

Future of Workforce, AI Potential Dominate University Tech Talk

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(TNS) – OXFORD, Miss. – High-level executives, politicians and strategists convened at a university technology summit to look at strengthening the Mississippi workforce using innovations in technology.

At the third annual University of Mississippi tech summit, Sen. Roger Wicker considered the state's workforce from a national policy standpoint.

FedEx Chief Information Officer Rob Carter encouraged executives to promote a work culture where employees feel empowered to do interesting things for their companies, such as – in the case of FedEx – sharing critical information.

He said the FedEx system was not originally designed as a customer interaction system.

“We began to say this thing won't scale, we won't be able to operate in the millions of packages kind of numbers unless we provide critical information for the operators to know what's going on in the business,” Carter said.

Carter said by the mid- 1980s, FedEx began allowing its customers access to package information online, but not to save money or eliminate jobs.

“We began to do these interesting things to say, if it’s good for our customer service team members and good for our operations to know where these packages are and have insights into that, then it will be good for our customers to do that,” Carter said.

Carter said in the future, FedEx is working on a few projects, such as one that would allow medical and aerospace companies to track shipments of supplies from warehouses to hospitals.

Tracking Real time On Network, which is a small, low-cost Bluetooth device, is being developed to streamline the way packages are scanned, and Blockchain Enabled Active Network, related to cryptocurrency, is being developed to show where products come from.

The first panel took a mile-high view of future opportunities and challenges in technology.

Former Netscape CEO Jim Barksdale said some countries are investing significant dollars in artificial intelligence, and the four largest U.S. firms today are all tech companies, so data breach has become a top priority.

David Steel, executive vice president and head of corporate affairs for Samsung Electronics America, said Samsung is investing in artificial intelligence to develop and sell the technology to other companies for the production of devices such as autonomous vehicles.

Steel said Samsung attended the summit to support STEM education and get students excited about technology.

“The soft challenge is people, it’s talent going forward, because all of these innovations rely on a great pipeline of young folks and older folks getting excited about technology,” Steel said.

Kevin O’Toole, senior vice president of product management for Comcast business services, said the cable company invests more than a billion dollars a year to provide network connectivity to businesses. He said Comcast will focus on expanding rural internet in Mississippi at low costs.

He said the company is also focusing on eliminating “bandwidth barriers” or all of the boxes, routers and devices needed for internet, that depreciate in seven years. “Now you just put in a server,” O’Toole said.

John Felker oversees the National Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center for the Department of Homeland Security, and said the federal government is working toward building partnerships with private companies in financial and corporate sectors to combat cybersecurity threats.

“We want to understand what they are seeing and blend that with what we bring to the table, which is unique in itself, the idea of information we can put together both

classified and non-classified from law enforcement such as the FBI and intelligence community, and combine that rapidly with information from our private sector partners to not only help us understand what's going on but to help them understand in a real-time situation," Felker said.

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