa’s head office in Morningside, Durban. The theme will be “Insights into AI and Machine Learning”.

Speakers include Andrew Collier, a seasoned data scientist with experience in both academic and commercial environments who currently heads up a data science consultancy, Exegetic Analytics.

Terrance Naidoo, Chief Technical Officer at LexisNexis South Africa, will share insights from his experience in driving technology at the firm, with a focus on search and workflow platforms, mobile applications, big data analytics and AI technologies including Machine Learning, Natural Language Process and Advanced Visualization tools.

Also on the Durban line-up is Amira Abbas, a master's candidate in Quantum Machine Learning and former research scientist at STANLIB Multi-Manager. She runs a tech startup and is extremely passionate about science and technology, specifically theoretical physics and artificial intelligence.

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