

The Importance of Digital Skills

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

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About the Author



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Behind every article or eBook, there is a story. I wrote this after being contacted by several organizations and quite a few individuals regarding skill enhancement to better navigate through our new normal. As I conducted some research and listened to others, I realized that this search for how to be current in the digital age was far greater than I initially realized.

Dr. Norfleet carries a long list of industry credentials, which includes John Maxwell Leadership Certification, Life Coach Certification, Lean Six Sigma Certification, and numerous awards for service and leadership. She is the Chief Executive Officer for Norfleet Integrated Solutions (NIS) and leads a team of highly-qualified professionals that work with individuals and corporations to provide strategic training and coaching solutions. Wendy's strengths are her extensive leadership experience, strong IT background, determination, and creativity. She thrives on challenges, particularly those that benefit her clients.

Prior to NIS, Dr. Norfleet served as college-wide Workforce Dean of Information Technology for Florida State College at Jacksonville. She is a graduate of Wayne State University (Ph.D., Instructional Technology), University of Detroit Mercy (M.S., Computer Information Systems), and Detroit College of Business (B.S., Computer Information Systems). Having worked in both the IT industry and higher education, Dr. Norfleet has served in many positions, including Professor, Dean, Interim Campus President, Software Computer Engineer, Quality Systems Manager, and Director of Information Technology. She serves as the board president for both the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce Information Technology Council (JITC) and the Pace Center for Girls Clay. Dr. Norfleet serves on several other boards, is a member of Leadership Jacksonville, and is a long-time mentor for Take Stock in Children.



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Navigating Our New Normal

Many of us faced an upheaval that may be hard for us to explain fully. Some worked for organizations that sent employees home to work, while others, due to the nature of their business, were forced to layoff or furlough employees. As our homes transformed into our new offices, we realize that we are being forced to embrace technology. There have been, and will continue to be, exponential changes across multiple dimensions of how we work. Perhaps the most pervasive, long-standing change will be the utilization of technology in the workplace.

While working from home, the best way to speed up the process of settling into your new normal is to fine tune your digital skills. Now that your living and workspace has become one, ask yourself what you need to do differently to maximize efficiency while working at home. We will never go back to normal. Instead, we must create our reinvented normal. In times like these, innovation is crucial to respond readily to unforeseen challenges. In our new normal, there is an expectation that everyone should be able to live, learn, work, and play in the digital world. The job landscape is changing fast, with many jobs and roles disappearing while new jobs are steadily being created. Those in leadership positions will strive to produce a flexible workforce, maximize efficiency while working remotely and maintain a collaborative virtual environment. In this quest for efficiency, the discrepancy between current skills and those needed in the digital world will become one of the biggest challenges faced in society.

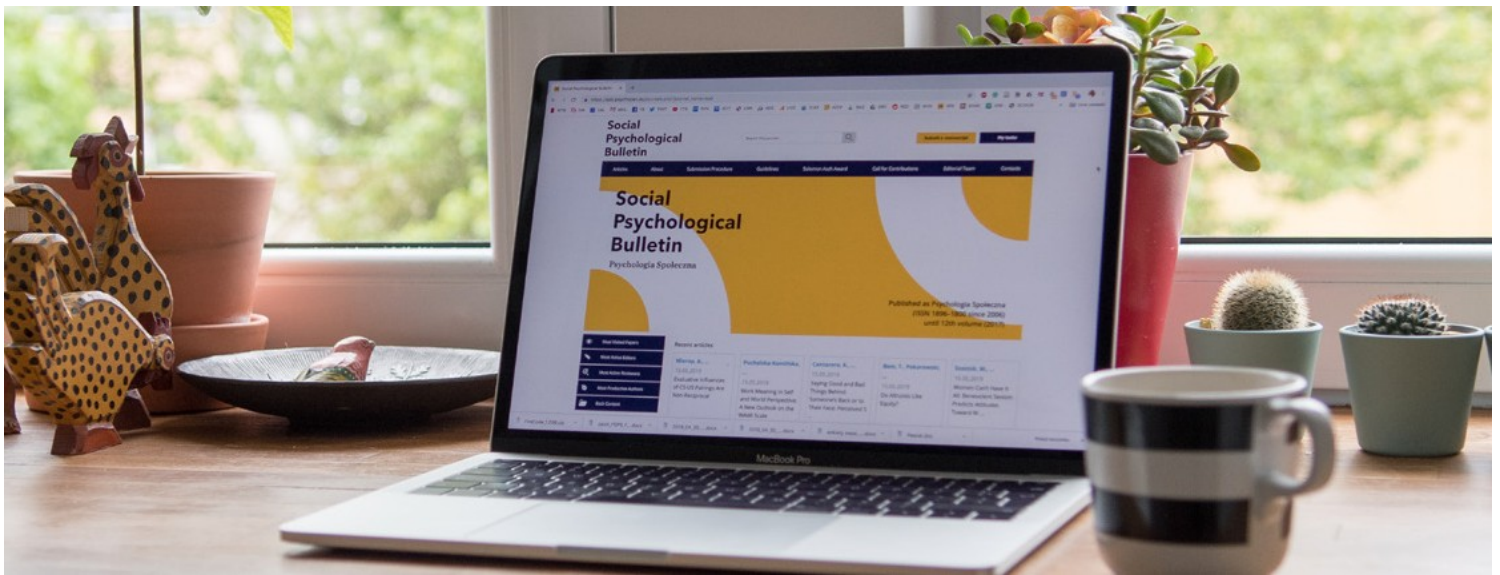
Hopefully, you'll find that you enjoy working from home. Maybe you have a better work-life balance, less commute time and more flexible hours. Yet, even when restrictions are lifted, digital skills will remain essential for anyone looking to stay competitive in the job market. According to The European Commission, 90% of jobs require basic digital skills. These jobs include teachers, doctors, agricultural workers, and lawyers. Even journalism has become more technical, emphasizing skills like Search Engine Optimization, JavaScript and Google Analytics.

Not only do these popular jobs require basic digital skills, but 38% of businesses reported that a lack of digital skills harmed performance. This is because the demand for digital skills is becoming universal. While basic digital literacy is required for the majority of jobs, more specific digital skills are becoming required.

Digital skills is a broad term, so let us demystify the definition. There are basic digital skills, such as Microsoft Word and Google Docs, that are minimal requirements for most occupations. Today, having this digital literacy is a necessity. There are also more advanced digital skills that a more select group of employees hold expertise in, such as IT tools and programming languages. Lastly, there are specific digital skills, such as design software and search engine analysis. These specific digital skills are mostly consumer-oriented and technology-specific. For the most part, these are the skills we are going to be focusing on. When companies try to address the digital skills gap, they are referring to those specific digital skills. It is meeting this high demand for digital skills that will require employees to upskill.

Due to the increase in remote work, many companies will strive to maximize productivity, establish leadership, and create virtual social intimacy. Truthfully, these things cannot happen until each person upskills. Even when society starts up, these fundamental shifts in the workplace will remain.

In order to keep up with these changes, it's crucial to keep adjusting and learning more about useful tech trends. Chances are, those trends will be implemented into your job sooner than later. By taking the time to enhance your digital skills within your industry, you'll become more employable, have opportunities for higher pay and stand out in the competitive market. That said, it can be complicated knowing where to begin when trying to upskill. Let's discuss which tech trends are emerging, which digital skills are becoming high-demand, and which digital skills will soon be a minimum requirement.



Section Two

Emerging Tech Trends

According to a Future of Jobs Survey in 2018 conducted by The World Economic Forum, there are dozens of new technologies that companies are likely to adopt by 2022. Big Data is expected to increase by 85%, machine learning is expected to go up by 73% and even humanoid robots are expected to be used 23% more. Because of the new use of emerging tech trends, new digital skills will be in demand.

To bridge the digital skills gap, many companies will be incentivized to pay a premium to acquire talent that has these skills. Right now, companies are in desperate need of those experienced in artificial intelligence (AI) and data science. Due to its rapid emergence, companies have difficulty finding the perfect employee with specific experience in that type of technology. Instead, they hire the person with the highest form of education. Yet, this person often does not have experience in that particular tech trend.

While many companies are looking to hire more PHDs to develop AI products, they are left with few who have actual experience in AI development. Instead of looking at general education, many companies will begin analyzing digital skillset. Because of this, acquiring these digital skills is more urgent than ever and will instantly set you apart within the job market.

Companies are already on the road to reskilling their employees. According to The World Economic Forum, 54% of all employees will require significant reskilling by 2022, and companies worldwide are aware of this necessity.

Because of this knowledge, companies will be eager to hire those who already have the digital skills to save time on training. If your company isn't helping you upskill, you must take the initiative and do so yourself. Further, businesses are low on the technology, resources, and time needed to train for digital skills. It's more crucial than ever that employees create a proactive response and learn the technology on their own.

How Companies Are Building Digital Skills

Companies are performing a fine-tuned balancing act. As digital skills become more necessary, companies are faced with employees becoming obsolete. To make matters worse, they are also looking at a severe shortage of qualified talent for our new digital age. Therefore, the motivation to ensure work with current employees and provide opportunities for upskilling is more urgent than ever. Working with employees that already have a vast wealth of knowledge and then supplementing that knowledge with digital skills is viewed as a win-win.

Although companies are in desperate need of those who have digital skills, developing an internal upskill program within organizations is not always easy. To do so, the company must know which skills will be needed in the upcoming years, then assess each employee's skill set accordingly. Once they go through this process, they can identify the specific training required within the upskill program. This process is not for the faint of heart. However, companies that have chosen to invest in upskilling have surely reaped the benefits and gained a competitive edge.

Upskilling takes place in a variety of ways depending on the level within each industry. Nonetheless, each sector has a responsibility to acknowledge the digital skills gap.

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| 1 | Industry | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How will our industry be more reliant on technology• Which tech trends are forcing our industry to evolve? |
| 2 | Company | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How will we hire & train the most qualified employees?• In what ways are we becoming more reliant on technology? |
| 3 | Organization/Team | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How will each individual role upskill?• How will upskilling help advance the company?• How will the team have access to these digital skills? |
| 4 | Individual | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Upskill individually and/or through the company.• Become more competitive in the job market and expand job opportunities.• Enhance salary potential. |

The benefits for a company working to minimize the digital skills gap will be plentiful. As machines and other technologies take over jobs, employees will find they are not yet equipped with the newly required skills. Once companies implement strategies to help their employees upskill, they'll boost employee value and become more cost-effective. Instead of scrambling to onboard new talent, training existing employees will allow them to become more valuable in the workplace and in their current position. According to Payslip, the high-tech skills gap is likely to amount to 500,000 empty roles in all of 2020. This leads to the hiring of unqualified candidates, making those who upskill early a rare commodity, allowing the company to evolve and positively adjust with the times, staying ahead of the competition. As the value of the company increases, revenue will increase with it.

Companies who test continuity procedures and contingency plans will be at the forefront by using their digital resources to test things out. On the contrary, businesses that do not acknowledge the digital skills gap will be forced to improvise. They will rely on the flimsy adaptability of the workforce in unprecedented situations.

As employees learn how to address their upskilling strategies, innovation and creativity will find its way in the workplace. Employees bring their own value to the company while upskilling under their role on the team. In turn, companies who implement a plan to upskill create more employee engagement. A great way to begin the upskill process is to have a good relationship between employer and employees. Once the upskilling process begins, this relationship will improve along the way, creating a more effective work environment overall.

Implementing Digital Skills in the Workplace

Implementing digital skills at your workplace will allow you to stay ahead of the competition and create a more productive environment. Your employees will have better access to remote working, more ways to collaborate from home, and more opportunities for online training. In general, most businesses acknowledge that a robust online presence is crucial to increasing revenue in the modern world. While traditional forms of sales and marketing become outdated, digital skills become a must-have. By implementing these skills, you'll build customer relationships and enhance sales through online expansion.

To implement digital skills at your workplace, raising awareness about the importance of technology is a meaningful first step. Sooner than later, digital skills will be required at every level, making it crucial for each sector to upskill. To promote access to digital skills, you can fund digital skills development on your own, through government channels or external organizations. Further, you can build multi-stakeholder partnerships and agree on a digital skills strategy to start putting in place.

Instead of focusing on each person learning the same digital skills, focus on those who have low digital skills, and make sure they upskill first. Furthermore, it's essential to focus on each individual's role and analyze which skills would be best to acquire.

For instance, someone in app development may need to learn more about JavaScript programming. Yet, the person who promotes that app and runs the digital market aspect of the product may need to focus on learning Search Engine Optimization and Google Analytics.

By implementing a comprehensive digital skills training program in the workplace, you'll avoid the vicious cycle of continually hiring more qualified employees. Instead, you'll hold a pool of the most qualified employees that can adapt to the workplace's changing technology. This is the most effective way to reduce costs, improve productivity and address the digital skills gap in the right direction.

Developing Digital Skills on Your Own

Although digital skills are increasingly in-demand, many companies don't have the time, technology or funds to help each employee upskill. To learn digital skills on your own, ask yourself which skills your job may require in the upcoming years. For instance, if you work for a tech company, keep in mind that data scientists are newly in-demand by employers worldwide. In fact, a recent McKinsey report showed that the US alone has a shortage of at least 140,000 people with analytical expertise. Soon, data science will be a minimum requirement. The most accessible way to learn digital skills is by enrolling in an online course. One way to level up your digital skills include utilizing online platforms such as Udacity, Coursera and Future Learn. All of these platforms offer digital skills courses for you to become more employable. Other sources for enhancing skills include companies like Norfleet Integrated Solutions that can meet with organizations and individuals to offer consultations, assessments, strategic planning, and comprehensive design of training programs. From expanding an online presence to learning about digital workplace trends, enrolling in a course on digital skills will allow you to stay on top of the most recent technology. While others may fall behind, it's up to you to keep adjusting to the current needs. Thankfully, it's never been easier.

Even if you don't feel the urgent need to develop digital skills for your current job, learning how to operate digitally has become a new requirement. Instead of replicating your workplace at home, adjusting and creating something new has proven to be more productive. The Pew Research Center found that 87% of working

adults now acknowledge that it will be essential to develop new skills to keep up with the changes in their workplace.

While developing new skills, you'll find that it will always take you back to the digital world. For instance, if you want to improve your written communication skills, you must start using editing software like Grammarly. If you're looking to improve your next job interview, you'll be guided to free online courses to help you do so. For job interviews, this may also include navigation on the online platforms. The soft skills that employees need, such as professionalism and interpersonal skills, will be acquired by knowing the digital world. Those who show professionalism must be able to remain self-motivated while working from home. Those who show interpersonal skills must maintain an active collaborative environment via technology. The best employees will be able to manage across various time zones, facilitate team-building and stay productive without needing external guidance.

While it's clear that digital skills are increasing in demand, staying on top of the relevant digital trends can be quite overwhelming. That said, it's essential to make sure that your skillset mirrors the latest industry trends.

The best way to upskill is not just to learn about digital skills, but to put them to action. To stay informed on the latest digital developments, practice using new platforms such as WordPress. Instead of just taking a course on Search Engine Optimization, test some keywords out. Many companies have begun implementing platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, requiring at least basic knowledge of new software. In the process of putting these digital skills to use, you'll gain credibility and become more effective at work.

The Vision for the Future

Ultimately, the urgent need for digital skills can no longer be underestimated. When it comes to addressing the digital skills gap, everyone plays a part. Industries must begin to identify the tech trends that will change their workforce. Companies must hold meetings to discuss potential upskilling programs. Individual teams and employees must analyze how their role will evolve, and which new skills will be of value.

The future of digital skills is guaranteed to be unlike anything the modern world has seen. With machines and humanoid robots taking over faster than many can adjust to, learning about the technology that surrounds us is crucial for succeeding in this new normal.

Norfleet Integrated Solutions Inc. works with both individuals and organizations to perform skills gap analysis, conduct training and to provide both individual and group coaching. We are now offering complimentary consultations. We'd love to hear from you!