



# We Are in a People Business

## AI & what the future holds for the imaging channel

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**W**e have all heard about the power of artificial intelligence (AI). This technology offers immense potential for businesses to improve processes, reduce downtime and enhance the customer experience. However, its implementation demands careful consideration.

The imaging channel is built on three core functions: sales, service and operations. Today, AI has already begun to profoundly impact all of these areas. What can get lost in all of this — and what we continue to focus our attention on — is this industry is, and will continue to be, a people business. That does not mean AI will not play a significant role in the imaging channel's future, but at the end of the day, AI is a tool that will assist people with solving the challenges of today and tomorrow.

That is not to say that AI has not already become an extremely useful tool in the imaging channel. Print is an area where it certainly excels. For example, AI technologies have been implemented to automate print settings between different types of paper, provide predictive maintenance solutions to improve MFP performance and create intelligent AI workflows to enhance process automation.

AI has so many real-life applications in the office. Think of it as a tool to help process and utilize data to automate repetitive tasks faster than a human possibly could, or to augment tasks that users often perform manually. AI is designed to recognize patterns within large amounts of data by utilizing iterative processing and intelligent algorithms. Beyond its well-known capabilities, such as writing copy, AI can be used to analyze customer feedback, identify sales opportunities based on interactions with potential customers, streamline customer service processes, and automate many accounting and data-processing tasks.

Looking ahead, the imaging channel will see AI playing a more integrated role in the day-to-day operations of the core functions mentioned above. Some examples include:

### Sales

Sales teams can leverage AI to analyze market trends and customer data, tailoring their approaches to meet specific client needs more effectively. AI technologies can also enhance sales processes by automating note-taking and streamlining sales process improvements within CRM systems. This allows sales teams



to focus more on building relationships and closing deals, rather than administrative tasks.

### Service

Service departments can use AI-driven diagnostics to anticipate equipment failures and perform maintenance proactively, reducing downtime and enhancing customer satisfaction. Additionally, AI-driven chatbots improve

customer service by providing instant and accurate responses to common queries. This not only enhances customer satisfaction, but also allows service teams to address more complex issues, providing more efficient support systems.

### Operations

In operations, AI can optimize workflows by automating routine tasks, managing inventory and streamlining logistics, leading to greater efficiency and cost savings. This includes document processing, data entry and other operational processes, reducing manual workloads and minimizing errors in day-to-day operations within the imaging channel.

However, as AI becomes more commonplace in the imaging channel, businesses must prioritize and address what is ethical, any copyright concerns and data privacy. Transparent AI practices and adherence to regulatory standards will be crucial in maintaining trust with clients and stakeholders. As this technology continues to take off, it is vital to stay on top of things and hold ourselves accountable. At Konica Minolta, we are committed to ensuring that our advancements in AI are not just about growth, but also about ethical and responsible use.

To support that mission, we have established an AI steering committee of about eight or nine people who have incredible backgrounds and knowledge in this space. This team will play a crucial role in staying updated on emerging AI technologies and bringing all kinds of ideas and strategies that are critical to implementing an AI strategy. Beyond staying informed, the committee actively contributes to implementing controls, crafting policies and, most importantly, aiding in risk mitigation. Its primary focus is on promoting the responsible and beneficial use of AI within the organization.

While AI can handle data processing and routine tasks, human insight and creativity are essential for relationship-building and strategic decision making. People will remain indispensable. Training and development programs will be vital in

equipping employees with the skills needed to work alongside AI effectively.

Gartner has some interesting data points concerning the next generation of potential decision makers in the B2B market. Eighty percent of all B2B sales interactions will occur in digital channels by 2025 and 44% of millennials prefer a seller-free sales experience (source: 2022 Gartner B2B buyer survey). These types of numbers point to an amazing opportunity for AI. However — and this is a big however — another survey by Gartner points to some less affirming outcomes. Buyers in the B2B space are two times more likely to have a better experience when interacting with a salesperson and 55% of buyers experience “moderate to high dysfunction” when a sales rep is not involved (source: 2020 Gartner B2B sales interactions survey). What this type of data points to — and as many of us know and believe: people still buy from people. AI will serve a role, but it will be designed to help us, not replace us.

In conclusion, AI holds significant promise for transforming the imaging channel, driving innovation and efficiency

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across sales, service and operations. By thoughtfully integrating AI and maintaining a focus on the human aspect of the business, the imaging channel can navigate the challenges and opportunities of the future, ensuring sustained growth and success. ■

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