

CEO UPDATE

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Associations need policies to guard against pitfalls of AI use

Free generative AI tools gobble data, making it available to anyone; use of AI in employment practices could lead to discrimination

By William Ehart

Think of generative artificial intelligence, which has been all the rage since last November's release of ChatGPT, as The Blob. If you remember classic horror movies, The Blob was an amorphous alien being that absorbed everything in its path. And if you're not careful, your proprietary association data could get absorbed by AI, replicated and then made available for other people to pilfer.



To prevent this from happening, technology experts recommend developing policies for how staff and volunteers can use AI. Generative AI tools learn every time users input information.

Anything you put into free versions of AI tools—ChatGPT, Bard, Bing—is there for others to see and learn from, too.

“The problem is really about data,” said KiKi L'Italien, a speaker and CEO of Amplified Growth and online community Association Chat. “Be

careful about how much information you plug into it, because do you want that information to be accessible to anyone? There are outside parties who know how to scrape sites, and if you're not being very careful, they could go and get proprietary confidential information that would make your organization susceptible.

“We're going to have to train people how to use it safely, especially when our volunteers are using these tools and probably have no idea that uploading something like a list of volunteers' emails and personal information could lead them into something problematic,”

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Taking 'road less traveled' to C-suite

How a marketing professional, journalist and psychologist transitioned to CEO roles

By Melanie Kalmar

Bennie F. Johnson, CEO of American Marketing Association (AMA), vividly recalls the first conversation he had with a traditional, nonprofit association recruiter about wanting to become a CEO. The recruiter didn't understand how someone from marketing could become a CEO. Johnson was told that recruiters only place people who are in operations and finance into these top positions.

Johnson then proceeded to explain to the recruiter all of the skills that individuals in marketing excel at: strategic planning, global expansion, innovation management, understanding

the customer based on insight, applying technology dynamically and smartly, and building relationships. “Why wouldn't you want someone who has this in their tool kit to serve in a leadership capacity?” he said.

While that recruiter wasn't convinced, Johnson's marketing background ended up playing a key role in his ascension to the executive level. “When you think about contemporary industry and the changing future of business, you need those market-oriented change skills,” he said. “That's what fuels my leadership and success as a CEO.”

Johnson is one of many CEOs whose unique

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FIRST-TIME CEO MOORE LOOKS TO ADVANCE DIVERSITY IN THE ASSOCIATION COMMUNITY

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AI policies and procedures

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L'Italien said.

Quickly deleting the information you enter into an AI tool may help protect you, but it is not foolproof, she said.

"None of us know exactly how much safer it really is," L'Italien said. "They say that if you go in and delete your chat immediately, then it doesn't stay there for the model to learn from. So, it's good practice to do it. They want us all to feel very safe. But I wouldn't."



L'Italien



Russell

Solutions

L'Italien and others told CEO Update that associations should use versions of AI built for an entire organization, such as ChatGPT Enterprise or Microsoft's newly launched 365 Copilot, which is integrated into the company's Office suite. (ChatGPT's pricing is flexible based on how an organization will use it; Microsoft charges its enterprise customers \$30 per month per user for 365 Copilot.)

"With Copilot, Microsoft is not consuming your data and putting it into a large language model," said Tori Miller Liu, CEO of the Association for Intelligent Information Management (AIIM). Large language models are the learning algorithms behind AI chatbots and are trained by vast amounts of data from the Internet.

"When you're thinking about using generative AI as an organization, the No. 1 thing you need to know is, don't use it unless you're in an enterprise license agreement," said Noelle Russell, a speaker on AI who has worked with companies such as Microsoft, IBM and Amazon. She is currently chief AI strategist for consulting firm Accenture. "You want to create a walled garden around your data so that you can control who has access and how long they have access."

Liu said that AIIM does not input member



Miller Liu



Tenenbaum

data into large language models. "I'm actually very reluctant to share industry research data that we've generated as well. And those are conversations that I've already had with my staff. But the risk spectrum is different depending on the organization, and the value of using generative AI has to be weighed against the risk.

"At an individual level, it's pretty easy to say to staff when and where they can use AI," she said. "And it's easier to train them around that because they're

just using it to make small improvements to their work.

"I think the situation becomes much more complex when you talk about using this AI application to facilitate collaboration across the association. That's when CEOs need to be much more deliberate in their decision-making," Liu said.

Among the risks of using AI is uncertainty about how articles, speeches, research documents and the like were produced.

"If we use generative AI for something that is actually going to be shared with members, we will disclose it," Liu said. "So, if it's a video or an image or even if text was used, if we did not heavily manipulate it after it came out of the AI application, then we will disclose that this was AI-generated."

Potential bias

AI models were created by people and have absorbed information that may lead to bias. In fact, the more AI is used, the more bad information it may rely on.

"We're already seeing research about how the output from ChatGPT is depreciating, it's not as good as it first was, because it's learning from social media, which is not a great source. And it's learning from prompts that might be inaccurate as well. It's a little amusing, but the more people

contribute to it, the worse the data is," Liu said.

Associations should guard against bias in marketing and hiring. "At Accenture, we have a team dedicated to bias mitigation," Russell said. "It's as easy as just changing the gender on the prompt, or the ZIP code, and seeing if the model is going to give you the same information.

"AI models are looking at patterns over the last 40 years and going, 'Well, someone who looks like a 40-year-old Latina is probably not making seven figures,'" said Russell, who hails from Puerto Rico. "That's just an assumption based on decades of data."

Some associations are using generative AI to screen resumes and recorded interviews with job candidates. Groups should be aware that AI platforms have bias built in, said nonprofit attorney Jeff Tenenbaum, who wrote an article on AI legal risks for the American Bar Association's Business Law Today and is managing partner of Tenenbaum Law Group.

"If you end up not hiring certain candidates and it turns out they were weeded out because of some AI screening platform that is discriminating on the basis of some protected characteristic, that creates liability risk," Tenenbaum said.

"For anyone who's using AI in any aspect of employee hiring, performance management or anything else, it's particularly risky from a discrimination perspective," he said.

Don't fall behind

Still, generative AI is not something that CEOs and associations should avoid just because there are risks, said Patrick Glaser, chief practice officer at McKinley Advisors.

"Associations also need to be looking at artificial intelligence from an opportunistic point of view, because there's a risk in doing nothing," he said.

"They need to be getting involved in it, understanding it, experimenting with it, seeing how it fits in their business in order to stay ahead of competition from the for-profit sector as well as other nonprofits," Glaser said. "The biggest risk for me is not engaging on the topic." ■

L'Italien will be among the speakers at Association Trends' Association AI Day on Nov. 6 at the National Union Building in Washington, D.C. Russell and Tenenbaum will be panelists at the CEO Update LIVE: Emerging Technology forum on Dec. 13 at the National Association of Home Builders headquarters in D.C.