

Building Organizational Capacity for AI

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I had the wonderful opportunity to attend the 2025 ACI Conference in Atlantic City, NJ, where I was fortunate to learn about one of the most talked-about topics in both the communications world and society as a whole: artificial intelligence. Speaker John Wihbey, an associate professor at Northeastern University, led us through best practices, the ethics of AI, and how conservation communicators can utilize AI while maintaining integrity.

AI has been a buzzing topic for the past few years, and a lot of us have questioned whether it has a place in our industry. Concerns persist around environmental costs of AI systems, ethical implications, and the fear that reliance on machine-generated suggestions might dull our cognitive sharpness and creative edge. Wihbey's message was clear; AI isn't here to replace creativity, it's here to clear the runway for it. He explained how AI can be integrated into workflows to streamline time-consuming tasks to allow us to focus our energy where it matters most. While daunting, artificial intelligence should not be seen as an all-knowing guru but rather as a hive of specialized worker bees. If you treat it like a smart intern and give it reliable sources and a solid foundation of information, AI can handle the heavy lifting of research and help gather the details needed to draft press releases, social media posts, campaigns, and more.

Training an AI to pull information exclusively from your agency's resources can save time, provide a clear view of data, and even help predict how audiences might react to news. For example, at Nebraska Game and Parks, we have decades of *Nebraskaland* magazine archived online, a collection that could take an entire day to sort through manually. With AI, I can instantly locate an article with ease. When given a body of research to share with the public, AI can scan it and highlight the most important details to shape content. Wihbey also suggested a fascinating idea: creating audience simulations to predict how people may respond to news releases and campaigns. This approach could be especially valuable in the conservation field, where sensitive, science-heavy topics often require careful communication.

A valuable suggestion was that every organization should establish an AI committee. These groups can weigh risks and benefits, set clear policies for AI use, and provide oversight for any AI-generated content. Having humans review how AI is applied creates a safeguard against misinformation and helps preserve organizational integrity. Without rules and best practices in place, AI-generated content can easily contain missteps, biases, or inaccuracies. This erodes public trust, particularly for conservation organizations built on

credibility. It is tempting to let AI become a free-for-all tool for creating all content, but as Wihbey cautioned, that path leads to 'automated content farms'. Instead, AI should be used to amplify human creativity and reinforce core brand values, not distort or replace them.

Wihbey didn't spend much time discussing the environmental costs of artificial intelligence, but as conservation communicators, we need to keep that concern top of mind. An equally pressing challenge is the spread of misinformation. In a world where AI-generated summaries often appear as the first search results, it is crucial that we publish accurate information and position ourselves as reliable, trustworthy sources. Until legislation defines the limits of AI's reach, it falls on us to do everything we can to ensure the public is correctly informed.

As someone who has been staunchly against AI since its rise in 2023, the presentation was extremely informative and opened my mind to its possibilities, and I'm very thankful for John Wihbey's insights. As we move further into a technologically driven world, it is important to hold onto our core values and integrity while adapting to new tools. My biggest takeaway is that AI should not replace human thinking but instead create space for it to thrive.