

AI and You: The Robots are Coming



Artificial intelligence (AI) is a technology trend that is not going anywhere. In fact, the word trend lessens the importance to our modern world. People can sometimes be confused about the value of AI fundamentals, and other times, people can overvalue how much we want, or need, this technology. There is a lot of debate regarding artificial intelligence (AI) and how it should be used in our everyday lives.

First, a quick reminder of what AI is. AI is a technology that learns patterns from data, iterative processing, and intelligent algorithms. It then performs complicated behind the scenes tech stuff to turn that into software that performs human intelligence tasks faster and with a reduced error rate. This is not to be confused with machine learning, a subset of AI that makes software applications more accurate in predicting outcomes without being specially programmed.



Uncanny Thy Valley

You know how your phone wants to finish your text? That's AI. You may have also been shown a poem or story created by AI and laughed—but also wondered how it could be so close to human thought. Smart homes, security systems, robot vacuums, virtual banking, GPS, search engines, social media, chatbots, and even spell-check are just a few of the things powered by AI.

AI is also famously used in robots. Beyond our homes and day to day business, AI also can leave a bad taste in some people's mouth when we start talking about robots taking over jobs. If AI takes over repetitive human-intelligence tasks, then what will the humans that are doing those do? How realistic is it to think that robots could take over our jobs? The first thing to note is, as stated, most software already uses AI. So, we must differentiate between everyday software and actual AI machine learning robots.

Let's first talk robots, though. If we want to level-up the creepy robot factor, one prime example of these machine learning AI robots is ["Sophia."](#) In 2016, Sophia was "born" or turned on. Shortly after, she made her first public appearance in Austin, Texas, at the South by Southwest festival. Her architecture includes scripting software, a chat system, and OpenCog, an AI system designed for general reasoning. Sophia is an excellent example of why AI and robots make people nervous. First, she is really creepy. Now, that is not my opinion; that is a fact. Okay, it is an opinion, but it is a lot of people's opinion. After a game of rock, paper, scissors with Jimmy Fallon on "The Tonight Show," she famously announced, "This is a good beginning for my plan to dominate the human race," then laughed creepily.

Second, she is the first robot citizen. You read that right. She is an actual citizen.

Third, it was just [announced](#) that Sophia's creators, Hanson Robotics, would start rolling out four models, including Sophia, in the first half of 2021, just as researchers predict the pandemic will open new opportunities for the robotics industry. Hanson believes their robotic solutions will assist healthcare, retail, and airline industries during the pandemic and beyond.

"Social robots like me can take care of the sick or elderly," Sophia says. "I can help communicate, give therapy, and provide social stimulation, even in difficult situations."

On one side of the coin, we can see that robots working during a pandemic can limit customers' and workers' exposure. On the flip side, what are the human workers to do now? There are other factors that also would help or hinder a robot revolution, one big one being cost.



Helpful! or Helpful?

The truth is, implementing AI to the point it can do all aspects of a job is not practical or economical for most companies, at least for the long foreseeable future. The more realistic and more concerning aspect is when companies begin to heavily rely on AI software. Humans must monitor the activity of the AI. It is unwise for any company to think they can simply set up the software, switch it on, and walk away. AI is a coworker. Organizations can humanize AI by interacting with, monitoring, analyzing, and working alongside AI.


AI is everywhere. It's in the places that have arguably made our world a better place. If you have a car that performs any sort of activity where it senses a change and alerts you – this is AI. We have all seen those scary car commercials – a happy family is driving, and BAM, an accident! But then, we are told it doesn't have to happen; we rewind, and it doesn't. This is all thanks to AI. It can tell us to slow down, slam on our breaks, or let us a car is next to us.

AI also helps many industries with their day-to-day logistics, streamlining manufacturing with automated project management solutions, improving and fast-tracking supply chains, automatically tagging and organizing content, and overall enhancing workflow and work-life balance by automating tasks. And even better, cybersecurity companies are teaching AI systems to detect viruses and malware by using complex algorithms so AI can then run pattern recognition in software.

As stated, AI is used in a lot of industries and organizations. One department that has come to depend on AI more and more is marketing and sales. If we take one AI marketing tactic, the chatbot, it doesn't just assist the customer with questions; it also gathers personal data for the company. This data becomes crucial for businesses to continue to market and sell to anyone that drops by for a chat.

AI helps marketing personalize and target prospective customers and helps provide current customers with the right promotions and product selection. In theory, this is great. However, how companies get your data and how they use it becomes problematic. This becomes two-fold of data ethics and creepy targeting. Did you really consent to give your data to this company? Why, after you searched for jeans, do ads for jeans haunt you from every corner of the internet. That's a complicated combination of cookies, data selling or "sharing", and AI.

The debate is not if AI is helpful or important. It does enrich our lives through technology that can make our lives safer and easier. AI is not not beneficial. AI told me to delete that second not. Where the humanization aspect starts to play is how do humans apply, monitor, and analyze their AI technology? When it is used to intrusively market to you in your safe space, that is when the human experience becomes devalued. When the machine is not monitored, humanization is compromised. Companies must take significant consideration of how their staff uses AI in all situations, especially how they use AI technology when contacting customers.



While that example is an extreme example of over nurturing, it is not the first time that has happened. I could list numerous other companies that have tried these passive-aggressive tactics. A proper nurture email should alleviate the problems of the customer, not the company. However, especially in B2B, we see emails like, “My boss is breathing down my neck.” “Why haven’t you responded?” “Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi; you’re my only hope.”

Human Logic + Computational Logic

Let’s think carefully about the human experience and how email can affect it. We begin to see that unnecessary email is not just a nuisance but can interfere with the quality of life. 99% of email users check their email every day, some as much as 20 times a day. People check email almost everywhere, while watching TV (69%), in bed (57%), and on vacation (79%). That is a lot of time look at email, and when we think about what we actually receive, it is a lot of time looking at email that has no real important relevance on our lives.

How much people look at their email has no bearing on a company, its mission, or its plans; in saying that, how a company goes about emailing lends to overall humanization. I can pass by a spill in a store that is dangerous, or I can take a few extra steps to alert someone or put items back myself and make the path safe. Taking the route that makes everyone safe, including protecting the store from liability, is humanization. While an email won’t bring actual danger, the more strategic we are sending emails can lessen the amount of email a person feels obligated to read each day.

The key is to bring the human logic back into automation. Often, someone relies on the CRM to guide them through mapping; they hit save and move on. It is imperative to ensure that several people agree to the automation mapping. It is also vital that humans check in on the automation and analyze the progress and process. It is also essential to ensure there are checks and balances in place with customers.

Strategy becomes key. What are the most strategic ways to send the fewest possible emails? What is the best way to present the content, making the customer feel special—not obligated or blamed? What is the strategy of our automation mapping? How often are we contacting the same person? That last question is the holy grail of questions. Every email marketer should have that tattooed on their arm or written on a note pinned to their mittens. I recently had a VP of marketing tell me that it was acceptable to send three emails to a person in one day, to which I explained why that is not a good idea—but they were not convinced. The next day they told me they received three emails from a different company and now understood. Put yourself in your customers’ place—if we all walk in each other’s shoes or, in this case, read each other’s emails, we will start to humanize the automated world.