

Digital skills every employee needs

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Digital skills are defined as a range of abilities to use digital devices, communication applications, and networks to access and manage information. They enable people to create and share digital content, communicate and collaborate, and solve problems for effective and creative self-fulfillment in life, learning, work, and social activities at large.

Entry-level digital skills, meaning basic functional skills required to make basic use of digital devices and online applications, are widely considered a critical component of a new set of literacy skills in the digital era, with traditional reading, writing, and numeracy skills.

At the advanced spectrum of digital skills are the higher-level abilities that allow users to make use of digital technologies in empowering and transformative ways such as professions in ICT. Major digital transformations such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), machine learning, big data analytics, change skills requirements and, in turn, impact capacity building and skills development for the 21st-century digital economy.

Digital skills employees require:

- **Expert Data Analysis**

Once a niche skillset, digital skills are now a workplace essential.

Within Africa and across sectors, at least 80% of managers and professionals need basic digital abilities. In larger workplaces, as many as 50% are required to have specialist digital skills.

Digital technologies are now commonplace in daily life and becoming embedded in the working culture. Having a workforce that knows how to use them efficiently is key to a company's success.

In this era of big data, many companies are sitting on a mountain of untapped information about their customers, process and workforce.

As digital transformation advances, the data recorded will continue to increase. Knowing how to harness this data is crucial to understanding your business and its future. Employees who can extract, analyze and translate useful information from your company's data set will be essential, and the skill will integrate into more and more roles within teams.

Done effectively, data analysis can give you essential business and customer insights. It can also be used to inform campaigns and content.

Currently, there are four main types of data analysis used by businesses:

- **Descriptive analytics** - often combined with other analytics, this practice brings together raw data from multiple sources to give valuable insights into the past.
- **Diagnostic analytics** - requires more detailed data to identify patterns and provide insights into specific problems.
- **Predictive analytics** - uses the findings of descriptive and diagnostic analytics to detect tendencies, clusters and exceptions, and to predict future trends.
- **Prescriptive analytics** - requires historical data plus external information, and uses machine learning, business rules and algorithms to prescribe what action to take.

The current trend, as highlighted by a recent BARC survey, is recognized by executives as the growing importance of predictive analysis and data mining. As sophisticated technologies and tools are further developed, the more important the role of the advanced analytics of predictive and prescriptive will be.

• **Advanced Social Selling**

As the social media boom of the 2000s settles and matures, so have its users. This means that sales teams of the future will need to adapt too. According to today's most successful social sellers, the trend is moving away from the cold call and the hard sell, towards value-based selling.

At the heart of value-based selling is trust. To create this, advanced social sellers need to equip themselves with content and conversation, so that they can build more meaningful relationships with their customers.

A recent State of Sales Report by LinkedIn showed that 77% of buyers won't engage with a seller without reading up about their company first. If you consider this with the fact that 80% of buyers reviewed 5 or more pieces of content before their purchase, it is clear that quality online content around your company and about your product will be essential for all future sales teams.

Good content can assist social sellers in starting conversations and building relationships. "Put relationships first," advises Phil Gerbyshank to ambitious social sellers.

It is crucial to make a connection with your audience and then maintain it by adding value in the way of sharing content. Social media is much more an opportunity to educate and become a resource for your potential customers, rather than to sell directly - that's for further down the customer journey.

• **Mobile Expertise**

Smartphones are now more common for online use than a desktop (51% vs 42%). And, with the digital native Generation Z set to make up 40% of all consumers by 2020, organizations will need to adjust their own expertise to survive in the coming years.

The rise of mobile means that businesses must adapt their strategy accordingly. This means adopting a mobile-first approach, in which comms, content and customer journey are optimized for mobile.

Leverage mobile-optimized video communications throughout the sales process and add video-building abilities to your sales teams to better engage the next generation of consumers. This will prove essential to all communications through native apps, such as Snapchat and Instagram.

The predominance of apps also means that businesses will need to stay abreast of the trends to make sure that their app remains relevant - and more importantly - discoverable. Intelligent, AI-powered marketing platforms can translate the vast troves of daily created user data into actionable updates to how your app is marketed.

The information is out there, future-proofing your workforce will simply be a matter of developing the right skills to be able to harness it effectively.

- **Multi-platform UX design**

As more of your customer base spend time online, moving between different devices, your company's digital presence will need to take centre stage.

The key to this is to ensure your app or website is easily navigable is at the heart of UX (user experience) design. And, with 79% of internet users admitting to searching for another site if they can't easily use one they landed on, it's essential to invest in this digital skill.

Importantly, websites and apps will need to be responsive to give users a consistent feel across different devices. Not doing so will create an impasse between brand and user that will encourage consumers to look elsewhere.

Consider how to make design teams agiler. To speed up the process and to allow creativity to flow, divide up the work for different features. If individuals have more independence, they will have clear ownership of their section and are more likely to feel creatively satisfied. This agile framework will lead to more productive workers and more flexible design necessary to keep up with tomorrow's digitization.

- **Network and information security**

This skill, while on the surface seems the least glamorous, is one of the most important.

Cybersecurity is one of the biggest issues of today and will continue to be as digital transformation advances. With recent controversies about cybersecurity in high profile cases like Yahoo, Sage and Hilary Clinton's email, ensuring business data is kept secure has emerged as a top priority.

As security methods evolve and develop, so do the threats against it. And the more connected your

workforce, the more the whole company is at risk from one employee's oversight. Even something as simple as using social media at work can be a risk.

Having a workforce that understands the basics of online security – and the steps they can take to defend it will keep your company, and its sensitive information, away from prying eyes and breach scandals.

- **Creative thinking**

Arguably the most important digital skill for the future doesn't relate to a specific device or software.

For 6 in 10 occupations, 30% of tasks are automatable. As technology rapidly evolves, previously revered breakthroughs are quickly forgotten, and specialized skill sets become obsolete.

Therefore the most important skill for any employee in the face of automation is creative thinking. To ensure the longevity of a workforce, they must be able to do what machines are unable to.

For example, VR and AI are fascinating developments, but may not yet be relevant for your company. It is important to invest in creative, versatile workers that are keen to learn and will be flexible through each technological advance.

As machines become more involved with daily tasks, the more we will need to have creative, versatile workers whose skills transcend what the machines can offer.

When it comes to digital transformation, it's crucial to have a workforce that has a grasp of the complexity of the digital world, and the new stages of a customer journey.

From making the most of big data to staying on top of how consumers are using technology are all essential skills for tomorrow's workforce. Making sure they have the right expertise to adapt as the technology evolves will help to future-proof teams as time marches on.

Why are digital skills important for your company's future?

Now you know what the most important digital skills are. But why are they so important? Explaining all the reasons to invest in digital skills training and development for employees would transform this article into a short book. And, we know, you're not exactly flush in the 'time' department. So, let's focus on the top ones.

Digital skills training attracts and retains talent

While the quick and turbulent advance of technology might strike a little fear into the best of companies, it's important to remember that employees are affected, too. In fact, many employees worry that their jobs will be replaced by chatbots, online self-service and automation. So, they're looking for opportunities to upgrade their technical know-how.

This means that an investment in digital skills training for employees is bound to get the attention of people who are eager to learn and are accepting of the change. And who wouldn't want that kind of employee? Plus, providing regular opportunities for your existing tech talent to learn new skills is likely to earn their loyalty and keep the talent poachers at bay.

Reducing your digital skills gap increases efficiency

Productivity is one of the top benefits of digital transformation. This could be due to a more motivated and skilled workforce. But it's also likely that the proper use of digital systems makes businesses more efficient.

Think about it. Applications like Google Drive and Slack enable teams to collaborate and communicate without having to leave their desks. Tools like Asana and Trello reduce the likelihood of redundancies and unallocated tasks. Video-conferencing software like Join.me and Skype allow meetings to take place without travelling.

In other words, when employees know how to use these technical tools (and all their features) correctly, they're likely to be more efficient. And efficiency means your team gets more done, in less time, and with fewer resources.

Continuous digital workforce training is your #1 competitive advantage

Most companies have been competing on a global level for some time now. The smallest of leather shoe factories in South Africa are able to compete with big, flashy stores in New York, all by having an online presence. So, with the competition growing bigger and fiercer, it's no wonder digital transformation is a competitive opportunity.

Let's use an eLearning course provider as an example. Many companies create and sell online short courses. However, the first companies to leverage interactive elements, like branching scenarios and interactive infographics, created a superior learning experience. This was their competitive advantage.

Conclusion

The key to surviving the Fourth Industrial Revolution is digital skills training and development for employees. This is how you ensure that you're innovating at the forefront of digital transformation.

Provide regular opportunities for your staff to learn and develop new technical skills, and then give them the confidence and space they need to turn those skills into ideas. It's up to you to create the talent you'll need in the future, and through continuous training, to keep the talent you already have.

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