

Working smarter with AI and a SharePoint intranet that holds it all together

Allyse Denmark, OneDigital

Well, thank you all for having me. I am going to share my slides. One moment, please. Hopefully everyone can see those okay. And I'm just really thrilled to be here. I've learned so much from the prior presentations and all of the research that SWOOP has been sharing with us. A colleague of mine is also dialed in, Chris Herrer. He's actually at his son's graduation in Italy, but has dialed in. He may have a glass of wine if he shares his camera with us.

But I wanted to share with you what we're doing with AI at OneDigital, not only from a business standpoint with the company is doing overall, but what we're doing in the communications function and a little bit about where the communications function is going overall, what this means for our profession, and a few thoughts I'd share at the end about that. So if you're not familiar with OneDigital, a lot of folks think we might be a software company, but we're actually a HR consulting.

We provide benefits like medical dental vision, 401k, all kinds of insurance, Medicare, property and casualty, and so forth to businesses all over the US and Canada, primarily companies that have under a thousand employees. And we're based in Atlanta. Our company has been growing rapidly. So we just celebrated our 25th anniversary and our goal is to double in five. So by 2030, we are expected to be twice the size.

We have been doing that for the past five years, like a rolling five years, but the executive team really realized that what has gotten us to our growth trajectory over time isn't necessarily going to be the same things going forward. And AI is really now at the center of our growth engine. So I always like to start with strategy, regardless of whether it's a presentation like this or supporting a stakeholder and how this supports the business. And it's also directly tied to our core values.

So one of our core values is fresh thinking, and we really pride ourselves on always looking at things from a new lens and not being afraid to dive in and try new things. So when generative AI burst onto the scene in the 2024 timeframe or so, we dove right in. And I'm going to share with you a little bit about that. Specifically, the way the communications function is supporting OneDigital overall with AI being at the center of our growth strategy are through all of our communications.

So we support the product team with all of our different, excuse me, we support the product team with everything that they're doing around AI and what the goals are from the executive standpoint. We have so much content that we're sharing that sometimes we do a dedicated

newsletter, like an AI takeover of the newsletter. So all of our channels are called Pulse. We do a Monday release of our newsletter, and this was a recent one where we did an AI dedicated version.

It talks about the strategy, it talks about how we're investing in our people with upskilling, even some media interviews that we're getting, and how to talk to clients about AI. Another communication channel that we're using to help our people understand what this means for the business, what it means for them, and to provide upskilling for all of our folks is our newish Viva Engage channel. And this has really taken off, thanks to Chris, who's on the line here. We have, since the moment we launched it, it's been gaining followers, I wanna say like doubling every few days.

And the content and the information that people are sharing with each other is really meaty. People are teaching each other really great tips, success stories, and then we're turning that into content that we can then push out to the whole company. The way that all of our people across the business get to our AI tools is through our intranet, which is called PulseNet. And the AI hub on PulseNet is the go-to place where people can get everything they need regarding all of our tools for AI.

It's not just the tools, but it's also the access to all of the training classes, it's access to all of the news and information. It's also access to the section in the middle, this enablement hub. So as an HR consulting firm, our clients are really wondering what AI means for their business and their workforce. And this is the hub within a hub of where you can talk to our, where all of our consultants talk to the clients about what AI means for them. But the real meat of the AI hub is that it lists all of our coworkers.

All of our AI coworkers or agents have a name, a face, a bio, and they are tied to very, very specific areas of the business. So this is an example of bio pages for our coworkers. And as you can see, Ace here is like a universal coworker. Ace can, he's not tied to any one part of the business. He's trained on everything related to OneDigital. He can search our intranet. He can search and have access to any files that you train him on. He can get to know you.

So you can share a little bit about you, your role, things that are very specific to how you do your job and can do all the writing analysis and so forth. All of the other ones are very specialized to different parts of our business. So as I mentioned, we are a benefits consulting firm. So Ben, the benefits expert, this is a tool that our consultants use for the benefits we sell and provide to our clients, not our employee benefits for all of us. We do have a coworker for that. Her name is Carly. But Ben is the benefits coworker for our consultants.

And this agent can look at renewals, look at all of the ways that our clients are using their benefits, claims data, help prepare for introductions to new clients and prospects and so forth. These other ones happen to be in our property and casualty business unit. Charity is dedicated to property and casualty insurance clients who are nonprofits. And Amy is a more general property and casualty. She can process claims. She can look at risk analysis to

make sure that our clients are set up on the right level of coverage for property and casualty and the like.

In addition to what OneDigital is doing for all the different roles within the business and how it's driving our growth, here in the communications team, we have really started diving into AI as well. So we have built some of our own coworkers these are not visible to the rest of the business. But the one on the right here, I call it IC, like IC Internal Communications, or our rest of the team probably I think just calls it our writer bot. But essentially IC is trained on all of our language, all of our style guide information, everything related to how we communicate internally.

It understands all of our stakeholder needs. For example, we support HR quite a bit in benefits. So the benefits that our own people get, it knows everything about them and can create communications very quickly for the communications team. We also have one for our CEO. Our CEO's name is Adam. So I call him the Adam bot. And Adam bot has been trained on every presentation, every video, every memo, every town hall, everything that Adam has ever done and is great at writing in his tone and voice. He uses it himself in addition to work that I do with him and his executive communications.

And then on the AI workflow set of things, this is where things are really getting exciting. So one of the ways that we get requests is through these intake forms. And many of you may have something similar. So anyone can suggest a article to go into one of our Pulse channels. And the way it works today is that an email form comes in, it goes to our specialists. We have a very human-centric approach in how we serve the stakeholders.

So she responds directly to the stakeholder, looks at it, evaluates it, determines if it does meet the criteria for an article, drafts it, goes back and forth. She requests two weeks notice for these articles to go out. And using AI workflow, we now have eliminated 80% of that. So the form comes in, the workflow reads the form, including the key messages, the purpose, any calls to actions, links, and so forth. And within minutes or less, drafts an article, headline, blurb, links, headline, all of the details, and emails it right back to our specialist.

And she can then not just respond to the stakeholder with, hey, got your form, we're looking at it, give me a couple of weeks to get back to you, but within a very short amount of time can send them, she does edit this to make sure that it's accurate. So there is a lot of governance and judgment that goes into these automated articles, but it can write it immediately. And then she can go back with a more comprehensive conversation with the stakeholder about when we think this would go out, what kind of messaging we're recommending and so forth.

We're also working on having this not only create the article, but create the images that would go along with it, the thumbnail, even an entire graphics campaign like digital signage and so forth based on our style guide. So the coworkers that we've created for corporate communications and these workflows are completely trained on our style guide and can crank out everything from graphics to PowerPoint and whatnot, fully branded and brand

compliant. We're also looking at having these workflows, we're testing it right now to build completely comprehensive communication plans and strategies.

So sometimes people aren't asking for a single article, they're asking for a more complex three month campaign about a new maybe service that we're rolling out to clients that we want people to really dig into. And also it can build webpages. So a lot of people ask for new sections of PulseNet, those go to Chris who's on the line and it's a pretty time intensive process right now, but these workflows can create fully formed brand compliant intranet pages immediately and then go to Chris for review and he can work directly with the stakeholder to refine them and get them published.

So this has been a really big change to how we do our work in the communications team and saving us a lot of time, a lot of mundane tasks. With a company that's growing every five years and a communications team that's essentially staying flat and small, there's five of us, including me, these kinds of tools are almost like having an unlimited number of additional team members that we can use to support our work.

And I'll have to admit that when I first started digging into AI and what it meant for the business, what it meant for communications, all this automation, I was a little worried maybe is the right word, concerned. What does this mean for the future of the communications team at OneDigital? If we're known as being writers and AI can do all this writing and crank out webpages and all the like, is there a risk to the people here at OneDigital and my team? And what does it mean for the profession overall?

So I have been doing quite a bit of research on this and working with my team quite a bit. And frankly, the worries are justified. What we're seeing is that as CEOs and heads of HR are deciding how AI may displace people in their workforce, communications is really at the top of the list. So I call this slide first, the bad news. It is a reality. Job postings is, many of you maybe know or have heard of this from others who are in the market looking. Job postings in the communications field and marketing are down about 64%.

66% of all CEOs are either planning to freeze hiring for the rest of the year or cut or some combination of both. And that's for all roles, not just communications. But again, communications are at the top of the list or other and other back office roles. When Amazon laid off 14,000 people at the end of last year, many of them are marketing communications. Same with IBM, Google, Chevron. I'm sure all of you have seen the news. But there is some good news.

And that is that while job descriptions that require AI skills have across the board, not just in communications, have gone up something like 600%. If you have proven AI skills on your resume, you're much more likely to be invited in for an interview. And these are real skills. Like, I mean, we can all say that we know how to use AI and use AI to try to generate resumes that match the job description, but it's getting sophisticated on both ends. And the more good news is that if you really have these proven skills, you can get a much higher compensation package.

Somewhere between 33 and 36% is what the research shows, that if you really know how to use these workflows and use AI in sophisticated analytical ways, it can really make a difference in the package that you're offered. And lastly, I think, you know, we've seen over the years, the dot-com era, or when there's a big financial crisis and jobs are affected, it sometimes takes a while for this technology or for this external situation to work its way through the economy and the job situation.

But the research is showing that, and there's gonna be quite a bit of ups and downs and shake out over the next four or five years, but in the end, there is an expectation that there will be more jobs created than lost. To the tune of 78 million is what's being projected. And again, that's not just communications, but again, you really need to have the right skills. So the skill set expectation is really changing based on what AI can do that used to require a human and frankly no longer does.

So where my team and I have really been focused is on how do we stay relevant? What is the most important thing that we can do to not only, when those conversations are happening around the executive table and they're thinking about, well, you know, maybe we don't need to hire as much, or maybe there are some roles that can be replaced with AI. How do we stay not only relevant, but indispensable to the organization? So these are the nine skills that my team and I are 100% focused on.

And we talk about it in all of our team meetings and our one-on-ones with our managers and so forth. And the first one is AI fluency. It is number one. It's not because it's the most important. It's because that's just becoming baseline requirement for all communication jobs, regardless the size of the company. AI is just being infused into every business and the communications team needs to understand what it means for the business and how to use these tools to get your own work done. But the rest of them are really not related to AI much at all.

These are the things that our stakeholders only want to work with a human on. While they could probably chat with an AI coworker and write all their stuff or create a communication plan or even design graphics, they want a partner that they can trust who understands what they're trying to achieve, what the goals are for their part of the business and wants those goals to succeed as much as they do. And they're looking for somebody who can guide them and make recommendations and be proactive when it comes to what they are trying to achieve.

So if you're supporting the IT department or HR, the sales and marketing, the product lines, what have you, they want a partner that they can know will guide them in the right direction, can make sure things are working and just be an ongoing support and thought partner to them. So these nine skills, all of us are self-evaluating how well we think we have these skills today.

We're then working with our leaders and our managers to make sure that we can get access to build these skills, whether it's on the job, shadowing, going to a conference like this or

whatever it takes to make sure that our stakeholders see us as being the human that they want to work with and that cannot be replaced by a robot.