Toolkit

Set of Digital Skills for Entrepreneurship

The COVID-19 pandemic had changed the whole world, people's attitude to new technologies and remote work, also, job requirements. As most companies, both micro and international ones, have started to improve a remote or hybrid working system, business, no matter what kind of, has become more digital.

That's why we prepared for you the Set of Digital Skills for Entrepreneurship:
- **Data analysis** — according to "The Future of Jobs Report 2020" [p. 30] published in October 2020 by the World Economic Forum, data analyst and scientist is in the first place in top 20 job roles across industries. Data analysis is a crucial skill in the reality of fake news. Also, in the top 15 skills for 2025 [p. 36] in the first place, you can find analytical thinking and innovations. So it's not only about analyzing data — but you need to also be ready to use them in innovative projects.
- **Critical thinking and analysis** — skill linked to the previous one; placed in the 4th place in the top 15 skills for 2025 [p. 36 of the report].
- **Complex problem-solving** — placed in the 3rd place in the top 15 skills for 2025 [p. 36 of the report]. It's not only to find a source of the problem. In the new reality of the digital world, you need to be ready to face a problem from different perspectives. Having an open mindset and creativity will be beneficial in this process.
- **Creativity, originality, and initiative** — speaking about creativity, it was also mentioned in the ranking — placed in the 5th place in the top 15 skills for 2025 [p. 36 of the report]. It was linked to the originality and initiative — why? Because it's hard to create something original and new in the era of the Internet and social media. Do you know that thought that everything you make up somebody made up before you? Exactly... Creativity, originality, and initiative as a skill show you the way to find new possibilities to adapt well-known solutions in your reality.
- **Active learning and learning strategies** — placed in the 2nd place in the top 15 skills for 2025 [p. 36 of the report]. It's the top skill of every entrepreneur — you can't make a business without active learning. The entrepreneur needs valuable sources of information for learning, but also unlearning old ideas and behaviors. Unlearning old ideas and behaviors in the context of digital skills seems to be crucial. You have everyday updates, new addons, interface changes... you have to be always ready for changes.

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- **Resilience, stress tolerance, and flexibility** — of course, linked to the above-mentioned everyday changes. These skills are placed in the 9th place in the top 15 skills for 2025 [p. 36 of the report].
- **Digital marketing/ digital strategy** — the above-mentioned report mention specialists in these fields in 4th place in the top 20 job roles across industries. Digital marketing, especially social media marketing, plays a huge part currently in designing brands' image and communication, increasing selling, and establishing cooperation.

Based on:
World Economic Forum, October 2020: "The Future of Jobs Report 2020": http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2020.pdf

Best Practices:
What worked in which environment under which circumstances?

Whether you start building an online business by yourself, as a freelancer, starting self-employment, or decide to form a team, to achieve the desired level of productivity in the online environment, you should remember the following points:

1. Cooperation is a key
As cliché as it sounds, without online networking, you'll just be a free electron. You can embrace cooperation in many ways:

- **Contribute to Facebook groups** — you'll showcase your level of expertise while helping others. The more you post, the more you'll be identified with your specialization, thus increasing your chances of getting a paid cooperation offer on interesting projects.
- **Create your communities on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.** Bring together people with similar values. Only people who share your values will be able to become ambassadors for your business without the promise of reward or payment.
- **Exchange skills.** The cooperation does not have to be based on financial compensation; you can start your business based on barter, i.e. non-cash exchange of goods and services. If you're great at web design, that's your currency - you can teach someone web design or create a website for him/her in exchange for another service or good. Remember, the good/service in this exchange has a contract price. You

mustn't get your clients and partners used to the idea that everything can be done with you using the barter method, because then you'll never start making a profit.

- **Take advantage of EU funding and crowdfunding opportunities.** This allows you to not only grow your business but also to network with partners across the EU.

2. Flexibility is not enough anymore

Through the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting accelerated digitization, the term "flexibility" has taken on a new meaning. Previously, when it appeared in recruitment offers it meant more or less "be ready to adapt to our environment". Now flexibility means much more:

- it is a readiness for sudden changes in the environment (including internal and external regulations)
- it is an ability to implement action in situations of change and crisis
- it is an awareness that what you are learning now may soon become obsolete, so you have to be ready to take the next steps.

Whether you choose Agile or Lean in your business, or maybe you choose to skip them altogether and take yet another path, being ready for transitions should be your top priority. The best practice is to monitor changes through newsletters and blogs created by apps that you use every day and LinkedIn feed.

3. Calculate the risk

Risk should always be included in the creation of a business and it is not negotiable. However, when we talk about online business and online branding, we take on additional risks due to the characteristics of online tools, applications, and social media.

So pay special attention to:

- **The selection of tools for your digital skill level.** In this way, you will minimize the risk of making a critical mistake and many daily frustrations. Of course, over time you will need more and more advanced applications, so - to minimize the risk of information overload - spread out the new material: every week learn one tool, testing it in practice.
- **If you create a team, when choosing each tool also take into account the adaptation costs.** Consider that 5 out of 8 people are already familiar with MS Teams, while you prefer Zoom and only you know it. You have a week to choose a video conferencing tool. It will take you much longer to train the whole team with Zoom and you will have to do it yourself. It will also have much more risk - missed calls, mistakes, stress, frustration. If you delegate this task to the 5 people mentioned above and agree to MS Teams, the risks and adaptation costs will be much lower.

- **Choose tools that offer active support or at least its users have active support groups on Facebook.** Contrary to what you may think, it is not that easy to get an answer from the support department of big companies. If the developers themselves do not answer you, look for help in Facebook groups.
- **Before you use a tool, read its license carefully.** Not all tools and not all plans are allowed for commercial use, and that's how you'll use them when you choose them for your business.
- **Remember that in social media nothing is private.** Whatever you publish becomes public content (even if you publish it on Facebook, on your so-called private profile in the visibility mode "For friends only", this content is neither yours nor private), so if you write a post or a comment, calculate the risk that you and your brand are taking. Once you start building your brand online, whatever you publish privately can affect the perception of your business.

4. Empathy and user experience design

Of course, designing user-centric services and products has been important before, but the COVID-19 pandemic has shown the direction that brands need to take to not only attract customers but also to keep them. In a business that's conducted entirely online, it's very easy to forget that there's a human being sitting on the other side of the screen who has real needs and emotions. Dehumanizing communication on social media or the purchasing process makes customers feel like they are just one of many in the crowd. That is why empathy plays such a huge role in building an online business and online branding. Remember to properly choose not only the channels of communication but also the form of the communication itself. Do not only talk about yourself and your business but also listen to your user.

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Lessons Learned:
What went wrong in which environment under which circumstances?

When you go into an online environment, a lot of things can go wrong. There are many variables, and you have every right to be concerned about them. What should you pay attention to?

- During the pandemic, a lot of people started their adventure with video conferencing apps. **You must have heard many spectacular mishaps when someone thought they had their microphone muted, but they didn't and said a word too many.** Such accidents happened to politicians, celebrities, businessmen — they can happen to you, too. How to deal with it? First, regularly check that you are muted. Crossed-out microphone icons in Zoom/Teams are visible next to your name and indicate that others can't hear you. Second: what you can, save for later. Tools can sometimes break down.

- **Before the pandemic, not all companies were using cloud solutions.** They stored their data on their internal computers. When the lockdown and crisis came, employees had to be sent to the home office, the effect was that data could not be transferred freely because it was only on the company's headquarters. If the data had been in the cloud, companies would have been able to continue their daily operations without problems and any downtime.

- In European realities, **face-to-face meetings in business are still considered more effective than video or audio conferencing**. Undoubtedly, the pandemic has helped change the perspective on this issue, but there are still businesses that you will not make an appointment with online. It's not because your business can't be handled that way, it's because someone values live human contact more than online solutions. It's not uncommon for clients and employers to pressure you to travel to attend a meeting that can be done online. Clients and employers are entitled to have their preferences and beliefs - but so are you. Remember, however, that your time on the road (even on a bus across town) also has value.

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Guidelines:
The "key" guiding principles of digital entrepreneurship in VET

The key thing to remember about digital entrepreneurship in VET is that creating a business online is not an inferior alternative to an offline business. In services outside the IT industry, staying 100% online with your business is still seen in some circles as a less valuable equivalent to "real" services and products.

Online business is another form — not inferior, not less valuable. It provides other opportunities than offline, some it takes away. What you can do is take advantage of all the potential that the online environment offers.

The second guideline to remember is that the online world is only for the young. This is a stereotype and a very unspecific one at that. What does it mean "young"? Is it about someone from generation Z (born in the mid-1990s), or Millennials from the 1980s?

The thing is, your date of birth doesn't make you a specialist in new technologies or social media. Yes, if you were born in the mid-90s or later, the existence of ICT and social media is more natural to you than it is to someone born in the 60s or 70s. However, that doesn't mean that a young person is more digitally competent than an older person, nor does it mean that a young person will essentially be more interested in new technologies than an older person.

Therefore, when building an online business:
- you can invest in a diverse team
- you can invest in products and services targeted to customers of different ages
- you should avoid age stereotypes when talking to your customers/partners.

Diversity in the online environment means primarily the diversification of people in terms of age, experience with new technologies and applications, and competencies (including the level of digital competence!), and education. Remember that when working with new technologies, experience and practical knowledge are key factors to consider — not studies, even relevant ones. The IT industry is a very good example that you don't need a degree in the area you work in to become an expert. However, you cannot do it without openness to constant change, flexibility in learning new things, ability to work in interdisciplinary and diverse teams.

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Even if you don't intend to work in IT, investing in a diverse team and a diverse customer can not only expand your brand's portfolio, but also enrich your personal knowledge, skills, and experiences much more than if you just focus on homogeneous groups of professionals and/ or customers.

That's why the third guideline to remember is to take care of your portfolio. Whatever you do in the online environment, make sure you document it. Of course, you will often be limited by a confidentiality agreement with a client, you won't be able to describe the details on your website or social media. What can you do?

Provide certain elements already at the stage of establishing the terms of the agreement. Some things do not have to be confidential. You can establish within the agreement that the cooperation itself with the client (brand name, industry, type of project) is not confidential and you can describe that.

After completing the project according to the contract, when both parties are satisfied with the cooperation, you can ask the client for recommendations on LinkedIn and a logo for your website. This type of testimonial will be visible to anyone who visits your profile and website, also, it will be available anytime and to anyone, you want to send such a portfolio.

In case of very fruitful cooperation, you can also ask whether the client agrees to describe its results in the form of a case study for your blog or social media. Such a description can also be placed by keeping the name of the company secret according to the client's wishes and mentioning only the industry.