

Will robots change the marketing industry?

How will artificial intelligence (AI) change the future of marketing and communications? Will it lead to the loss of jobs or will it improve performance and productivity, allowing humans to shake off all mundane tasks and be more creative?

Here we talk to Paul Conneally, EMEA marketing lead at the software company [LiveTiles](#), about how intelligent automation can transform the way marketers do their work.

Robots can go deeper

Artificial intelligence has come a long way since the days it was merely the subject of sci-fi novels and dystopian, post-apocalyptic, movies. Machine learning, neural networks, big data processing have set to change the way we live and communicate. It is true that Apple's Siri or Amazon's Alexa remind us nothing of the blood-thirsty cyborgs in Hollywood's popular representations, but how deep can AI infiltrate into our daily decisions and activities? And how will this affect industries like marketing and communications, for which deep customer insights are becoming more imperative than ever?

"The AI canvas is essentially built around prediction, judgement and action. This is aligned with how strategic communications and marketing are organised. The future of marketing lies at the granular level of identity-based engagement, and AI will be the great enabler that will drive this," says Conneally.

"We conduct research or analyse data to predict or influence behaviours and deliver on specific goals; we make judgements based on this evidence-based information which we then shape into the action we will take to achieve these desired goals. Communications, PR and marketing are

taken up with repetitive, rudimentary tasks that can be so easily automated, such as the updating of directories, pitching stories or localising content,” he explains.

Conneally says that with more and more tasks handed over to AI, as it increasingly learns and improves itself, “communications professionals will concentrate on what matters most, like relationship building, strategy and campaign design with much of the execution, analysis and reporting will be done by AI-powered programmes. This will be a collaborative effort where humans will still make the big calls based on vastly improved and more timely data.”

As Conneally notes, “many of the better known, household brands” are already applying AI to their communications strategies and campaigns. “Companies like Amazon use AI extensively to understand customer needs and behaviour, tailoring newsfeeds and even pricing according to the real-time data that is being generated. The entire Amazon ‘experience’ is AI enabled. Nike is also using AI in very innovative ways, inviting customers to design their own sneakers but then using this data to run algorithms that create new product lines in step with customer desires, and delivering not just identity-based products, but also personalised messaging. Numerous brands are using AI 24/7 to improve search, recommendations, ad performance and Chatbot-led customer service,” he adds.

Making the robots work for you

Will there be a time when all communications decisions will be informed by AI? “Informed yes, decided no. The decision making will remain human-centric for the foreseeable future, at least on the broader, more strategic calls. It really comes down to the value we believe AI can add to our business and setting it on a path to do just that. It is about putting the power of AI at the disposal of your business and having it work hard for the team, bringing extended bandwidth that can cover multiple time zones, languages or data points, and allowing you to be more strategic, decisive, and accountable.”

But won’t this trend eventually lead to a reduction of jobs? “AI represents the fifth industrial revolution following in the footsteps of steam, mass production, personal computing, and the current era of digital transformation. All of these ‘revolutions’ have been disruptive, and all of these have led to the disappearance and the invention of new jobs,” replies Conneally.

“The work of a data scientist, for instance, didn’t exist ten years ago yet this job is now indispensable across a range of industries from PR management to banking because digital transformation brings with it the ability to generate and convert data to provide fresh insights and new revenue opportunities. Specifically looking at the communications industry, I believe activities like managing media lists, updating directories, account-based distributions and so on will be fully taken over by AI-powered solutions. This is not necessarily a case of replacing jobs but of releasing

untapped or unused talents to focus on more strategic, relationship-oriented and high-return activities.”

Small firms can use AI too

As the Marketing Lead in the EMEA region with LiveTiles, a global software company with a stated mission to “reshape the way people interact with technology”, Conneally makes sure “to provide a communication channel from users to designers, so we build intelligent workplace solutions that are ethical, meaningful, and beneficial.”

But according to him, the adoption of AI does not only concerns big-budget companies. How can SMEs make sure that they don’t fall behind? “You don’t need to be a computer scientist or conglomerate to write an AI strategy. Smaller companies can invest in AI and compete on an equal footing with competitors in the bigger leagues. AI is a great leveller. Some have called it a truly democratising technology because its power is at the disposal of whoever deploys it effectively,” he says.

“Smaller companies need to seek out their AI advantage and find that sweet spot where humans and machines can collaborate. Start with a concrete project such as a virtual assistant for customer service or managing ‘always live’ directories and take it from there. The important thing is to start.”

Written by Irene Psychari.