

# Future Proof

Futurist leader Deborah Collier shares how her consulting firm, Digital Skills Authority, is preparing the next generation of global leaders with the digital know-how to strategically scale.

BY TAYLA BLAIRE

Planning for the future is all in a day's work for Digital Skills Authority president Deborah Collier. She has been doing it for decades, using her extensive educational background to create implementable strategies for businesses and governments for more than 30 years.

Collier's first role in the early '90s was as a technical support engineer at the UK Ministry of Defense, initially on the helpdesk while studying a computer science degree in the evenings. After a five-year career in IT at companies such as J.P. Morgan, she started her own digital e-commerce and marketing agency, completed her master's degree in business information systems and worked for a management consulting company leading workstreams and advising marketing directors and partners on launching new online initiatives. But she didn't stop there.

"My next venture was [at] an e-business consulting and marketing firm for 10 years," she says. During her tenure at the firm, Collier developed business management and digital marketing programs with certification components.

"I later invested these constantly updated certifications into the new dedicated awarding body, Digital Skills Authority, with growing content and training delivery by a team of experts," Collier recalls.

With the growth that Digital Skills Authority has enjoyed comes the need to get—and stay—ahead of the curve. Collier, as a digital tech entrepreneur and futurist leader, considers this a core competency.

"I need to see what ideas will sink and what we'll need in the future," she explains. This skill enabled Collier to develop a content strategy and engagement course she describes as the "first public classroom course training ever developed and delivered to brands such as Skype and Warner. It later became the foundation of a core component of our marketing and management certifications."

"I then created the first ever e-business management program in 2009," Collier continues. "It's about being cutting-edge. That's what draws clients towards us."

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**SUCCESS+:** What does Digital Skills Authority offer? Who should be looking at the courses available and why?

**Deborah Collier:** I built Digital Skills Authority from the ground up with limited resources, developing the business plan, marketing, digital, technology and growth strategies and the Certificate in Online Business series. I'm leading the global expansion, including appointing and directing regional leaders who will collectively lead our future growth, standards and operations.

Digital Skills Authority is the industry's global awarding body for advanced digital and digital business skills. Aside from product development, quality and measurable impact, we're focused on multi-user subscription licenses through international partners and are seeking governmental backing or other strategic partnerships to deliver e-learning subscriptions at scale internationally. This boosts economies and enables digital innovation and business.

Through our e-learning platform, we offer digital interactive media subscriptions as well as on-site consultative programs and public courses delivered by future licensed training providers. We're approached by corporations looking to upskill their teams or startups looking to build a team. We've written the recipe. We know what they need to do—the skills and activities required to take the next steps. It's the strategic development of skills and education, created by pioneers in the industry who have done this for many, many years.

**“WE NEED MORE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT, LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE WITH A FOCUS ON ETHICS—ENVIRONMENTALLY AND SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE BUSINESSES.”**



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**S:** Some notable companies have chosen Digital Skills Authority. Can you tell us more about your client base and elaborate on some of the success stories?

**DC:** Some of our more well-known clients are leaders and teams at Procter & Gamble, Ernst & Young, Mars, Schneider Electric, L'Oréal, Delta Air Lines and several international post offices, banks, insurance companies, government ministries, stock exchanges [and] telecoms companies, as well as startups and SMEs. We also sometimes have individuals wanting to boost their careers, start a business or who are job seeking.

We've seen people take our courses and then be promoted shortly after. One national post office reported that our training enabled them to implement a professional presence. Another client, a national retailer, informed us that their year-end stats revealed an increase of several million in their sales that year, after learning about merchandising products with us. We had staff from an airline on a consultative course [that] ended up reporting to their teams in real time to update their website and make things more navigable to drive more sales.

**S:** What does a well-rounded tech marketing strategy look like?

**DC:** Tech marketing is all about data, so any tools that can analyze and provide insight into audiences' advertising performance and competitors are vital, as well as automation. Artificial intelligence will continue to support businesses with their marketing strategies.

**S:** As a futurist leader of the DSA, which skills do you see becoming increasingly critical for the future of work?

**DC:** I think we're going to need a mixture of human skills, management and machines. Selecting, monitoring and managing technologies and tools will be crucial, including emerging technologies, such as AI and spatial computing—that mix of reality and augmented reality because we can now extend our worlds.

I also think we need more strategic development, leadership and governance, with a focus on ethics—environmentally and socially responsible businesses. Creativity and innovation will continue to be important, as well as other human skills like communication, collaboration, empathy, people management and teamwork. Technology is taking care of the mundane, repetitive tasks, but we need to be skilled to do something with those technologies.

**S:** Are there any industry-specific trends you foresee?

**DC:** Depending on our government's actions today, our culture will either be heading toward enlightenment that is more socially conscious and ethical or it's going to be a dystopian future fueled by a lack of ethical governance, extreme conditions in wealth and opportunity and lack of meaningful education.

**S:** What recommendations do you have for improving digital security in the United States?

**DC:** Cybersecurity is something I'm extremely passionate about, especially corporate espionage and the protection of citizens' and directors' information. Hacking puts entire businesses at risk, which on a broader scale, has the power to collapse economies. The future battles of this world are going to be less about guns and boots on the ground and more about information warfare and cyberattacks.

Governments have been quite late in catching up with the fact that content needs to be heavily regulated in some ways. Robots need to be monitored. Citizens must be equipped to protect their content and their computers. There should be someone on every board of directors equipped at a reasonable level regarding cybersecurity. This will become more important in the future. ♦

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*THIS INTERVIEW HAS BEEN EDITED FOR LENGTH AND CLARITY.*