

6 Ways Small Business Owners Can Get Their Employees to Use AI



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One of the most pivotal innovations that artificial intelligence offers small businesses is the ability to change the rules of engagement – a more level playing field. And its adoption in this size category has been stunning: According to Unbounce's recent Break Free: The State of AI Marketing for Small Business report, approximately 30% of small and medium-sized businesses are leveraging some form of artificial intelligence.

One overriding challenge, however, is that implementing the right tools is only half the battle: To be successful in applying this new technology, it's critical to equip employees

with the guidelines and skills to make it both effective and profitable.

Some pathways for achieving that:

1. Set clear team expectations

As with any new technology, AI presents both advantages and potential risks, so it's critical to ensure that proper guardrails are in place to protect you, your company and its customers. This includes a clear and accessible policy, which should outline how AI can and should be used within an organization, which platforms are approved for its use and who is authorized to leverage it. This policy can and will evolve: Feel free to start simple and expand it as you implement more AI tools into existing processes.

2. Training, training, training

While younger generations may be more intuitive when it comes to technology, this isn't the case for all employees. Before rolling out AI tools, it's important to provide a general overview of what it is and how it works. This training should include common terminology, understanding the differences among types (such as machine learning, deep learning and robotics), data cybersecurity, ethics and the challenges associated with AI biases.

In addition, a team needs to understand this tech's current limitations. Too many people are jumping in blindly without grasping flaws or shortcomings that the human user needs to accommodate or otherwise address. For example, many platforms lack contextual understanding or the ability to incorporate human emotion, which can cause them to misinterpret input.

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3. Enhance data and analytic skills

One of the key benefits of AI is its ability to process, analyze and summarize large amounts of raw data, but the last thing you want is a team blindly inputting information and simply trusting the resulting analyses. Instead, provide additional training and education in the areas of data analysis, interpretation and visualization. The result will be better leveraging AI's abilities and catching errors that could cause poor results.

4. Promote strong AI communication skills

AI is a technology designed in part to respond to inputs in the most efficient way. But, as with so many systems, garbage in will ultimately lead to garbage out. When a human manager asks a human worker to perform a task, there is a lot of information shared apart from just written or verbal instructions, such as body language, contextual phrasing and tone of voice. Unlike humans, AI is limited to a certain range of input types like text and images.

So, businesses need to make sure their teams understand how to guide AI and ensure the technology clearly understands instructions before performing tasks. For this reason, employees need to learn to "speak AI" to get the most out of it. A question written in the wrong way could lead to an incorrect or poor response, so developing the ability to write high-quality AI prompts and queries will set users apart. This process also includes asking the right follow-up questions, since AI doesn't always get it right the first time.

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5. Encourage new-tool use and experimentation

AI is evolving at breakneck speed. New tools and platforms are emerging daily that can quickly cause a small business to lose its competitive edge. For this reason, encourage and incentivize team members to be on the lookout for new tools. For example, if your small business already uses a chatbot for customer service, its marketing team might consider also looking into image-based AI to help design creative graphics.

To achieve all the goals listed here, you may have to create a budget for technical training, as new programs may require basic coding or an understanding of language models. Again, the more knowledge you equip a team with, the more opportunities they will spot.

6. Foster a process improvement mindset

Naturally, the majority of existing business procedures were built for a pre-AI world, but doing things the old way simply because “that’s how it’s always been done” won’t fly in the modern economy. Owners can drive a new mindset by encouraging every employee to be a champion for process improvement. Exposure to methodologies such as Six Sigma or Kaizen can be a way to equip team members with the skills they need to adapt systems as new technology is implemented because no amount of technology can overcome inefficient or cumbersome processes.

As an owner, you’re ultimately responsible for providing employees with both the tools and training they need to be successful, and it may be beneficial to seek the expertise of a professional coach who can help them navigate these challenging transitions. Having an outside point of view to mitigate risk, while holding you accountable, could mean the

difference between a transformative AI experience and becoming outdated, and cast aside.

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