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XLabs founder Radhika Dirks tells Long Island firms to embrace AI or risk losing customers to competitors



Radhika Dirks, CEO of XLabs in San Francisco, speaks at an AI Conference at LIU hosted by LIA and HIA-LI on Wednesday. Credit: Howard Schnapp

By James T. Madore james.madore@newsday.com [James T Madore](#) Updated April 5, 2024 3:52 pm

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Employers need to determine how to use artificial intelligence in their operation or risk being outflanked by rivals, an expert said at the region's first business conference about the new technology.

Radhika Dirks, CEO and founder of XLabs, which uses AI to develop products in San Francisco, said top executives at companies and nonprofits should look into how their competitors use AI and how it can be integrated into their workplace. They also need to train employees in how to properly use AI.

She said introducing AI into the workplace isn't solely the responsibility of the information technology staff.

"It's too late to ignore [AI], too late to leash it ... We just have to figure out how to shape it," Dirks told the audience of 400 people at the conference organized by the Long Island Association and HIA-LI business groups.

She and others said businesses that are new to AI should proceed slowly, identifying a small project where the technology would be beneficial and developing policies to protect customer relationships and proprietary information.

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"You need to have an internal AI evangelist on your team but also work with an AI adviser because they will have [an understanding] of the entire landscape," Dirks said.

She acknowledged AI's many downsides, showing AI-generated fake videos of celebrities and a purported arrest of former President Donald Trump. She said the technology perpetuates falsehoods, bias and plagiarism.

Still, AI has the potential to solve big problems, Dirks said, recounting how one of her businesses developed 40 cancer drugs in six months with \$250,000 in funding compared with the traditional method where one drug comes to market in nine years after \$1 billion has been spent.

After Dirks left the stage at Long Island University's Tilles Center for the Performing Arts, the university's Andy Person presented the results of a March 13-April 3 survey of 154 executives, many of whom attended the conference.

More than 8 in 10 said AI would help their business in the future and more than 5 in 10 said their competitors were already using the technology.

Among those who said they had adopted AI, more than 5 in 10 are using it to produce marketing and advertising campaigns and to communicate with customers.

Peter Scavuzzo, a partner responsible for technology at Marcum LLP accountants, said the poll results reinforce the maxim that “AI isn’t something optional, it’s something that’s essential ... that we all will be forced to adopt because our competitors have done so.”

He said Marcum rolled out an AI tool in October 2023 that is now used by 65% of its 4,500 employees around the globe and by some clients.

Scavuzzo was one of three executives on a panel about how local companies are employing AI.

Chris Canadeo, growth director at the advertising agency EGC Group in Melville, said it has used AI for promotional materials, “but there still needs to be vision and direction” provided by humans as well as safeguards to protect confidential information.

Suzanne McLaughlin, executive vice president of sales and marketing for the consulting firm Custom Computer Specialists in Hauppauge, said AI-generated research has helped the firm to customize its services. “We also have a bot on our website that directs people to the information that they’re looking for,” she said.



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James T. Madore writes about Long Island business news including the economy, development, and the relationship between government and business. He previously served as Albany bureau chief.