



The Digital Divide

The impact of digital skills and resources on finding work.

EMPLOYMENT | HEALTH | LEARNING

Acknowledgement of Country

In keeping with MAX's commitment to reconciliation and respect, we acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land where we deliver our services and recognise that this land has always been under their custodianship. We pay our respect to Elders and emerging community leaders.

Foreword

An often-repeated claim about digital technology is that it opens up a wealth of economic opportunities. While this may be true for some, those who don't have the skills or the access to digital resources are effectively denied these opportunities.

When you consider that those who lack reliable internet access, their own PC, or solid digital skills, often experience economic, physical, or cultural disadvantage, it becomes a serious equity issue. Digital skills, while important for Australia's economic future, are far more wide-reaching in their impact as digital technology becomes enmeshed in our everyday lives.

For example, they ensure our older Australians can confidently continue to maintain independence as they leave the workforce and retire. They help those from all over the world, who now call Australia home, to more fully participate in our society. They assist Indigenous Australians to level the playing field and ensure access to opportunity.

While digital access is not formally a human right, digital access is critical for addressing disadvantage and something government and businesses need to address.

As new technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) becomes more prominent and jobs continue to shift towards needing more complex skills, there is a very real danger of more people being left behind or left out of the opportunities of the future. Employers should be future-proofing their businesses by investing more in the digital skills of their staff and minimising the barriers within their recruitment processes.

The focus of the current unemployment system needs to change too. In order to focus on the right job for the right person, instead of a focus on a job right now, there needs to be a stronger emphasis on investing in building digital skills and providing education so they match the expectations of the labour market.

Darren Hooper
Managing Director

Introduction

Technology is unavoidable in most aspects of modern-day life.

The tasks in our workplaces are increasingly being automated and with this comes a different type of digital skillset that is required.

In recruitment, technology is used for a wide range of purposes including candidate attraction, applicant tracking, candidate selection and employee onboarding.

These trends do not appear to be slowing down with studies showing the use of AI for recruitment has doubled in the last year alone, coupled with significant investment by organisations in new and emerging technologies to support recruitment.

Australian workplaces have also seen a 12% increase in demand for digital skills since 2016 and by the year 2026 could be facing a shortfall of over 300,000 workers with the appropriate digital skills.¹

Yet for many Australians, there exists a digital divide, a lack of digital literacy skills, poor or no access to information and communications technology, compounded by the effects and implications of the use of digital recruitment technologies and AI in the employment market.

Of those impacted, it disproportionately affects people with disability, those with low levels of education or employment history or those who have other traditional barriers to employment such as those who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) or mature age.²

This digital divide creates additional barriers for those seeking work who do not have the resources or requisite skills to engage with an increasingly automated and artificial employment process.

As one of Australia's largest employment services providers and a leader in adult education and training, MAX is uniquely placed to gain a greater insight into what impacts a lack of digital resourcing and skills has on finding, securing, and maintaining employment.

1. Growing Australia's digital workforce (futureskillsorganisation.com.au)

2. Thomas, J., McCosker, A., Parkinson, S., Hegarty, K., Featherstone, D., Kennedy, J., Holcombe-James, I., Ormond-Parker, L., & Ganley, L. (2023). Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: Australian Digital Inclusion Index: 2023. Melbourne: ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology, and Telstra

1/4 of Australians are considered to be digitally excluded'



Our Approach

The intent of this white paper is to provide a better understanding of the challenges that people with unequal access to digital technology and skills encounter in securing and maintaining employment.

Despite previous reports on these issues, the Digital Divide remains an ongoing concern for those who are seeking employment.

It is our aim to understand the experiences of those seeking employment so we can provide the support to develop the skills they need for meaningful, long-term employment.

We also seek to gain better insight into what employers want from job applicants and how they are investing in recruitment and skills training for their businesses.

Customer Survey Research

Over the months of March and April 2024, MAX distributed surveys to MAX customers in employment services via email and text message.

These surveys of 17 to 19 questions differed depending on whether customers were part of the Workforce Australia (WFA) or Disability Employment Services (DES) programs, as well as other demographic considerations such as CALD people.

The survey asked questions about respondents' access to digital resources, their confidence in their own digital skills and their experiences applying for jobs digitally.

We received 1,160 responses and note that in order to respond to the survey, some level of digital skills was required, even though this was minimal.

We also received responses from more than 150 businesses across Australia to a 20 question survey about the use of digital technology within their recruitment practices, their views on how their business handles recruitment and how they plan to recruit in the future.

Customer case studies

We also spoke to several customers who had experienced the impacts of low access to digital skills and resources.

The purpose of this was to gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by individuals looking for work with low digital skills, low confidence in their ability to gain them and little access to digital technology.

1,160

Individual respondents

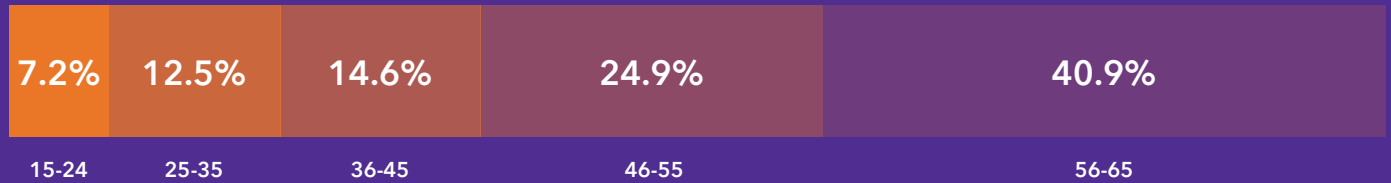
150+

Businesses across
Australia participated

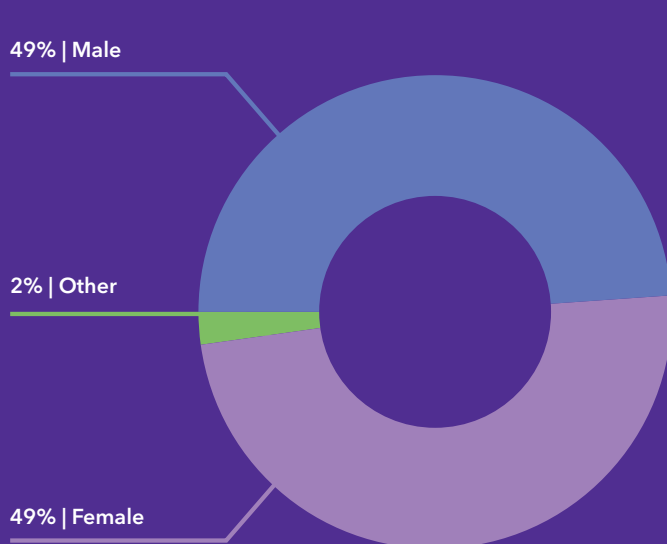
Our Demographics

Customers surveyed for this report

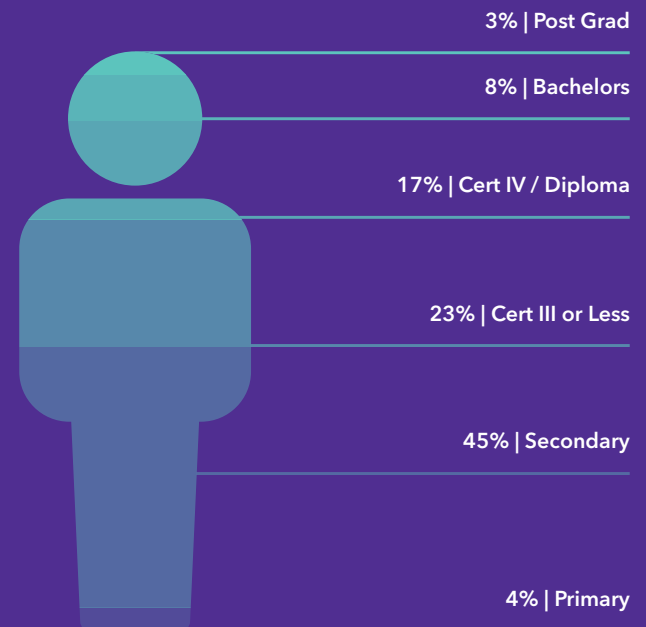
Age range



Gender



Level of education



Dwelling location



What are Digital Skills?

Digital skills can vary depending on a person's experience with digital technologies and therefore what 'digital skills' mean to each person can be different.

For the purposes of this report, digital skills are defined as but not limited to:

- > Being able to competently use devices like computers and tablets.
- > Being able to search for credible and factual information on the internet.
- > Knowing how to be safe online.
- > Being able to communicate socially and professionally via various channels such as email and social media.
- > The ability to use software and digital applications for work purposes.
- > Being able to apply for jobs online and complete online applications.
- > The use of video conferencing platforms to participate in interviews.



Key Themes and Findings

Nearly all job applications are found via job search sites or social media platforms.

For 1 in 3 job seekers, however, the digital skills required to find, research, and apply for these jobs digitally are out of reach.

This lack of confidence extends to their perceived ability to meet the current and future digital skills demands in the jobs they are looking for. As there is certainly a gap between the digital skills needed to look for work and what level of digital skills are expected by employers.

The lack of self-belief is consistent across cohorts but disproportionately affects certain demographics.

42% of all middle to mature-age respondents (46 - 65) didn't believe they had the ability to keep up to date with the digital skills required to maintain employment.

This age group currently stands at 24% of the population, however, with the median age trending up towards 47 years old the expectation is that this group will increase in size in the future.

This poses interesting questions as to how government policy can assist in developing the digital skills capacity of Australians as they age.

Businesses also need to consider whether they are adequately maintaining or upgrading the digital skills of their employees to meet the changing demands of their industries.

65% of businesses surveyed planned to increase their focus on digital skills in employee training.

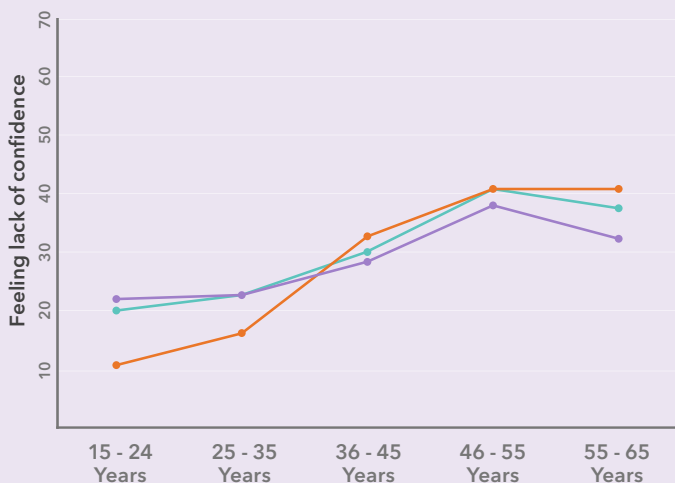
While it is important that the majority of business leaders see the value in training their employees in the skills of the future, the fact that 1 in 3 business do not is worrying.

According to Deloitte, while Australian businesses are planning to spend around \$8 billion in learning and development in 2024, 1 in 8 businesses are still looking to cut L&D budgets.¹

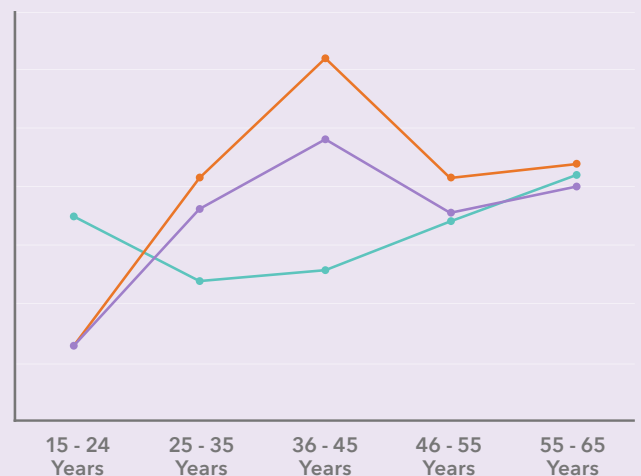
While pessimistic, short-term economic outlook may be impacting these decisions. The estimated \$2 billion in skills value lost due to these cuts represents a significant lost opportunity for Australian businesses.

1. Ready Set Upskill : Maximising the ROI of skills and training | Deloitte Australia

Lack of confidence in digital skills (WFA)



Lack of confidence in digital skills (DES)



Key

■ Lack confidence in applying for jobs

■ Don't believe they have the digital skills now

■ Aren't confident in their ability to keep up with the digital skills of the future

More barriers, less confidence

Disability Employment Services (DES) customers broadly have lower levels of confidence in their ability to meet the digital demands of the workplace.

Curiously, the results showed that nearly half of 36 to 45-year-old DES customers were worried about their digital skills. 62% feared they did not have the ability to keep up to date either

While this may be a result of low response numbers in this cohort, it may also point to those who have experienced massive changes in technology in their lives and are cautious of further technological changes in the two to three decades of work ahead of them.

These attitudes are, however, understandable in light of recent technology changes impacting the way we work.

Automation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are affecting almost every industry in ways that only a few short years ago were considered in the realms of science fiction.

New jobs or new ways of doing existing jobs require new skillsets and the pace of change can be hard to keep up with.

What is clearly identified and consistent across the report, however, is that the more barriers to employment someone experiences, the more likely that their digital confidence and digital skills are low.

Shaking confidence: the impact of being unemployed

Those who have been unemployed for less than six months and those who have been long-term unemployed (more than 36 months) show the lowest levels of confidence in their digital skills.

For those less than six months, this could be explained as an initial reaction or anxiety around becoming unemployed and being uncertain about the future, which then changes over time.

For those who are long-term unemployed, their confidence is likely to be more embedded and harder to improve.

The periods in between show self-belief improves among our customers, and there are a couple of factors at play here.

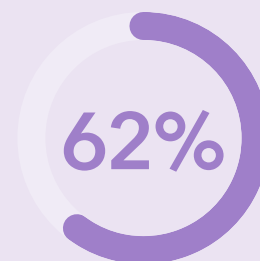
DES Customers aged 36 to 45: lack of confidence in digital skills



Are not confident in applying



Are not confident in current skills



Are not confident in keeping up-to-date



CASE STUDY

Ernest, 47, Innisfail QLD

In the early 2000s, the Nokia 3110 was a popular mobile phone with a reputation for being robust and dependable. Ernest Stockham, 47 from Innisfail, can certainly attest to that as he still uses his trusty old phone to this day. The only limitation is it came out before smartphones were invented, so without a computer or tablet, Ernest didn't have access to the internet from a personal device and he didn't know how to use email.

Ernest had been out of work as a labourer for five years and he found searching for a job online a challenge with limited digital ability. So, when the opportunity to take part in the Digital Literacy course came up, he took up the opportunity to improve on his basic knowledge.

"I'm not very good with devices and technology. I didn't know how to save files and retrieve them. I could navigate around but I couldn't copy or send things."

He learnt how to use a computer and sent his first email. He learnt how to upload and download files, create folders and files, and take screenshots on a mobile phone - the first time he'd used a smartphone. With the help of his trainer, he applied for a job at Opal Boxes during the course. He went on to get an interview and was offered a role as a labourer and he's still employed at Opal Boxes today.

Ernest is able to use his new skills to record the amount of boxes he makes and stacks and to access his roster. He's not looked back and is grateful for being able to do more with computers.

"The skills have come in handy - for work and personally. It's helped me in a few aspects in using the internet socially as well."

Improving digital literacy

During employment services, customers receive various supports depending on their needs which could include things such as health support, vocational training or other soft skills courses that are designed to build confidence and capability in looking for work.

What is interesting in the results is the stark difference between WFA and DES customers.

Newly unemployed customers in the WFA program are far more worried about their ability to meet the current labour digital skills demands with 37% not confident they have the skills. Whereas only 20% of DES customers found this to be true.

The opposite can be seen in those who have been long-term unemployed. 42% of DES customers didn't believe they had the appropriate digital skills while this was only true for 24% of WFA customers.

This may point to several factors.

The early shock of unemployment appears to impact WFA customers more, possibly because they are less likely to have experienced cyclical unemployment or faced barriers to work previously.

For some with extensive work history who may not have looked or applied for jobs in a long time, a certain level of self-discovery may make them question where they fit in the current job market.

DES customers, having faced those challenges to secure employment, appear to be more resilient early on, however, as the time unemployed lengthens confidence dips dramatically as the negative long-term effects of unemployment become more apparent.

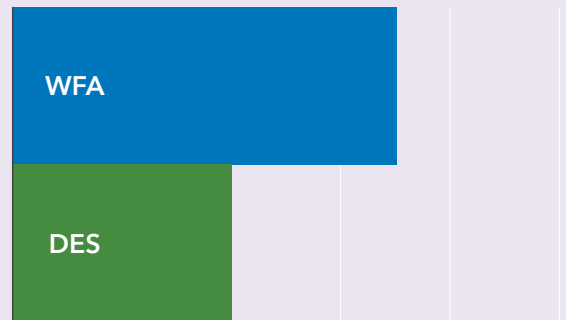
Particularly for DES customers, it's important to note some other contributing factors.

With higher unemployment, higher underemployment and the unique limitations on work type and capacity, it is more likely that DES customers will experience cyclical unemployment.

As DES customers cycle through roles that do not fit their capacity, they understandably lose confidence.

Changes in confidence over time unemployed

Unemployed for 6 months



Unemployed for over 36 months





CASE STUDY

Jennifer, 46, Bridgewater TAS

Jennifer Banfield, 46, lives with her five adult children in Bridgewater, Tasmania. After graduating from high school in 1996, she married her husband who was in the Army. Her first child arrived in 1998 and the family moved around a lot for her husband's work. Jennifer dedicated her time to raising her family. Sadly, her husband passed away two years ago and Jennifer needed to look for employment

As a Workforce Australia customer, Jennifer is required to report her job searches online. Coupled with no previous work experience and limited digital skills, Jennifer needed support to boost her digital ability.

"I have a computer but my use of computers was negligible. Yes, I'm only 46 but the world is so different from when I was growing up. When I went to school, we had computers but it definitely isn't what is now - there was no Google. So what we had back then is definitely not what we've got now."

Boosting her digital literacy skills opened up opportunities to apply for jobs online and helped her to improve the quality of her applications.

"I've grown up with a mobile phone from the time I was an adult as a form of communication with people but emails is something that is pretty new to me. Yes, I receive emails but I never really learned how to format emails and send them back. It is important to apply for jobs - a lot require sending an email with your resume rather than going in and seeing people. I now feel confident in emailing - before I wouldn't have had that confidence." And she shared the experience with her eldest son too.

"He grew up in the era of Google so he was able to teach me some stuff too. It was a give and take situation. Yes I was the eldest person in the room, but I gained from it. The stuff I learned from digital literacy has helped me to go on to further study business and financial literacy."

The link between education and digital skills

There is a strong link between the level of education achieved and the confidence in their digital skills.

Though it is hard to determine if this is cause and effect or contextual as there is also a strong link between education and economic participation which may mean that access to digital technology is limited by their access to financial resources.¹

As the survey shows, as the respondents get older, they are more likely to have lower confidence in their digital skills. As technology has changed so too have school curriculums, however those who attended school 10, 20 or 30 years ago likely had far different exposure to digital skills and technology.

More than 70 per cent of DES respondents who did not engage with any education past high school lacked digital skills confidence.

1. OECD (2006), "The Returns to Education: Links between Education, Economic Growth and Social Outcomes", in Education at a Glance 2006: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2006-11-en>.



70%

of high school educated
DES Customers lack digital
skills confidence



Access to technology

This particular cohort of DES customers were also far more likely to not own a digital device such as a PC (72%) and nearly half did not have access to reliable internet connections (45%).

Lack of digital access more broadly was prominent across all cohorts regardless of geographic location with 1 in 5 customers surveyed not having access to reliable internet and close to half not owning or having easy access to a digital device such as a PC.

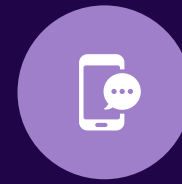
When we consider the costs of owning technology to an individual in receipt of a welfare payment, this is not an insignificant amount and is often balanced with choices around other basic needs such as food, clothing and utility costs.

DES customers, who must also contend with the additional costs associated with living with a disability, may face even harder financial decisions when budgeting.¹

This may be why DES customers broadly, with some cohorts in particular, are more affected due to a lack of access to digital technology and subsequently lower levels of digital confidence.

1. Mitra, Sophie and Palmer, Michael and Kim, Hoolda and Mont, Daniel and Groce, Nora, Extra Costs of Living with a Disability: A Review and Agenda for Research (April 1, 2017). Disability and Health Journal, Forthcoming, DOI/10.1016/j.dhjo.2017.04.007, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2967775>

The cost of technology in Australia



Mobile Phone Device*

\$913



Monthly Phone Plan

\$30 - 41



Entry-Level Laptop

\$299 - 400



Monthly Internet Plan*

\$75

*based on the survey average

Technology at work

The concept of life-long learning is important in light of these results. Those who do not continue education past the mandatory years of schooling find it difficult to participate fully in Australia's modern economy.¹

Further to this is the fact that technological change is not slowing down and jobs requiring lower levels of skill or of a mostly physical nature are slowly being replaced.

In almost all roles regardless of level, there is some element of technology involved. From mechanics to warehousing, administration or retail, the prevalence of technology means that digital skills are required in almost every occupation.

Without the technological resources to participate digitally, it becomes much harder to acquire the digital skills required to gain and maintain employment.

1. OECD (2018), Equity in Education: Breaking Down Barriers to Social Mobility, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264073234-en>.



CASE STUDY

Elizabeth, 56, Busselton WA

When Elizabeth Moore, 56, from Busselton WA, first travelled to the Kimberley, she fell in love. Wanting to explore the vast region, she decided to leave her home in Melbourne and moved to the remote area of Western Australia.

She landed on her feet with a job as a mental health nurse but fast-forward many years and she was in need of a break. She resigned from her job and took the time to care for her aging parents.

Looking to get back to work after a few years out, Elizabeth was keen to change direction in her career. However, she struggled to get a start.

“It was very frustrating and impersonal to apply for jobs online. I was sent an online interview and the online interview was actually essentially a personality test and that was it. Apparently I failed that. Being in the mental health game, I’m aware of how inaccurate personality tests can be.

“I found online very impersonal and I think that the employers are potentially missing out on employees on doing such a mass screening.”

After some months of looking at jobs in retail and hospitality, Elizabeth was keen to set her focus on mining. With many mining hospitality jobs requiring an RSA, Elizabeth needed to boost her digital skills to take an online course so she enrolled in Digital Literacy.

“It was very helpful to get tips on the online application process and to set up a profile so I could do a quick application. It might open up some office opportunities that weren’t open for me.

“For being unemployed for such a long time, it was a good opportunity to have a purpose every day. I’ve been itching to get back into the workforce so that I had a purpose to my day.”

Employers and job candidates are disconnected

Responses from employers reveal that businesses might be making recruitment processes harder than they need to be.

The vast majority of employers (88%) believed that their recruitment processes made it easy for prospective applicants with more than 90% also believing their processes were accessible to those with disability.

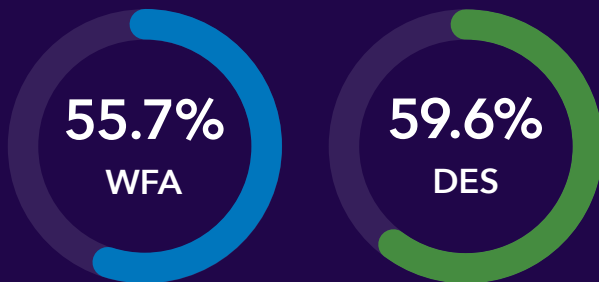
Business leaders also believed that their recruitment processes had the right mix of human interaction at 94%.

The response from our customers when asked the same questions shows a big disconnect, with more than half of customers across all groups having experienced difficulties applying for jobs online.

Common complaints were that applications were too long, difficulties in understanding the application or discomfort with the amount of personal information that was requested.

In stark contrast to employers' sentiments, more than 90% of our customers surveyed believed that there was not enough human interaction involved in the recruitment process.

WFA and DES Customers who had difficulty in applying for jobs



Are job applications regarded as easy to do?

Believe there is enough human interaction



98%

Employers



10%

Job Seekers

Believe the application process is easy



90%

Employers



42%

Job Seekers

Reasons why applications feel difficult to job seekers



52%

of people had trouble understanding how to complete the application



34%

of people didn't feel comfortable giving all the information that was asked for



31%

of people felt the application process takes too long

Lack of human connection in applications

When a job application is handled through a digital platform - whether it be SEEK, LinkedIn or a company-specific job portal - the only response a candidate will usually get is confirmation it has been received.

Should an applicant progress in an application, it is likely that there is correspondence sent through digital channels with further steps before proceeding to an interview, which in some cases may be via a pre-recorded video.

Many times, however, applicants will generally only receive email correspondence confirming they were not successful, if they receive any correspondence at all.

Whilst employers feel the human interaction is right, the reality is that the interaction is probably only being felt by the one person who is successful for the role.

There are several reasons why an HR team would follow processes that may not provide applicants with the best experience.

When unemployment is high, applications for jobs can overwhelm recruiting teams.

Conversely, in tight labour markets there is significant time devoted to sourcing the right talent for roles.

Additionally, features of the welfare system such as mutual obligations can encourage unemployed people to apply for jobs that are not appropriate, or they are not qualified for, to meet their requirements.

It is therefore understandable that businesses would look to streamline these processes and remove administrative burdens from their employees.



Digital applications are the mainstay of recruitment

From our survey respondents, it appears that broad sections of society are being excluded, particularly those of mature age or living with disability.

While 95% of Australians own a smartphone, those from more disadvantaged sections of the population tend to not own or have easy access to a PC or laptop.

Businesses use a range of applications and programs for recruitment that may not be optimised for use on mobile devices such as through company-specific application software (40%) or third-party ID verification software (14%) and generally require a PC.

For those segments of the population unable to afford or access these digital technologies, they are effectively locked out of progressing job applications when it suits them.

Whilst employment service providers like MAX can provide access to technology in their offices, it doesn't help those who want to apply for work outside of their appointments.

Although online forms are relatively easy to complete on a phone, standard elements of a job application include a cover letter and a resume.

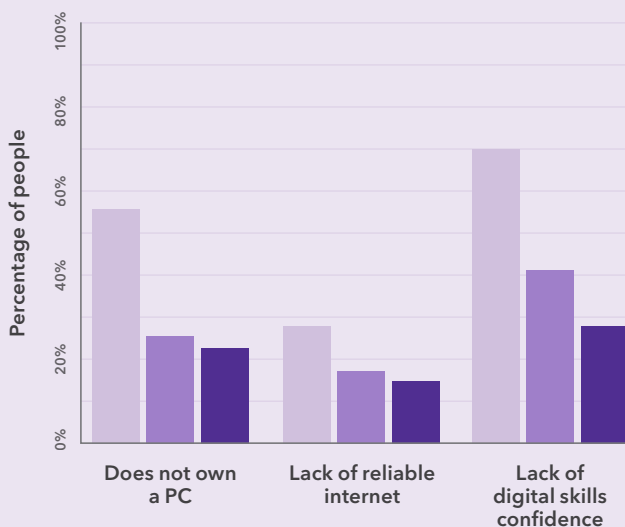
A cover letter can be composed on a phone but it's arguably a more difficult task. A resume is near impossible and attaching it to an application is a complicated process without a laptop.



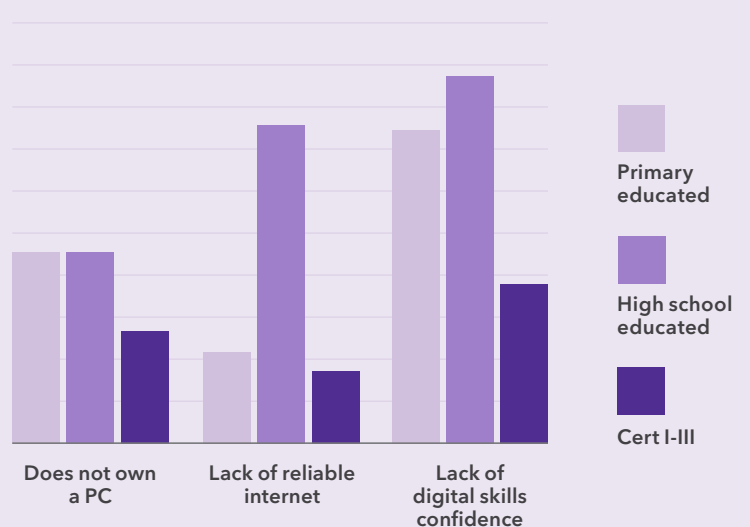
95%
of Australians own
a smartphone



WFA Customer Digital Resourcing



DES Customer Digital Resourcing



The future of job applications

40% of business respondents signalled they plan to spend the same or more on assistive or AI technologies that streamline the recruitment process in the upcoming financial year.

Further to that point, while AI is normally used mostly in the applicant screening stage of the recruitment process, around 70% of those surveyed do not currently use AI technologies to support applicant screening.

Employees also aren't the only ones with concerns about technology with businesses surveyed only expressing moderate confidence in the impartiality and accuracy of AI technology.

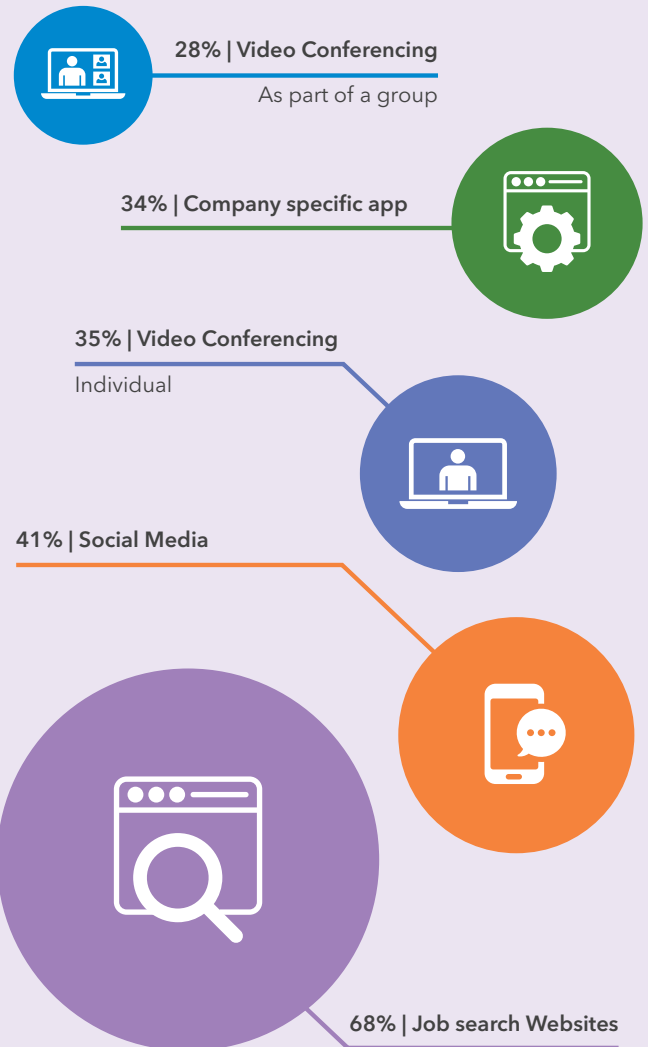
These results seem to cut through the rhetoric of AI advocates and critics alike heralding or warning of the new technology respectively.

What these results do show is that businesses are taking a tempered approach to refine their existing processes.

Many of the processes involved within their current recruitment practices do require a certain set of digital skills, however, and this is where businesses can do more

Without more attention paid by businesses to make their recruitment process more accessible or government policy that enables greater digital access and training to those who need it, this issue will remain.

How businesses hire using a mix of various software, applications and websites



70%
of those surveyed do not currently use AI technologies when screening applications

Digital platforms like Seek and Indeed are still the number one source of applicants for most businesses.

The way forward

1. Access to resources

Without greater access to digital technologies, there is little chance of addressing the inequity the broad swathes of the population are experiencing.

Announced in 2009, the National Broadband Network (NBN) has been mired in controversy for most of its history for cost blowouts and timeline pushbacks.

The provision of affordable, accessible, high-speed internet in Australia was its intent, however, the median fixed broadband speeds in Australia rank the country at a lowly 94th as of the time of writing this report.¹

Whilst there are alternatives such as satellite, 5g and hot spotting from phones, these technologies are not accessible by all and those living on the fringe of metropolitan areas or further afield may still struggle with access, or the costs associated with them.

Government has highlighted the importance of addressing the lack of digital skills in the employment market, and more is needed to meet the demands of the future.

Subsidising the cost of budget laptops and mobile broadband connections for those who need them could be a potential solution. In the meantime, employment services providers like MAX or community libraries are the primary method of access.

The digital skills that businesses and job seekers need cannot be developed and maintained without access to the internet and the technology to interact with it.

1. Australia's Mobile and Broadband Internet Speeds - Speedtest Global Index

2. Cost cutting in HR practices: a double edged sword

While businesses need to find more ways of increasing productivity and driving efficiencies, caution around the technology used should be exercised.

The algorithms that inform AI or assistive technologies are not impervious to the bias found across all parts of our society.

These algorithms learn from historical data sets or the data entered by humans and absorb the bias inherent in this data.

This could have the unintended consequences of filtering out qualified applicants based on things such as gender.

Other groups can be inadvertently filtered out such as those with gaps in their employment, a feature that could be common in mature-age women, people from a CALD background or those with disability.

It is important that businesses seeking to implement these types of tools first consider what is important in their own recruitment practices and the impact these tools may have.

Businesses should consider vetting the outcomes of such tools, for example, manual checks on filtered resumes. It is a responsibility of Government and Business to ensure discrimination isn't buried or hidden in AI models.

These processes still require human oversight and may not allow businesses to immediately realise the efficiency gains of AI tools. However, without rigorous controls, businesses risk both entrenching inequity and missing out on talented applicants who may not fit within the parameters set within such tools.

3. Beyond resumes and cover letters: the importance of human connection

While COVID-19 instigated an overnight digital transition for many industries, what is clear from those seeking work is that the human element is important and needed in the recruitment process. Even more so if you experience some element of disadvantage.

Looking beyond more traditional features of the application process, such as resumes and cover letters, allows businesses to reconsider the value of administrative processes that can be a burden to the recruitment team and a barrier to those without digital access.

It also allows recruitment teams to truly engage and get to know job applicants more personally and broadens the accessibility of their recruitment efforts.

While technology is taking over large parts of jobs across many industries, the human aspect of the job is only becoming more important. With the evolution of technology and the changing nature of roles, a focus on people fit, culture and soft skills is increasingly important and cannot be judged based on resumes and cover letters.

A large function for employment service providers is to support people to apply for jobs. Helping people navigate the barriers of resumes and cover letters and getting candidates in front of employers is a key part of success.

Participating in local job fairs is another way that recruitment teams can speak directly to potential applicants giving the chance for both parties to understand each other before progressing to interviews.

While the practicability of initiatives like the above depend on the resources of the business, there are opportunities for businesses of all sizes to take more communicative approaches to filling job vacancies.

4. More training opportunities

The government is clear on its priority to ensure Australia and its workers are ready for the jobs of the future and the digital skills they require.

To do this, government needs to reinvest some of the savings of the past several years of lower unemployment in ensuring that there is priority given to enabling and delivering high quality digital literacy support that builds real workplace skills that employers need. A continuing reduction in the financial support available for the unemployed will only see those already struggling, further marginalised and unable to access employment.

Training for those seeking work focuses on the immediate barriers they have and how to bridge them in order to secure employment. There needs to be a shift to preparing those seeking work for the jobs that fit them, not the jobs they can fit into right now.

A model that seeks to fundamentally improve the lives of the unemployed so they can maintain meaningful, long-term employment requires different supports.

That may mean longer foundational or digital skills training programs as well as broadening the scope for subsidies for vocational qualifications. It also may require more holistic approaches to assessing the capacity and skills a person has as well as addressing all the barriers that may impact their search for work.

Employers have a part to play in this as well. Ensuring their workers are being trained effectively for the future does not just provide dividends to the bottom line but it prepares people for the shocks of events outside their control.

COVID-19 impacted all facets of the global economy, but part of that shock was the unpreparedness of businesses and their employees to manage such a dramatic shift in the way of doing business.

As innovative technology continues to change industries and the way they do things, it's important that businesses are preparing their employees with meaningful educational opportunities to meet future demands.

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