

MDIA2011 – ASSESSMENT 3

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS PLAN HYPOTHETICAL 4 – ALDI

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Situation

Aldi is one of Australia's most popular supermarket retail chains, known for providing high-quality food with satisfactory prices, being highly sustainable, and having strong customer loyalty. They are a business known for prioritizing simplicity and cost-efficiency. Although Aldi as a retail chain are already operating effectively, ever since Artificial intelligence (AI) has been introduced and is a rapid growing form of technology, it will most likely be implemented into even supermarket stores to improve automation. This is what Aldi plans to do to embrace this technological advancement of AI. They have announced plans to introduce three "Shop & Go" stores in the neighborhood of Newcastle, Rockdale as well as Marrickville. They announce that these new stores will be staff-free and using top AI camera systems, allowing consumers to leave the store checkout-free (without scanning items at a checkout). This idea was inspired by the success of Aldi's first automated store in Greenwich, London. Though this change of operations is a positive step forward for Aldi as a company, it sparks immediate concern from key stakeholders; mainly Aldi employees and the Distributive and Allied Employee's Association (SDA). The SDA has immediately spoken in public stating that "the initiative is worrying for employees and that Aldi must consider its responsibilities to hard-working Australians."

Context on AI automation

Over the past decade, many global brands have already decided to rapidly include AI into their industry operations, supermarket fields included. According to WaveGrocery (2024), Through using AI, supermarkets have been able to easily manage inventory, analyze customer data, orchestrate quality control checks, and even "obtain deeply precise analytics that will guide their industry forward". Especially in the UK, enhancing AI has become widely adopted in retail stores such as Sainsbury's, Morrisons, and Waitrose supermarkets. All these stores are planning to partner with specified AI companies to provide real time data and insights for key processes, improve stock information, and to better analyze customer behavior, (Menear 2024). An Israeli company named ShopperAI has also found an 18% increase in packaged snack revenue overall after applying AI to track customer movement and behaviors. They also applied this with their shampoo section and had an increase of shampoo sales by 25%, (Kestenbaum, 2023). Through these, it's clear that AI is going to be slowly but surely part of retail and service companies, which is why Aldi's choice to focus on AI automation testing is a highly beneficial and strategic decision. Despite these high benefits, this push to become completely staff-free and automated raises high concern for key stakeholders.

Key stakeholder concerns (brief scope)

The most crucial concerns would stem from workers in this retail environment. This move towards a staff-free store raises anxieties about job losses and a lack of communications in this new technology adoption. While implementing AI could highly enhance efficiency in store operations, employees may feel left out from these key decisions made by the organization that

will impact their future roles on the team. Inklebarger (2023) found that although 79% of grocery executives plan to boost even more AI investment, productivity in the grocery industry has had a decline, even if digital orders have been rising. This highlights the importance of including and consulting employees in any key decisions made to ensure these new technologies will be both effective and accepted. The Australian Council of trade Unions (ACTU) has also voiced their urgency on this publishing a media release, stating “Good employers understand this and are consulting properly. The new AI Implementation agreements will protect those companies by ensuring that other employers engage in the responsible uptake of AI around the country” (Saccotelli, 2025). Another crucial stakeholder to be aware of would be the consumers who feel uncertain about this change. While this ease of the Shop & Go seem innovative and appealing, an article written by Wolniak (2024) found that not all shoppers find it easy to use, specifically older consumers or those that are less tech-savvy. Concerns on increased theft, lack of staff assistance and privacy risks also are voiced out by customers.

Stakeholders

Now going into a more in-depth analysis of these affected stakeholders, it is able to be highlighted from scoping the situation that the main affected parties in this plan are the employees, customers, external stakeholders (the general public), as well as the SDA and Council of Trade unions.

Employees and Council Unions

For employees, hearing the phrase “staff-free” would spark instant concern about a company that seems to be testing about an automated future without them. Whilst it’s important to clarify that these trials will be limited to three stores, and that Aldi intends to re-train and employ staff into other roles; exempling to digital support, store operations and management, etc.. worries about job security and job satisfaction could still arise, possibly effecting job performance. Not to mention, the statement from the SDA voices an even clearer scepticism towards this change for Aldi, the fear that this AI-enabled automation will eventually replace more jobs than it creates. As seen from Inklebarger, 2023’s statistics on how productivity in the grocery industry is already starting to drop after AI has started to be implemented into the workplace, this shows that deep consultation with employees will be crucial to ensure the technology adopted will be in ways that will also benefit and work for the employees, not just the business. A clear path of communication must be given to the employees to feel like they are growing and still highly valued, not being thrown in the sidelines.

Customers

Customers are another critical group to consider. All these years Aldi has prided itself as being simple, efficient yet still have reasonable pricing. This is so that customers will be able to shop faster, in less stress and be more satisfied with their experience, (Dollar, 2025). Through this

Aldi has built a reputable name and developed a loyal and extensive customer base. However, it's not for certain that all these consumers will be accepting about this new automation plan. As discussed older shoppers may be less comfortable with these high-tech facilities, it may feel like more of a 'hassle to get used to' rather than an upgrade. Concerns about privacy, the learning of using the scan&go systems, or even simply just the loss of human assistance and services could effect the experience. Other risk is customers intentionally under-scanning or 'failing to scan' the items, leading to high opportunities of theft (Wolinak, 2024). Communicating with these consumers, will have to go beyond just sending a simple announcement stating that AI will now be in the works and testing for Aldi, there needs to be a clear message of understanding, empathy and reassurance. If customers know that there will still be real-time support from employees, (whether in store or virtually), and that their feedback will be actively heard and considered, customers would be more likely to be trusting in this initiative rather than wary.

External Media and Public

When announcing this initiative to the public eye, it should be a message that is official and transparent, with carefully chosen language to maintain a positive brand reputation. This includes the external stakeholders such as the media, local councils and advocacy groups who mainly shapes the public's perception on controversial and booming topics. If not careful, especially given Aldi's current image as an responsible employer and existing "simply efficient" store theme, this new initiative could be looked down upon the publics. For example, if not carefully handled, the phrase "staff-free" could be taken as abandoning human connections and efforts for automated efficiency. It's a corporate reputational risk, not just simply as an employer but also how the public will see Aldi's social values.

Communications

A thorough communications plan will be constructed to address each major stakeholder to ensure that this initiative will run in a way that is strategic, authentic and considerate of these stakeholders. While this is to be an innovative step for the organization, it must not be communicated as just a technological upgrade, but rather as a transition that continues to shape Aldi's image as a company who values it's people, customers and the broader community.

There will be three main, central messages which will guide this communications plan:

Key message 1 -- ***Aldi is advancing, not replacing***: This is a strong message that elaborates to stakeholders how the shop&go initiative is about improving efficiency, not removing the human touch and interactions. The staff will be retrained and given opportunities to adapt and embrace new roles that will create a more advanced yet consumer-friendly shopping experience

Key message 2 – ***Our people and communities are at the heart of this change***: this message represents and specifically addresses the employees, consumers and communities and tells them that they will be actively engaged in shaping this new experience. With their feedback, concerns and insights which will be valued and continuously evaluated and built upon for the development process of the change.

Key message 3 – ***Innovation with responsibility***: This message ensures that the company is committed to running this initiative with full transparency, making sure that all stakeholders will be actively considered throughout the process and not just informed. This gives a promise that this technological advancement will never come at the cost of ethical responsibility and understands that innovation will come with accountability (to employees switching roles, customers getting used to the new system, etc..)

Tactics

Now, in order to prove these messages and turn them into action, three main tactics will be implemented by Aldi when undergoing this automated initiative

Tactic 1 – The employee storytelling series: According to Spear & Roper (2016) speaking on the concept of corporate storytelling “Enabling employees to actively share stories can enhance their support for corporate strategy more effectively than just receiving stories from official sources”. Which is why Aldi will launch an internal communication series which will feature staff who have undergone the training and fully gotten used to their roles working with the new Shop&Go model. There will be weekly short-clipped videos pre-recorded by employees sharing their experiences, what their new responsibilities look like, as well as their thoughts about this new initiative. It’s crucial that employees feel thoroughly supported when undergoing corporate change as Fitzpatrick (2011) explains how “change initiatives often fail simply because no one really cares, and that the bigger picture isn’t understood”, which is why this storytelling series will enable fellow employees to feel supported, that they are one of the key points to this change. It will reduce the feeling of fear and build morale amongst staff who feel concerned and uncertain about working into a more advanced store environment.

Tactic 2 – Interactive customer desks: To address concerns about the functionality and any technical difficulties, Aldi will implement several interactive customer desks around the store layout. These customer desks are meant to act as real-time assistance hubs for consumers where there will be on screen FAQs, be able to get guidance through on-screen manuals, and even request live support via video call with Aldi’s customer service staff. This is to reassure customers that even in this staff-free environment, there will still be human support available if needed. This tactic will be able to address the older customer demographic’s worries on new technology, get insightful feedback from consumers, as well as uphold Aldi’s image as a brand who values simplicity, clarity and efficiency. In a way, in terms of corporate leadership, this approach imbeds Aldi as using

theories of democratic leadership to this external stakeholder, which is to encourage subordinates, or in this specific case – the consumers – input in decisions and engages a two-way-communication. This reflects to when Allert (1997) speaks on ‘corporate communications and trust in leadership’, stating how a corporate leader must “regard difficulties as opportunities rather than inconveniences, walk in another’s shoes and walk in another perspective”, which is what implementing this customer desk will result to.

Tactic 3 – CEO livestream QNA conference: According to Li (2021) speaking on roles of transparent communication, a concept called ‘accountable transparency’ is important to be applied into corporate settings. This is where organizations should provide comprehensive and complete information, including both threats and opportunities of an initiative to reduce the possibility of anxiety, misunderstandings and doubt. Which is why, to communicate transparently and show genuine interest in this initiative to the publics, the CEO and senior executives of Aldi will host two livestream QNAs open to employees, customers, union representatives, and the general media. This QNA is an opportunity to address all doubts and questions concerning the initiative, one will be held before the launch and one after (which addresses and reflects on any feedback received post-launch).

Evaluation

To ensure the success and in order to collect meaningful feedback from stakeholders, Aldi will use both a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection. For the internal stakeholders (employees), to measure the effectiveness of the storytelling series, the engagement rate will look at the number of views, shares and feedback comments. For the external stakeholders, customer feedback will be collected through the interactive desks and post-launch surveys to measure the ease of use, satisfaction and any concerns. The CEO livestream can also include polls and check viewers comments and interactions via tracking through the stream. These evaluations will ensure whether the communications plan is effective enough to ensure that Aldi’s transformation is stakeholder-led and legitimate.

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Aldi Australia Announces Launch of Staff-Free AI “Shop & Go” Trial stores

Sydney, Australia – 7th August 2025: Aldi is proud to announce the Launch of its first Australian staff-free “shop&go” trial stores, arranged to open in Newcastle, Rockdale, and Marrickville. Inspired by the success of its automated store in Greenwich, London. These stores will be fully checkout-free embedded with advanced AI camera technology, letting customers come in, shop, and leave without checking out any items.

“Our people and our customers remain at the heart of this transition” said Senior representative from Aldi headquarters. “This initiative is in no way about replacing our employees with technology, but about advancing and adapting into a higher, more seamless store to create even more meaningful experiences for our customers. Our staff will be retrained and engaged in commencing this initiative.”

To ensure this shift is inclusive of all affected stakeholders, Aldi will implement real time support desks, transparent live QNA sessions, and undergo employee storytelling initiatives. Our staff will be offered new roles and higher skill opportunities, with back-and-fourth communications with union representatives as well.

As being one of Australia’s most trusted supermarket retailers, we as a company remain loyal to being transparent, responsible and will always put the community’s values first. This initiative is a trial, and Aldi will continue to seek feedback from all major stakeholders to build this plan into a safe, inclusive, and futuristic experience for all.

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