Ensuring AI Policy Works for Us All

Description

Article by Tina Merritt with permission to reprint, originally published in the THE ROANOKE TIMES.

In todayâ??s business world, AI is already a practical tool for small businesses like mine, not just a futuristic idea. Itâ??s changing how we communicate with clients, create marketing strategies, and streamline operations. It is important for Virginia elected ofï¬•cials to understand the value AI is already delivering to our stateâ??s small businesses and our ability to compete when considering how to regulate AI.

As the business development manager of a title and settlement company in Southwest Virginia, Iâ??ve experienced how AI can boost eï¬?ciency and impact, especially in ï¬• elds that depend on accuracy and trust.

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Still, for small and microbusinesses to fully beneï¬•t, we need technology platforms and policies that reï¬?ect our realities and provide the support to use these tools eï¬?ectively.

Recently, I joined other small business leaders from Virginia in Washington, D.C., to meet with staï¬? from Sens. Mark Warner, Tim Kaine and Rep. Morgan Griï¬?thâ??s, oï¬?ces. We were there to share how AI is impacting our work, and why itâ??s so important that the rollout of these technologies includes and uplifts small businesses, not just the biggest players in the market.

In real estate and title services, AI has already made a diï¬?erence in how I work. I use AI to draft email outreach, generate marketing content, and brainstorm social media posts that are more relevant and engaging. Generative AI tools help me write customized follow-ups to agents and clients. Meta has helped me craft social content that will reach a larger audience. These tools have helped me be more eï¬?cient and consistent, especially as my workload has grown.

AI also supports our visibility. With limited marketing budgets, small businesses like mine rely on tools like Metaâ??s ad platform to target our services to the right audiences, homebuyers in our region, agents seeking reliable closing partners, and others in the local real estate ecosystem. These platforms allow us to compete in a crowded digital space without needing a full-time marketing team.

While AI has the power to amplify small business voices, it can also drown them out, as search engines and recommendation systems often favor larger companies with more data and bigger budgets. This doesnâ??t mean small businesses oï¬? er less value, but we often canâ??t keep up with the volume of content these systems reward. In meetings with Senate staï¬?, I shared that small businesses donâ??t need protection from innovation; we need to be included in how itâ??s built and regulated, with greater transparency and consideration for our speciï¬•c needs and algorithm goals.

AI is a tool, not a replacement. In industries like mine, relationships are still everything. Clients want to know thereâ??s a real person on the other end of the phone who understands the stakes. Small businesses understand this; large companies who look to outsource and automate everything, do not.

AI can support that relationship, but it canâ??t replace it.

AI tools themselves should be built with equity and transparency, so small business owners can trust the platforms they rely on. When AI empowers small businesses, it doesnâ??t just boost productivity, it strengthens communities.

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Tina Merritt has been in the real estate industry for over 27 years. As a Virginia Certified Title Settlement Agent (VCTSA), she has been involved at the state and national levels of our industry, promoting the Title Agentâ??s role as an educated and valued part of the real estate transaction. Tina currently serves as Vice-Chair of the Homeowner Outreach Program Work Group at the American Land Title Association and has been a Certified HOP Leader since 2017. She is currently Director of Business Development for Premier Title of Virginia and resides in Blacksburg.

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