

# Illuminating the future of law

The legal services market has turned to Chrissie Lightfoot for her future forecasting at a time when uncertainty has stirred panic and confusion. She fields questions from all over the world about how lawyers can remain relevant when robots finally do take over, and about the viability of the traditional law firm model moving forward. Her prevailing message is that things will be OK. Lawyers already have everything they need to adapt and survive, she tells **MELISSA COADE**, they just need to be willing to evolve.

She is the entrepreneur-turned-solicitor from Yorkshire who has traded on ‘The Naked Lawyer’ moniker since a book by the same name was published eight years ago. As far as futurists go, Chrissie Lightfoot is neither pretentious nor stuffy. She is brave.

Before talking about business innovation became popular and long before Lightfoot even entertained the idea of studying law, she was wondering how she could make the best possible contribution to society. Driven in equal parts by curiosity and altruism, she talks of a childhood spent poring over books that explored the many possible futures for the world.

“As a teenager, I always had a curiosity with the future,” Lightfoot says.

“I have always been intrigued by what is next and how can we improve things. I was genuinely interested in looking at how I could protect and futureproof my own career and how I could use that to help and teach others as well.”

Lightfoot joined the UK legal profession in 2008. When she qualified, she held on to the single-minded belief that she could use her skills to bridge the world of business and law. Within three years, she had left the mid-tier firm where she cut her teeth to launch a project that was designed to teach soft skills to lawyers. And so, The Entrepreneur Lawyer was born.

For the air of mysticism most futurists bring with them, Lightfoot’s ability to transmute expectations and find new niches is refreshing. On top of ‘non-practising solicitor’, she identifies as a technologist, investor, consultant, writer, and, of course, entrepreneur. Lately, she has been devoting her efforts to the development of a new AI product, Robot Lawyer LISA.

“My vision is, and always has been, to bring convenient, time-efficient, high-quality and affordable legal services, products and advice to the global mass market, where suppliers

(lawyers) and buyers (consumers and business people) all benefit from a sensible commercial business model, thereby future-proofing all parties involved and serving the currently unmet need,” she says. “For the last 10 years, I’ve been helping a whole triage of law firms, technology companies and buyers of legal services to come together so that truly client-centric provision – that is, what the end user, the customer, is really looking for – is actually delivered.”

The distinction between a client and customer may be semantics for some, but it is a critical mental shift, and this sits at the heart of The Entrepreneur Lawyer’s message for change.

Lightfoot believes the value of her products – intended to nurture soft skills like emotional intelligence (EI), empathy, creativity, inbound marketing methods, personal branding, as well as branding of products and firms – belies the common business dynamic law firms have with their clients. ▶▶▶

Mark Skeet Photography



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CHRISSIE LIGHTFOOT



Mark Skeet Photography

She argues that machines will eventually transform the relationship between lawyers and the people they service, estimating that within two to five years a significant number of legal services will be offered via self-service models. What will change, perhaps faster than people realise, is how comfortable customers are coming to rely on digital technologies without any human interference. According to Lightfoot, about two-thirds of the population are already prepared to engage with digital platforms for their legal needs, with only half of that group interested in having a human lawyer involved at some stage of the process.

"There is going to be a transition period over the next five years where you see those statistics shifting, without a doubt. We are starting to see that there are a lot more providers in the space. I think those start-ups that do survive will begin having a dramatic impact on the whole legal landscape makeup," she says.

"There will be more DIY from a customer and business perspective, where human lawyers will not be needed unless the public chooses a human lawyer to 'top and tail' the product and/or service. This human

service will be a measured use by a customer, aligned with their comfort level regarding trust and risk."

While this change will be for the better, she adds that it will determine which businesses stay around in the long run. The smart lawyers are teaming up with artificial intelligence (AI) and are finessing their customer-service skills. But Lightfoot's warning is not unkind. She understands that there is a general desire among lawyers to evolve.

"I would say that there is innovation in law. It is happening, but it is happening very slowly," she says.

"There are still challenges to bring smart technologies, together with technology-minded and skilled people, into the fold, but they are now getting more listening-time and more respect. Leading law firms have started to get it, which is great to see, but what is needed from the profession and industry is buy-in from individual lawyers from all firm sizes and fields of legal practice."

Lightfoot is brave because she puts her money where her mouth is. She knows that her futureproofing method works and is willing to share that knowledge because she has road-tested it.

Before writing *The Naked Lawyer* and its 2014 sequel, *Tomorrow's Naked Lawyer*, Lightfoot

implemented basic principles of offline and online relationship sales, relationship marketing and customer service gleaned from stints working in the leisure industry and as a business consultant to law. As a junior lawyer working for a commercial firm in the UK, she managed to generate and refer £562,000 of new client legal work enquiries. It was 2010 and businesses were still struggling from the hit of the global financial crisis.

"It is all about the customer service, putting customers front and centre, talking to them, understanding them, providing them with what they need and want within a viable, sustainable and trust-worthy business model; and then obviously they are going to buy your service," Lightfoot says.

"Well-served customers stay with you. They will remain loyal and be your ambassadors. I use those tactics and principles in my own businesses and apply them to being a lawyer when teaching others by saying: 'This is the future-proof model to create, constantly evolve and improve'."

When Lightfoot left her job in Leeds to launch The Entrepreneur Lawyer, she was acting on an opportunity. She saw there was a neglected market that could be tapped into and customers who were likely to

pay for legal services if they were more accessible and offered at a better price.

Lightfoot says it was apparent to her that the cost of legal services has been prohibitive for many people in the community and that consumer information was lacking. In her mind, there was no reason that should continue, so she did something about it.

"Having been a woman in business as a buyer of legal services, having worked with the technology companies, having worked as lawyer in a law firm, and consulted with many law firms, I could see that lawyers were not looking at serving this 80-90 per cent of the market. "I thought: 'I am going to put something out there that is going to actively serve the majority of the latent legal market. And the less interference from a human lawyer, the better, because the human lawyer's game-playing tactics and self-interest costs the customer time and money.'"

Robot Lawyer LISA was unveiled last year. It is a rules-based expertise automation technology that sits on an AI platform. LISA empowers users to create two-way/bilateral contracts between themselves, such as a legally binding non-disclosure agreements (NDAs), for free, and a number of consumer and business property contracts, removing the need to consult expensive human lawyers for both parties. Lightfoot explains that the platform advises customers as they work through it.

"What we have done is create a superior base document from scratch which begins in the 'middle ground' from which the user then builds their bespoke contract. What is unique is we have taken the knowledge, experience and wisdom of a 30-year practising solicitor in developing the unique base document and added some 'secret sauce'," Lightfoot says.

"We ask the questions that are going to be the key, fundamental legal and commercial nuanced

considerations for the user; the real deal-breakers or deal-makers. As an experienced businesswoman and a lawyer, I know those questions are actually going to make the difference to an actual contract."

LISA has been developed to help users create business leases, residential leases and lodger agreements without involvement from human lawyers. This suite of property-related legal tools has been piloted and the company is gearing up for a new round of funding. As far as Lightfoot is concerned, her latest AI project is just part of a bigger wave of smart technology legal solutions that will soon be on offer.

After establishing herself within the tech community and becoming an authority on all things AI in legal circles, Lightfoot says her learning will surely continue. She loves what she does, and loves showing the industry the possibilities that are achievable.

"I continue to do my speaking engagements and the odd consultancy through Entrepreneur Lawyer Ltd and love this aspect of my business life, but when you have a start-up venture it is absolutely necessary that you are in it full-on," Lightfoot says.

The Law Society of NSW will host Chrissie Lightfoot as a keynote speaker at its inaugural conference for the Future of Law and Innovation in the Profession (FLIP). Attendees will receive 6 CPD points and a complimentary copy of her bestselling e-book, *The Naked Lawyer*. **LSJ**



For more information about the FLIP Conference or the Law Society's Innovation Awards Dinner on Friday 14 September, visit [lawsociety.com.au/flipconference](http://lawsociety.com.au/flipconference)



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