

Are you a “player”? How to future-proof yourself in the digital age

This year’s keynote speaker at **The Lawyer’s Business Leadership Summit** was the “practical futurist” and former IBM global managing partner Andrew Grill, who had a simple message: “Disrupt yourself or you will be disrupted”.

Grill set the tone immediately in his keynote, and for the Summit as a whole, by finding out how “digitally curious” his audience of legal market leaders really was. He posed a series of simple questions to those in the auditorium, highlighting six technology-related steps that are easy to take and asking which of them people had already signed up to.



Andrew Grill

The six questions elicited a gradually reducing number of hands in the air:

Are you on LinkedIn?

Have you Googled yourself lately?

Do you consume papers and magazines digitally?

Do you bank with a digital-only bank?

Do you use “two-factor authentication” on your social media accounts?

Have you bought some bitcoin?

Grill encouraged the audience to start doing all of these things if they weren’t already. As he emphasised, disruption is coming to all clients as well as the legal industry, which is facing the same exposure to disruption as any other industry.



Grill highlighted the three forces that drive disruption: high profits, new technologies and consumer demands.

High profits

Disruptors see the high profits to be had in industries such as legal, media, hotel and taxis and decide that they would like a share.

New technologies

New technologies around smartphones, 4G and cloud computing allow new services to flourish. Grill pointed out the fact that, should he wish he could order a parcel and pay for it there and then, while on stage, and have it sent to him has become second nature to most people.

Consumer demands

With the ease at which consumers can order and pay for almost anything online or via their mobile, their last best experience with a company becomes the norm for further interactions with other suppliers. Grill asked the room if they became annoyed when they cannot get a parcel delivered the same or next day when Amazon can do this simply.

When these three forces come together, this is when the risk of disruption for a firm or an entire industry is greatest. Grill challenged the audience to think about how these three disruptive forces were at play in the firms represented, and how they could offer an Amazon-like experience in the future.

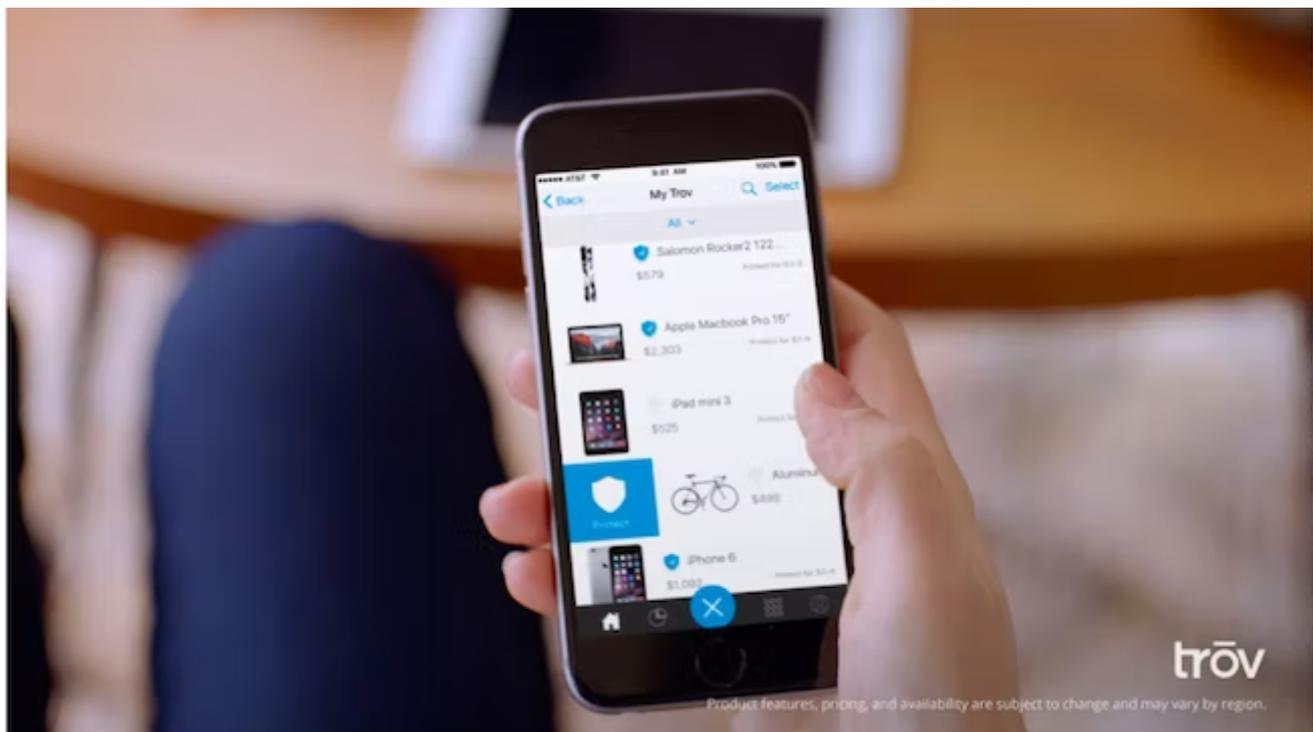
Grill used the well-worn disruptor examples of Uber, AirBnB and Netflix. While we think we all know how they started, he explained how each of them had to pivot to survive.

Uber started life as a “limo-sharing” app, until the founders realised that the addressable market for people wanting to share a limousine was small and so they had to disrupt their own model to become the global ride-sharing platform they are today.

The “Air” in AirBnB referred to people who had an air mattress and a spare room to share. They also realised the addressable market was small, so had to pivot and develop a platform to share spare rooms around the world.

Even Netflix began as a DVD-mailer service, and when video streaming and broadband technologies matured, they were able to stream movies to homes anywhere, and now they are investing upwards of \$15bn per year on new content, and media companies such as the BBC and ITV are scrambling to respond.

While these three companies are well known, Grill showed an example of “on-demand” insurance company Trov, which is disruptive because it removes the friction of buying and claiming insurance.



Grill challenged the audience again to see where they might be able to remove the friction points in their business and reduce the risk of new players coming into their space.

In the question and answer session held after the talk, one delegate asked, “If you could do one thing to disrupt the partnership model what would it be?”

Grill responded by suggesting that law firms needed to disrupt themselves before others did. One example given was the 50+ NDA review services currently on offer.

Grill suggested that perhaps firms needed to offer such a service themselves (as a white-label) to keep clients rather than have them look elsewhere – at a different price point to that of having juniors performing this task.

The final disruptor that Grill showcased was one that nearly everyone in the room uses every day – Amazon.

In an interview with Warren Buffett aired on CNBC, he explained how Jeff Bezos needed three key components to launch his online book selling business:

- A payment mechanism – Visa and Mastercard already existed
- A transport network – UPS and FedEx were well established
- A communications network – the Internet had been around for years

Warren explained that these three things were essential for his business, but he did not need to spend any money to use them. In the same way, Grill asked the audience what things they needed to innovate their business but don't have to pay for.

Another recent disruptive example is the launch of Apple Card with Morgan Stanley.



Grill explained how this is a game changer in the financial services space because it marries the distribution network of one billion iPhones with the existing processes and know-how from Morgan Stanley. While Apple Card is likely to take some business away from established high street banks, it is probably more of a threat to challenger banks such as Monzo, Starling and Revolut as they may provide an even more integrated user experience.

However, it is not just happening in the financial or legal industries – disruption is everywhere. One good example is WhatsApp where 64 billion messages are sent every day – on one network, one platform and one app. In contrast, SMS globally sends 20 billion messages per day – this is disruption on a massive scale.

Turning away from technology, Grill suggested that in any firm there were three types of people:

- Prayers: these people are literally praying that the threat of disruption and the need for change will go away.
- Stayers: Grill gave examples such as Theresa May and Boris Johnson, who will stay the course to get the project done but won't look outside at anything new.
- Players: people who are digitally curious and "lean forward" when new technologies are discussed. Grill invited everyone in the room to become players. Players are also better prepared for anything that can happen in terms of new entrants and the threat of disruption.

Grill explained that one of the largest changes in 2018 was what he deemed "regulated disruption", with two major changes being introduced.

The first of these was open banking, which was introduced by the UK and EU regulators to open consumer banking data and allow it to be transported securely. While this is a major change for the financial sector, Grill argued that once consumers and customers start to demand a value exchange for data that they own and want control of their data, this will start to flow through to other sectors such as the legal profession.

Open banking has been made possible using application programming interfaces or APIs.

APIs are the reason when you are on the Expedia website and can book a flight with EasyJet – the two websites connect with each other using APIs.

Grill said that in future RFPs and RFIs, clients might ask, "do you have an API?". If you answer anything but "yes", Grill suggested you talk to your IT head about how you can provide a more "Amazon-like" experience to existing and potential clients.

The second change was GDPR. Grill sees this as a huge opportunity because it takes a law (the Data Protection Act) written before social media and email marketing existed and brings it into the 21st century.

GDPR is great for consumers because it empowers them and recognises that there is a need for a fair value exchange for their data. One of Grill's favourite phrases in the era of Facebook and Cambridge Analytica is "if the product is free then the product is me".

While this is a problem for "big tech" at the moment, Grill explained that there will be a backlash felt across multiple industries as consumers realise their own data has

real value.

One of the key points of Grill's keynote involved what he dubbed "the scary slide" (see below). Everything on this slide will disrupt every firm's business over the next 18 months, Grill insisted.

Some of the terms are already well known, some are not. Grill encouraged delegates to go home and play "Wikipedia Bingo" to understand what all the terms mean and what they mean for individual firms.



He stressed that everyone in the room needed to be personally involved and invested in understanding how their firms might be disrupted by existing or new technologies, or new players that they may not be aware of.

He also explained that there was a need for "digital diversity" across all management teams, to ensure they were not left behind and are fit for a digital future, adding that "to get digital you need to be digital".

In closing, Grill provided some simple, practical steps firms could take to ensure they are ready for their own digital future.

He outlined the "two tribes" in every firm: Those "going digital" that are senior figures and know how to influence, even though their digital skills are still developing; and the "born digital", people whose first toy was perhaps a smartphone and who don't know of a time without the internet. However, they aren't as "experienced" as senior members of the firm and don't do things the way others do.

These two tribes need each other to provide a catalyst for change and innovation.

Grill said that one of the easiest ways to bring these two tribes together was by running a hackathon, a 24-hour competition to help solve some of the firm's biggest challenges.

With a hackathon, it allows a firm's young leaders to come together and demonstrate how young people think and give them a voice. For those "going digital", it also allows them to have access to the latest thinking and methodology and challenge the status quo.

The easiest way to stage a hackathon is to empower a group of young leaders to organise one. In Grill's experience, these events produce a buzz throughout a firm and an excitement level that will help to bring everyone together. They can also be staged at very low cost to the firm.

To summarise, Grill's overall message is that no firm is immune to the threat of disruption but there are steps you can take to be prepared and prosper. Disrupt or be disrupted.

For more information on Andrew Grill see futurist.london, or contact him on Twitter @AndrewGrill or by searching for "practical futurist podcast" on your podcast app.

For more information about attending The Lawyer's **Business Leadership Summit** in 2020, please contact Emma Bower on +44 (0) 20 7970 4171 or at emma.bower@centaurmedia.com

By **Matt Byrne** 6 November 2019 09:00
Event Business Leadership News