Your Employees Need More Than Paychecks and Perks — Here's What They Really Want

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

I've had countless conversations with colleagues, friends and fellow leaders about the main driver of their employees' satisfaction. Over and over, they essentially talk about "the paycheck."

No doubt, everyone would agree that solid compensation is non-negotiable. Still, for me, employees these days are increasingly seeking personalized, holistic benefits packages that address their deeper needs — especially when it comes to financial and family security.

After all, people don't just work to benefit themselves; they give their best at work to ensure they're able to support their loved ones, save for the future and protect their legacies. Now, the challenge for employers in the 21st century is to meet these needs in ways that go beyond surface-level perks.

Related: 3 Workplace Biases Inclusive Leaders Can Reduce Right Now

Employees expect more from their benefits

Employees, especially top talents, often feel their current benefits packages do not adequately address their financial or

family obligations. In other words, traditional benefit offerings — like basic health insurance or occasional "wellness credits" — aren't cutting it anymore.

A significant pain point for many employees is the perceived lack of workplace support for major life transitions, including family growth, elder care and retirement planning. Many employees feel their employers don't value their goals beyond the workplace, especially when it comes to their long-term financial outlook; these people want a safety net that addresses 'complex' needs. They are looking for benefits that supplement life insurance, help them manage assets and ensure their families can weather life's storms.

There is a clear trend: Prospective employees are increasingly prioritizing financial security and long-term support over superficial perks. Questions about financial consulting, estate planning resources and parental leave are now far more common than inquiries about whether we give free lunches or gym access. It's a clear sign that employees are getting hungry for resources that fortify their financial well-being and protect their loved ones.

But it goes deeper than that. Employees increasingly say they want advice, resources or digital tools for retirement planning and broader financial wellness. Recognizing that many employees struggle with student loans, credit card debt and daily budgeting presents is already a big opportunity for employers. Offering personalized financial coaching or accessible digital platforms can be a significant differentiator.

It's another thing to understand generational benefit preferences — younger workers prioritize flexibility, mental health and loan assistance, while older employees value health insurance and retirement. Tailoring benefits to this multigenerational workforce, including the increasingly popular option of digital estate planning tools, demonstrates

a genuine commitment to employee well-being.

How to offer meaningful financial support

As employers, what we can do to answer this growing call for financial security is to acknowledge that generic offerings won't suffice. Instead, we must explore integrated, long-term solutions that genuinely lighten the burden for employees and their families.

Offer your employees direct access to financial experts. Connecting them with certified financial planners, tax specialists and estate planning attorneys empowers them to make informed decisions about their savings, investments and insurance needs.

Next, consider tax support. Major life events often bring complex tax implications. A dedicated resource hub or hotline for tax-related questions can significantly reduce employee stress. Employees also appreciate guidance on leveraging life insurance policies effectively. For instance, bundling life insurance with other financial planning resources helps employees see the big picture of their family's financial roadmap.

Finally, integrate estate planning tools. Far from being an afterthought, estate planning is a foundation of financial well-being for employees of every age bracket. Do it properly and you'll see everything from property to digital assets get handled accordingly.

Related: Stop Searching for Your Purpose — It's Delaying Your Success. Here's What to Focus on Instead.

Peace of mind in the digital age

Even before 2025, I already noticed a surge in digital estate planning platforms and apps. These tools offer a streamlined way to create wills, manage beneficiaries and store important documents securely online. This digital shift matters for employers, too. For one, it aligns with employees' preference for convenient, technology-driven solutions they can use on their own time. Organizations can offer discounted or even fully covered estate planning packages by partnering with reputable providers. Employees then have the peace of mind that their assets, wealth and personal information are safeguarded, not just for retirement but for the unexpected events life may bring.

Encouraging estate planning benefits doesn't just revolve around death or illness. It also ensures that an employee's personal information and digital accounts are properly managed and protected, which means their well-being and security are supported *right now*. People want to feel secure that their families will be financially stable no matter what comes their way.

Invest in your people

I believe that offering comprehensive benefits that demonstrate genuine concern for financial stability is one of the most effective ways to show employees that they matter. When people know their loved ones are secure, they bring more creativity, focus and loyalty to their roles at any organization. We've personally invested in these deeper benefits and have seen reduced turnover, heightened engagement and a stronger sense of community among our teams.

In an era where remote and hybrid work arrangements are reshuffling traditional office dynamics, thoughtful, personalized benefits are becoming a powerful differentiator.

The bottom line is really simple: If you want to support your employees, address their long-term financial needs. Integrate digital estate planning, financial advisement services and comprehensive life insurance options to show them that you value them as “people,” not just the role they fill.

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If You’re Using ChatGPT This Way as a Marketer, You’re Missing Out on Its Full Potential. Here’s How to Maximize Your Results.

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

By now, most marketers have experimented with ChatGPT. You’ve probably asked it to write a blog outline, draft a few email subject lines or generate some Instagram captions. But if you’re still treating it like a vending machine — insert prompt, get content — you’re leaving a ton of value on the table.

The real power comes from what we call “prompt conversations”: a deliberate, iterative back-and-forth between you and the AI, where each response informs your next prompt. It’s not about asking for the perfect output upfront. It’s about

collaborating with ChatGPT to create something better, faster — and often, more original than you could've come up with in isolation.

Here's how to make that shift.

Related: 3 Tips to Know Before Using ChatGPT for Marketing

Think in stages, not prompts

Instead of expecting one prompt to give you a finished piece of content, break your process into phases: ideation, structure, drafting and refinement. ChatGPT shines when it has context, and a conversation gives it exactly that.

Let's say you're writing a blog post on cybersecurity for small businesses. Don't just prompt: "Write a 1,000-word blog post on cybersecurity tips for small businesses." That'll get you something generic.

Instead:

1. **Start with a role and outcome prompt**: "Act as a content strategist. Give me five timely blog post angles on cybersecurity for small businesses."
2. **Follow up**: "Take the second idea and create a blog outline with an intro, three main sections and a conclusion."
3. **Draft in pieces**: "Now write the intro in a conversational tone. Mention a recent news event that makes this topic urgent."

Each step improves quality and gives you control. Plus, it allows you to correct course if the AI veers too far from your intent early on.

Refine with micro-prompts

Most marketers underuse ChatGPT's ability to revise its own work. Don't settle for a "meh" paragraph. Tell it what to fix.

- "Make this paragraph more concise."
- "Add a metaphor to explain this idea."
- "Rewrite in the tone of a Seth Godin blog post."

You're not starting over; you're editing collaboratively. This is where the "conversation" really kicks in — and where nuance, style and depth start to emerge. You'll often be surprised by how well ChatGPT responds to creative nudges.

Related: 5 Mistakes I Learned to Avoid When Working With ChatGPT

Use it for strategic thinking, too

Prompt conversations aren't just for content execution. They're great for upstream thinking — like naming campaigns, testing messaging or exploring buyer personas.

For example:

ChatGPT will do the heavy lifting, and you'll spot ideas you hadn't considered. You can even ask it to role-play as a skeptical customer or a competitor, helping you pressure-test your messaging before going to market.

Build your prompt stack

Once you find sequences that work (e.g., for writing case studies, newsletters or landing pages), save them. Create a prompt stack: your own playbook of step-by-step conversations that consistently produce results.

This saves time and improves quality across your team. Over time, you'll develop reusable frameworks for different content types, which reduces friction when onboarding new team members or scaling campaigns.

Beware of blind spots

As powerful as prompt conversations are, they come with caveats. ChatGPT's job is to be helpful – even when that means inventing information that sounds right but isn't. It will confidently cite fake statistics, create imaginary quotes or attribute real quotes to the wrong people. It's not trying to deceive you; it's trying to please you.

Always double-check facts, names and sources. If ChatGPT gives you a quote, Google it. If it cites a study, look for the original. Treat the AI's content as a first draft that requires human judgment and verification.

Another pitfall: the language itself. ChatGPT has certain go-to phrases that instantly signal "AI-generated." You've seen them:

- "In today's fast-paced digital world…"
- "Unlock the power of [insert feature here]…"
- "Whether you're a small business or a large enterprise…"

These lines feel stale and generic because they are. Savvy readers (and editors) can spot them a mile away. Train yourself to recognize this filler language – and ask ChatGPT to rewrite with more specificity and originality:

- "Avoid clichés. Rewrite this intro with a punchy, unexpected opening."
- "Replace this generic phrase with something vivid or visual."

You can even paste in your brand's existing content and prompt: "Match this tone and avoid generic marketing language."

Another tactic is to proactively set constraints. For instance, tell ChatGPT: "Avoid using startup clichés or overused buzzwords." You can also ask it to analyze its own writing: "Which phrases in this paragraph might sound too generic or robotic?" It's surprisingly self-aware when asked.

AI can get you 80% of the way, but that last 20% — the polish, the precision, the personality — comes from you.

Related: ChatGPT is Becoming More Human-Like. Here's How The Tool is Getting Smarter at Replicating Your Voice, Brand and Personality.

The marketers getting the most out of ChatGPT aren't those who know the cleverest single prompts. They're the ones who treat it like a junior collaborator: giving it guidance, pushing it to iterate and building on its outputs.

Prompt conversations shift your mindset from "asking" to "shaping." And that makes all the difference.

Start a smarter conversation. Your content will show it.

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Indie Bookstore Goes Viral

After Hundreds of Customers Line Up to Help Move Its Inventory to a New Location — One Book at a Time: 'Book Brigade'

In early April, the owner of an independent bookstore in Chelsea, Michigan, told the community that the store, Serendipity Books, was moving around the corner because they were able to "outgrow" their current space due to the immense "community of indie book lovers" in town.

But the move, from Middle Street to Main Street, needed a few more hands to make it happen.

"When I came down the steps of the old store and looked, turned the corner, and I saw this line … I really struggled to hold it together," owner Michelle Tuplin told ABC News.

Related: Entrepreneurs Who Show Up Locally Often Grow Faster — Here's Why

Tuplin, who has owned the store since 2017, said around 300 community members came out on April 13 to help with the move, forming what has since been called the "book brigade."

The story has also gone viral on TikTok, with the store's original post garnering more than 1.7 million views.

> *@serendipitybooktok POV: your community shows up 300 strong to help move your ENTIRE BOOKSTORE around the corner to your new location. Today was so beautiful thank you Chelsea!!! ???*

#fyp #bookbrigade #michiganbookstore #indiebookstore #booktok #shoplocal #community #serendipitybooks ♬ original sound – Serendipity Books

Remarkably, the entire move only took two hours, Tuplin estimates. About 9,100 books were passed by hand by people of all ages around the charming streets that look straight out of a Hallmark movie.

Chelsea is about 60 miles from Detroit and has around 5,300 residents. That means approximately one in 17 town residents came out to help. The store has been in business in the community since 1997.

“I think there was a 6-year-old and then a 91-year-old, so it went over the whole gamut,” Tuplin told ABC News. “I think independent bookstores have a really important place in communities, and people feel an ownership, a sense of being a part of a thing, and we wanted to be able to give them that opportunity to help in a meaningful way.”

Serendipity Books is holding its grand opening event on April 26 to coincide with Independent Bookstore Day.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/community-book-brigade-helps-small-business-move-locations/490254

Why Micro-Influencers Are Winning the Trust Game in

Marketing

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

What people remember about Calvin Klein's #MyCalvins campaign is the way it encouraged social interaction through micro-influencers and paved the way for users to share their own photos, creating a sense of community around the brand. The influencers that the company selected are also indicative of the brand's presence, and by interacting with fan posts, it initiated a reciprocal relationship among the brand, the influencers and their followers.

The following key insights highlight various factors to consider when engaging an influencer.

Related: Why I Stopped Chasing Mega-Influencers: A Reality Check from My Marketing Agency's Pivot

Target influencers based on their niche, not numbers

Ensuring that a brand is represented by the right kind of people is crucial. In the digital age, where 'Cancel Culture' is prevalent, companies can easily face backlash. Aligning a company's message with its brand identity is one way to gain positive recognition from followers.

For example, engaging a fitness guru to advocate for a slimming service might not resonate as well as partnering with a parenting influencer, whose audience may be more receptive. The key factor is choosing influencers based on demographic relevance rather than just follower count.

Brands should focus on quality over quantity when it comes to influencer partnerships. A smaller, engaged audience is far more valuable than a large, passive one.

Create exposure without hard-selling the product

The goal is to build a community, and psychologically speaking, followers tend to exhibit ‘herd mentality.’ When a product is widely discussed and positively received, even skeptical consumers are likely to try it out of curiosity.

For instance, if multiple influencers post about teeth whitening products over several months, viewers may develop an interest in trying them, even if they had not previously considered teeth whitening. Simply seeing others adopt a product can create the impression that it is something worth exploring.

Overpromotion, on the other hand, can have the opposite effect. If a product or service is aggressively marketed, consumers may perceive it as a cash grab and avoid it. Real exposure comes from slow, organic growth and genuine influencer engagement.

Call-to-actions become more interactive than isolated

Micro-influencers act as an extension of the brand, and when they interact with their followers, they foster trust and brand awareness. Brands should follow suit with their official accounts, engaging directly with consumers rather than maintaining a distant corporate persona.

Brands should be actively involved in discussions, responding to comments and even sharing user-generated content. This

fosters an authentic community where customers feel seen and heard. It also encourages organic content creation around the brand, reinforcing the sense of belonging.

When brands and influencers collaborate to create interactive, community-driven marketing efforts, it strengthens credibility and enhances engagement. User-generated content, in particular, plays a crucial role in making a brand feel more relatable and trustworthy, as it leverages the natural tendency of people to follow trends within a social group.

Related: The Rise of Nano-Influencers: How the Smallest Voices are Making the Biggest Impact

The evolution of consumer trust

Today’s consumers are more discerning than ever, and traditional advertising methods often fail to resonate. Authenticity is now the cornerstone of successful marketing campaigns. Influencers with smaller, more engaged audiences tend to have higher trust levels among their followers compared to large-scale influencers who are often perceived as paid promoters.

Micro-influencers build their following based on credibility and niche expertise, which is why their endorsements often feel more genuine. Consumers trust real-life recommendations over generic advertisements, making micro-influencers a powerful tool for brands.

This shift in consumer trust highlights the growing importance of authenticity. When influencers and brands prioritize building relationships over driving sales, they foster long-lasting loyalty that extends beyond individual campaigns. Brands that embrace this strategy will continue to thrive in an era where trust is the most valuable currency in marketing.

Measuring success

One of the biggest advantages of micro-influencer campaigns is their measurable impact. Unlike traditional advertising, which often struggles with direct attribution, social media campaigns led by influencers offer clear engagement metrics.

Brands should look at key performance indicators (KPIs) such as engagement rate, click-through rate, conversions and brand sentiment rather than just follower counts. Micro-influencers often see significantly higher engagement rates than their macro counterparts, making them a cost-effective alternative to traditional advertising.

Brands need to shift their mindset when measuring influencer ROI. It’s not just about immediate sales but about building trust, awareness and long-term customer relationships. A well-executed influencer campaign can deliver sustained brand loyalty.”

Finding the right balance between sponsored and organic content

To maintain authenticity, influencers must strike a balance between sponsored and organic content. Audiences can easily detect when a post feels overly promotional, which can diminish trust.

Influencers know their audience best. Giving them the flexibility to present a product in a way that resonates with their followers results in more natural, engaging content.

Successful micro-influencer campaigns seamlessly integrate products into everyday life, rather than pushing aggressive, ad-style posts. For example, an influencer could incorporate a skincare brand into their morning routine video rather than explicitly saying, ‘Buy this now!’

Related: 3 Tips for Creating Sponsored Content That Engages Consumers

The future of micro-influencer marketing

As digital landscapes continue to evolve, micro-influencer marketing is expected to become even more sophisticated. Emerging trends include AI-driven influencer selection, deeper audience analytics and the use of virtual influencers.

Additionally, platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels are shifting the way brands engage with their audiences. Short-form video content has proven to be a powerful format for authentic storytelling, making it an essential part of any influencer strategy moving forward.

Social media is constantly changing. Brands that stay ahead of trends and continuously refine their influencer approach will see the most success.

In conclusion, micro-influencer marketing is redefining consumer trust by prioritizing authenticity over mass appeal. By carefully selecting influencers who align with their brand values, fostering interactive engagement and focusing on relationship-building rather than aggressive sales tactics, companies can create impactful campaigns that resonate with today’s discerning audiences. As marketing continues to shift toward authenticity and engagement, brands that invest in micro-influencers will position themselves for long-term success.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/how-to-build-brand-loyalty-through-micro-influencers/489423

Learn How to Become a Successful Online Content Creator for Only $35

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The economy and job market may be out of our control, but we can still generate our own revenue streams. Goldman Sachs valued the creator economy at $250 billion way back in 2023 and predicted it would double in size by 2027, so there's plenty of room for everyone to work an online niche. You don't even have to go back to school to learn how. The Ultimate 2025 Social Media & Freelancer Marketing Bundle offers 10 short courses explaining exactly how to become a successful online creator, and it's on sale for just $34.99.

You start by building your brand. You want viewers to come specifically for your content. The Personal Branding Mastery: From Zero to a Branding Hero course explains how to do that. Next, Social Media Marketing Strategy with ChatGPT (Branding, Digital Marketing, Instagram Marketing, SEO) shows you how to use AI to generate the kind of engaging content that viewers want to share.

No matter which platform you're on, using ChatGPT for Viral Content Creation Ideas (Branding, Reels, TikTok, Pinterest, Social Media) can help you brainstorm the best ideas for

content. Then, ChatGPT for Viral TikTok Videos (Branding, Social Media, Digital Marketing, Shorts, TikTok, Reels) demonstrates how to make the best videos on Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, as well as TikTok.

Viewers love videos, and there's no question that TikTok and YouTube are the two heavy hitters. You can do both, with courses providing strategies for mastering each platform.

If you need a successful blog for affiliate marketing, Blogging Mastery Using ChatGPT (Content Writing, Copywriting, Creative Writing, Storytelling) makes that easy. Plus, remember this is all business, so there's also a course on freelance entrepreneurship and the principles for success online.

This bundle is presented by ExpertEase, a leading online learning platform with courses that are designed by industry experts specifically for professional growth. It has provided concise, actionable knowledge to more than 50,000 global members.

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I've Seen 25 Years of Change

in My Career — These 3 Lessons Every Business Owner Should Know

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This year marks my 25th anniversary in B2B tech public relations. It's been a time of great transformation for both the tech world and the art of shaping markets and market makers. With all the new tech breakthroughs, global trends and customer expectations, the practice of PR (and all digital-driven businesses) has shifted dramatically to keep up.

From fax machines to Twitter threads, the way we communicate, influence and build relationships has changed. The saying "the only constant is change" rings true in this age of non-stop disruption. In this business world, it's the adaptable who thrive.

One thing's for sure, looking back on the last two decades: If you want to survive in the business world, flexibility is your best friend. Those who can pivot faster and spot new opportunities in the chaos are best positioned to stay ahead of the game. This means not just keeping up with change, but also innovating and demonstrating serious marketing resilience.

Related: **How Successful Leaders Get More Done in Less Time**

1. Shift from product to

storytelling and thought leadership

Today, businesses must engage with multiple audiences across various platforms, including digital, social and community-based channels. It’s no longer just about pushing a message out – it’s about creating meaningful, two-way conversations with customers, investors, analysts and other key stakeholders.

In the early days of PR, the focus was on showcasing product specs and technical features, hoping to impress decision-makers with “speeds and feeds.” However, as the industry evolved, PR shifted its focus toward storytelling, emphasizing the business benefits, including the “how” and “why” behind the product.

Focusing on the human side of the offering, including how a solution solves real-world customer pain points and makes people’s lives easier, makes it relatable. More customer-centric messaging has sparked better engagement and stronger connections. One key lesson learned is that a compelling narrative can make even the most complex offering relatable.

The companies that rise above the noise in a crowded market aren’t just product peddlers; they are leaders. They are thought leaders and trusted experts in their field. Thought leadership is instrumental in establishing brand authority and creating trust with customers.

We’ve developed and moved markets over the years by effectively positioning executives as thought leaders. This happened through interviews, speaking engagements, contributed articles and videos that showcased their core values, industry knowledge and expertise. It also fostered a deeper connection with their target audiences.

The key takeaway is that thought leadership is central to a

successful marketing strategy and consistency and authenticity are essential for effective thought leadership.

Related: How to Use Storytelling to Make Your Audience Fall in Love

2. Crisis management and reputation building

Crisis management has been an inevitable part of this fast-paced industry where market pressure and rapid innovation can sometimes lead to vulnerabilities like product recalls or security breaches. I learned the key to handling a crisis is a proactive, transparent approach that prioritizes accountability, clear communication and swift action.

One of the biggest PR crises I had to face was the recall of a client's product from several major distribution partners after a couple of reported incidents of battery swelling. We had a crisis communications plan that we implemented immediately. This plan outlined the communications protocol for such an event, including executive spokespeople, messaging development, approvals and so on.

All companies today need to have a crisis communications plan, driven by strong leadership. Long-term reputation building relies on consistent thought leadership, content marketing and positive media coverage to offset risks and maintain trust. Effective crisis management isn't just about fixing the immediate issue; it's about preserving the trust and credibility that can sustain your brand long after the storm has passed.

3. Data-driven decision-making

One of the most significant developments in the ongoing convergence of PR and digital marketing has been the rise of

data-driven decision-making. In a world where AI, automation and analytics are of growing importance to business operations, the PR practice has had to become accustomed to these tools to measure impact, get real-time insights and adjust strategies.

Businesses today must likewise embrace a data-driven approach. Make sure that your PR team collaborates with marketing, sales, and product teams to align messaging, drive engagement and support the company's growth strategy. Breaking down silos and fostering cross-departmental collaboration not only strengthens campaigns but also maximizes impact.

Related: Is Sharing Equity Worth It? Here's How to Add the Right Partners at the Right Time

Adapt or perish

The constant pace of change in our world today underscores the importance of adaptability. The business world moves fast, and you're already behind if you're not keeping up. The key takeaway: the timeless secret to success has always been flexibility and adaptation.

You make a plan, see how life shows up and adjust accordingly. So, here's to innovation, embracing change and pushing the envelope. It's an exciting time to be in the game!

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These Are the U.S. Cities With the 'Most Affordable' Rent, According to a New Report

As the cost of rent has increased by more than 50% over the last decade, some popular cities like Miami are becoming less and less affordable.

To find the most affordable cities for renting in the U.S., financial site WalletHub compared the median annual gross rent to the median household income in 182 cities, ranking them from most to least affordable.

Related: Here's How Much a Family of 4 Needs to Live 'Comfortably' in Every U.S. State, According to a New Report

The most affordable city was Bismarck, North Dakota, where the median annual gross rent is around 15.3% of the median annual income. The average salary in Bismarck is $69,989 per year, according to ZipRecruiter. The average rent, meanwhile, is $1,023 per month, per Apartments.com.

The second most affordable city was Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The mean annual gross rent there costs around 16% of the median income. Cheyenne, Wyoming, came in at a close No. 3 — residents spend 16.1% of their earnings on rent in the city.

Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Fargo, North Dakota, rounded out the top five most affordable.

The bottom of the list featured Glendale, California (No. 178), followed by Detroit, Michigan; New Haven, Connecticut;

Newark, New Jersey; and finally, in the last spot (No. 182), Miami, Florida, where residents spend 33.48% of their income on rent.

In Miami, the average salary, according to ZipRecruiter, is $55,183. The average rent is $2,950, per Zillow.

“In the most affordable cities for renters, the median cost of rent is as low as 15% of the median income, compared to more than 33% in the most expensive cities,” said WalletHub Analyst Chip Lupo. “This gives people in the least expensive cities a clear financial advantage; the money they save on rent could go toward their emergency fund or savings for future home ownership.”

View the full list of all 182 cities, here.

Related: Here Are the Best and Worst States for Retirement in 2025, According to a New Report

https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/these-cities-have-the-most-affordable-rent-in-the-us-report/490224

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5 Key Data and AI Innovations to Keep an Eye on in 2025

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At the end of the first quarter in 2025, now is a good time to reflect upon the recent updates from Amazon Web Services (AWS) to their services that provide data and AI capabilities to end

customers. At the end of 2024, AWS hosted 60,000+ practitioners at their annual conference, re:Invent, in Las Vegas.

Hundreds of features and services were announced during the week; I've combined these with the announcements that have come since and curated five key data and AI innovations that you should take notice of. Let's dive in.

The next generation of Amazon SageMaker

Amazon SageMaker has historically been seen as the center for everything AI in AWS. Services like Amazon Glue or Elastic MapReduce have taken care of data processing tasks, with Amazon Redshift picking up the task of SQL analytics. With an increasing number of organizations focusing efforts on data and AI, all-in-one platforms such as Databricks have understandably caught the eyes of those starting their journey.

The next generation of Amazon SageMaker is AWS's answer to these services. SageMaker Unified Studio brings together SQL analytics, data processing, AI model development and generative AI application development under one roof. This is all built on top of the foundations of another new service – SageMaker Lakehouse – with data and AI governance integrated through what previously existed standalone as Amazon DataZone.

The promise of an AWS first-party solution for customers looking to get started with, increase the capability of, or gain better control of their data and AI workloads is exciting indeed.

Amazon Bedrock Marketplace

Sticking with the theme of AI workloads, I want to highlight Amazon Bedrock Marketplace. The world of generative AI is fast-moving, and new models are being developed all the time. Through Bedrock, customers can access the most popular models on a serverless basis – only paying for the input/output tokens that they use. To do this for every specialized industry model that customers may want to access is not scalable, however.

Amazon Bedrock Marketplace is the answer to this. Previously, customers could use Amazon SageMaker JumpStart to deploy LLMs to your AWS account in a managed way; this excluded them from the Bedrock features that were being actively developed (Agents, Flows, Knowledge Bases etc.), though. With Bedrock Marketplace, customers can select from 100+ (and growing) specialized models, including those from HuggingFace and DeepSeek, deploy them to a managed endpoint and access them through the standard Bedrock APIs.

This results in a more seamless experience and makes experimenting with different models significantly easier (including customers' own fine-tuned models).

Amazon Bedrock Data Automation

Extracting insights from unstructured data (documents, audio, images, video) is something that LLMs have proven themselves to excel at. While the potential value borne from this is enormous, setting up performant, scalable, cost-effective and secure pipelines to extract this is something that can be complicated, and customers have historically struggled with it.

In recent days – at time of writing – Amazon Bedrock Data Automation reached General Availability (GA). This service

sets out to solve the exact problem I've just described. Let's focus on the document use case.

Intelligent Document Processing (IDP) isn't a new use case for AI – it existed long before GenAI was all the rage. IDP can unlock huge efficiencies for organizations that deal in paper-based forms when augmenting or replacing the manual processes that are performed by humans.

With Bedrock Data Automation, the heavy-lifting of building IDP pipelines is abstracted away from customers and provided as a managed service that's easy to consume and subsequently integrate into legacy processes and systems.

Amazon Aurora DSQL

Databases are an example of a tool where the level of complexity exposed to those leveraging it is not necessarily correlated with how complex it is behind the scenes. Often, it's an inverse relationship where the simpler and more "magic" a database is to use, the more complex it is in the areas that are unseen.

Amazon Aurora DSQL is a great example of such a tool where it's as straightforward to use as AWS's other managed database services, but the level of engineering complexity to make its feature set possible is huge. Speaking of its feature set, let's look at that.

Aurora DSQL sets out to be *the* service of choice for workloads that need durable, strongly consistent, active-active databases across multiple regions or availability zones. Multi-region, or multi-AZ databases, are already well established in active-passive configurations (i.e., one writer and many read-replicas); active-active is a problem that's much harder to solve while still being performant and retaining strong consistency.

If you're interested in reading the deep technical details of challenges that were overcome in the building of this service, I'd recommend reading Marc Brooker's (Distinguished Engineer at AWS) series of blog posts on the topic.

When announcing the service, AWS described it as providing "virtually unlimited horizontal scaling with the flexibility to independently scale reads, writes, compute, and storage. It automatically scales to meet any workload demand without database sharding or instance upgrades. Its active-active distributed architecture is designed for 99.99% single-Region and 99.999% multi-Region availability with no single point of failure, and automated failure recovery."

For organizations where global scale is an aspiration or requirement, building on top of a foundation of Aurora DSQL sets them up very nicely.

Expansion of zero-ETL features

AWS has been pushing the "zero-ETL" vision for a couple of years now, with the aspiration being to make moving data between purpose-built services as easy as possible. An example would be moving transactional data from a PostgreSQL database running on Amazon Aurora to a database designed for large-scale analytics like Amazon Redshift.

While there has been a relatively continuous flow of new announcements in this area, the end of 2024 and start of 2025 saw a flurry that accompanied the new AWS services released at re:Invent.

There are far too many to talk about here in any level of detail that'd provide value; to find out more about all of the available zero-ETL integrations between AWS services, please visit AWS's dedicated zero-ETL page.

Wrapping this up, we've covered five areas relating to data

and AI that AWS is innovating in to make building, growing and streamlining organizations easier. All of these areas are relevant to small and growing startups, as well as billion-dollar enterprises. AWS and other cloud service providers are there to abstract away the complexity and heavy lifting, leaving you to focus on building your business logic.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/science-technology/5-key-data-and-ai-innovations-to-keep-an-eye-on-in-2025/489228

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3 Workplace Biases Inclusive Leaders Can Reduce Right Now

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As an inclusive leader, here's one thing you can remember amidst the swirling controversies around diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI): It's always legal and a good idea to understand and reduce bias in the workplace. Consider this functional definition of *bias* as "actions that produce advantage for some people or ideas and disadvantage for other people or ideas."

Sociologists have identified dozens of types of bias, and all are worth understanding. But right now, there are three particular biases that cry out for reduction:

- From win-lose to competition and collaboration
- From diversity vs. merit to differences as qualifications

- From DEI uniformity to respectful conflict resolution

Related: If You're Not Aware of These Common Biases, Your Entire Leadership Strategy Is at Risk

1. From the win-lose bias (or zero-sum beliefs) to competition and collaboration

Research shows that those who have more to lose are more likely to adopt win-lose biases. A current wave of loss aversion can be seen in the assumption that undocumented immigrants take the jobs of American-born people, in the argument that equality and equity are not compatible and in the presumption that learning about human differences is inherently discriminatory.

Inclusive leaders recognize this tendency to win-lose but do not accept its dominance. And the way forward is not to blithely assure people that it's all really win-win. While there are synergies and "rising tides that lift all boats," it is not effective or truthful to counter win-lose narratives with simplistic "we all can win" platitudes.

Why not? Because there are winners and losers in corporate life. Some people get the project assignment, some don't. Some earn a larger bonus, some receive performance improvement plans. Some get the promotion, some don't. We compete, and that's okay, as long as it drives excellence and is fairly practiced (no small feat). Inclusive leaders acknowledge the challenge and opportunity in both competition and collaboration, on their teams and with customers.

As an inclusive leader, are you talking out loud about how competition and collaboration co-exist as success factors, specifically to counter the win-lose bias?

Related: 5 Examples of Unconscious Bias at Work and How to Solve Them

2. From the diversity vs. merit bias to differences as qualifications

Another well-worn bias on the loose is diversity vs. merit – the reality that those who differ in identities from established "norms" face persistent doubt that they are "qualified" and that they deserve or earned the job or assignment. The current shorthand for this bias is "they are a diversity hire."

Inclusive leaders diagnose and respond to this bias efficiently because presumed and ill-defined "merit" hurts the organization.

- The diversity vs. merit bias reinforces that "different is bad," when the research is clear that well-managed diverse teams innovate and produce more than homogeneous teams.
- This bias fuels the internalized self-doubt of those who are "different." Such an impact causes some to avoid applying for positions and can isolate the "only ones" who try to produce and advance in such low-performing environments. Know this: Claims of merit and meritocracy are not credible among those whose parents taught them "you have to work twice as hard to get half as far."
- One of the most troubling expressions of this bias shows in performance appraisals. To be specific, Black and Hispanic employees may receive lower performance ratings than they have earned. This can impact their work assignments, compensation, productivity, promotion and eventually their retention.

As a corrective, inclusive leaders can define “merit” in a more rational way. *Merit is the demonstrated and rewarded pattern of high performance, in a combination of individual effort, team success and positive results.*

The Society for Human Resource Management puts it another way: “Merit-based frameworks prioritize inclusivity and belonging, ensuring that everyone has the chance to contribute, develop, and succeed, shifting the focus from traditional measures of ‘most qualified’ to fostering environments where all talents can be discovered, nurtured, and valued.”

Inclusive leaders know that talent is distributed relatively evenly across populations. The way forward with *equitable hiring* is to focus on the market availability of the mix of talent, which is not discrimination. Thoughtful, fair-minded leaders don’t need quotas or targets or any other representational method that runs the risk of unfair preference when applied to individuals.

When we are positioned to compete for our fair share of market-available talent across relevant identity points, it brings “excellence” and “well-qualified” into focus. We steer away from bias inclined toward or against anyone primarily on the basis of their identities, so we can direct our decision-making toward competing for the mix of talent we need to succeed.

When it comes to *development opportunities and advancement*, rather than diversity vs. merit, we can move toward differences as qualifications. In this construct, diversity may include aspects of identity like race and gender, when, for example, the HR team is composed only of women. The new discipline is to analyze the relevance of any identity point and consider all manner of distinct abilities and transferable skills in the definition of qualifications.

One of my favorite examples: The tech company that always has

a sentence in a management promotion announcement explaining how the rising person is skilled as an inclusive leader. When the promoted person is a white man, announcing his inclusive leadership capabilities sends three important messages: 1) all leaders are expected to lead inclusively, 2) white men observing the announcement discover that white men can also be rewarded for leading inclusively, and 3) it rightly pressures the rising leader to get even better as an inclusive leader.

Many DEI leaders have missed a key theme in this meritocracy mess. To focus on merit and qualifications is not only a risk for bias – it's also vital to excellence in the organization. We should not abandon the pursuit of quality because the idea of merit has been used to abuse. So, we don't shy away from the discussion of qualifications, but instead we reduce how bias creeps into decisions via assumptions of merit, and we join our colleagues in committing to what is truly meritorious in past and expected performance.

Inclusive leaders need to get clear about merit and meritocracy in their own minds, understand the coded bias of this language for many and then redefine diversity vs. merit to differences as qualifications.

Related: 7 Ways to Check Your Bias When Evaluating Your Team

3. From DEI uniformity to respectful conflict resolution

There is no question that inclusion has fallen short of including many, and I say that as a white guy who has been developing inclusive leaders for more than 40 years. To the degree that leaders claiming to be inclusive have permitted DEI to operate coercively, perhaps pushback can be seen as a reaction to being pushed.

When we evaluate the current controversies around DEI, we can

see the aversion to losing in the win-lose frame. Inclusion fails anytime the tone of an interaction, program or policy comes across as “It’s our turn now, you’ve had your run, so sit down and be quiet.” When white men worry about their white son’s opportunities, responding only with data to counter the concern is tone deaf and uncaring. There’s fear to unpack, and scared colleagues to care about.

I realize it’s easy for me, as a person with much accumulated advantage, to point out the problems with “It’s our turn now.” However, as inclusive leaders, we have a decision to make: Are we going to coerce or influence? The recent election offers up the data: Requiring uniform acceptance of a progressive DEI agenda is not working, and it’s unscalable.

Inclusive leaders now must open the door to anyone feeling excluded by inclusion, marginalized by equity work or stereotyped by “diversity.” This opportunity calls us to depressurize DEI by connecting it to the company’s core values, by equipping colleagues to try on how inclusion helps them succeed and by inviting people in but not mandating this learning.

Obliging employees to “get with the program” is not scalable, but it does fuel conflict. So, it’s also time to tune up policies and practices around conflict resolution. The years ahead will be filled with opportunities to equip your culture to identify and resolve conflict driven by differences. Two vital resources to support this:

Inclusive leaders, right now, are finding the courage to reduce bias in their organizations. Be one of them. It’s a powerful moment to lead your teams beyond:

- Win/lose assumptions to embracing collaboration and competition
- Meritocracy as an argument to diverse excellence as an expectation

- Respectful learning and dialogue that can navigate conflict

It won't be easy, but it will be good, when you lead more inclusively by reducing bias.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/3-workplace-biases-inclusive-leaders-can-reduce-right-now/489251

'Anticompetitive Policies': Google Partially Loses Antitrust Case

For the second time in less than a year, a federal judge ruled that Google has an illegal monopoly on some advertising tech markets.

On Thursday, U.S. District Judge Leonie Brinkema in Alexandria, Virginia, wrote that Google had harmed advertisers and consumers by violating the Sherman Antitrust Act in two markets.

Related: Could Google Be Forced to Sell Chrome? The DOJ Is Reportedly Pushing For It.

"Google has willfully engaged in a series of anticompetitive acts to acquire and maintain monopoly power in the publisher ad server and ad exchange markets for open-web display advertising," Brinkema wrote in the 115-page opinion, per

Bloomberg.

“In addition to depriving rivals of the ability to compete, this exclusionary conduct substantially harmed Google’s publisher customers, the competitive process, and, ultimately, consumers of information on the open web,” the ruling continued.

The Justice Department has noted in the past that competition could “be restored” if Google would sell some of its businesses. Suggestions have included Google parting ways with its Chrome browser, which has more than 65% of the search market, or Google Ad Manager.

Related: Firefox Would Like to Remind Everyone It Exists and ‘Isn’t Backed By a Billionaire’

Brinkema also wrote that Google “further entrenched its monopoly power by imposing anticompetitive policies on its customers and eliminating desirable product features.”

Google did win part of the case, notably about its DoubleClick acquisition not harming competition.

In a statement to TechCrunch, Google’s Vice President of Regulatory Affairs, Lee-Anne Mulholland, wrote: “We won half of this case, and we will appeal the other half.”

“The Court found that our advertiser tools and our acquisitions, such as DoubleClick, don’t harm competition,” Mulholland continued. “We disagree with the Court’s decision regarding our publisher tools. Publishers have many options, and they choose Google because our ad tech tools are simple, affordable, and effective.”

Google is in court again next week in a separate trial on the DOJ’s request for the tech giant to sell its Chrome browser.

In August 2024, after a 10-week trial, a federal judge ruled that Google illegally monopolized the online search and search

ads markets.

The judge wrote in a 286-page opinion that “Google is a monopolist, and it has acted as one to maintain its monopoly” through actions like exclusive distribution agreements that make Google the default search engine on browsers like Apple’s Safari.

Related: Here’s Why Google Losing the Antitrust Case Matters, According to a Market Insights Expert

https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/google-antitrust-case-illegal-monopoly-federal-judge/490214