

How to Utilize AI in Your Business While Minimizing Environmental Harm

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The use of artificial intelligence is on the rise across almost every industry, and the ways it can be used are expanding as we speak. AI can be tremendously beneficial across a variety of fields, but it can also have drawbacks – one of them being a substantial impact on the environment.

The energy consumption required to power AI is significant. Power-hungry AI processors burn through a lot of energy quickly. Creating an image, for example, can use as much power as it takes to charge your phone.

The infrastructure that supports this process also requires the use of other resources, such as water, to cool the systems and prevent overheating. An AI prompt uses as much water as a 16-ounce bottle for every 5-50 interactions.

Despite the negative impact AI use has on the environment, it is not going away. It is becoming a necessity to be competitive in just about any market, so avoiding AI entirely isn't a practical option. The key is to be intentional: knowing when and how to use AI is vital to your business and to the planet.

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AI policies: What they are and how to use them

We recommend implementing an AI policy in your company to guide your organization on when to use AI and when not to. This ensures your team's usage will align with company values, standards and legal requirements in order to maximize benefit.

While providing this type of framework will not mitigate the environmental impact of your AI usage, it can give you more control over when you're making the environmental tradeoff of using AI.

When and how should you use AI?

AI is a part of the modern business environment, and there are a few ways in which it can have a maximal impact on your business, keeping you competitive while being selective about how you're impacting the environment.

1. Use AI to increase efficiency

AI can drastically increase the efficiency of your team if used correctly. When used to take on mundane tasks, AI can eliminate human error and increase productivity. When entering data, for example, humans can easily make costly mistakes. AI does not make those types of mistakes and can also flag errors made by humans. The amount of efficiency that you can gain back using AI is critical to staying competitive in the market, so this is the best place to use AI in your business.

2. Use AI to enhance your team and client experience

The use of AI to enhance the workplace experience of your team and the service experience of your customers can increase satisfaction for all parties involved. By reducing the time it takes to deal with the nitty gritty, humans can move on to

more satisfying things that can increase happiness and productivity while giving your clients the seamless experience that your competitors will be rivaling via their use of AI-enhanced tools.

AI-enhanced customer service experiences are becoming increasingly standard, with clients expecting quick and tailored service and responses. This is something that companies broadly will have to keep up with to stay competitive.

On the team side, AI can help increase satisfaction in the workplace by streamlining communications, scheduling and resource management. While face-to-face teamwork is important, most employees would agree that too much of their time is spent in unnecessary meetings. No one will complain when your AI policy helps take the drudgery out of their day.

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When should you not use AI?

When choosing how to implement AI into your business operations while minimizing your environmental impact, there are some key situations where using AI does not make sense.

1. Avoid AI simply “for fun” or for tasks that can be easily done without AI

Most people would agree that AI has some fun uses, but it just isn't worth the environmental impact. For example, using AI to create images or videos that are not necessary is not a good use of resources.

Using AI for basic research that could be found using other resources is not an efficient use of the technology, so rather than asking AI for help with every small task, your team's training should include the type of tasks that can be done without AI. Generating an entire presentation with AI, for

example, rather than using existing templated slides, may not be the best environmental tradeoff.

2. Don't use AI for anything that requires nuanced communication or emotional intelligence

AI doesn't yet understand how to handle delicate situations. Though the communication it generates can sound conversational, since AI is purely input-driven, it can often miss the context that sensitive matters require. Rely on your team's ability to handle these situations with tact, and therefore reduce your use of AI.

3. Don't use AI when it takes away from the human experience

As valuable as AI is, your team is more valuable and should be your top priority. If your company's use of AI is taking away from the experience and learning of your humans, that is counterproductive.

Your human team members should have the opportunity to learn how to do tasks before handing them over to AI. If they don't have the chance to build the skills foundational to their job, they are missing out on experience that could benefit their future, your company and the field at large. For example, while doctors with years of experience can benefit greatly from using AI to look at medical scans, a resident should have the opportunity to develop an eye so that they know what to look for when making a diagnosis.

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The AI field continues to grow and change by the day, so plan to regularly monitor and educate yourself on the ongoing impact of AI on the environment, quality of the tools and the competitive landscape of AI use in your industry, and update your AI policy accordingly.

If you implement AI use in your organization in an intentional way, you can reap the benefits and avoid overusing the technology, which will help reduce your company's environmental impact while staying relevant.

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