

Artificial Intelligence's Impact

— ON EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Artificial Intelligence (AI) can help companies' external-facing communications in better personalizing content, understanding customers' behaviors, predicting customers' buyer intent, and forecasting the future sales pipeline.

By Pam Didner

AI is already part of our daily lives, even if it's not overtly apparent. Google harnesses AI to autocomplete search queries, predicting what you are searching for with great accuracy. Facebook news feeds and Amazon product recommendations are tailored to your preferences based on your content consumption and product purchases. Spotify, Pandora, and Apple Music all have certain machine-learning algorithms built into their applications to make decisions about which new songs to recommend by associating listeners' preferences with attributes of songs in their database. Alexa and Google Home have already become the new normal for many households.

AI definition. Machine Learning. Deep Learning.

The most common definition of AI is "intelligence exhibited by machines." In order for machines to "think" or "act" like humans, we need to "teach" them how to learn. For machines to learn, it's best to feed them massive amounts of data and build algorithms for computers to begin teaching themselves. Machine learning means algorithms that parse data, learn from that data, and then apply what they've learned to make informed decisions.

Another term used in AI is "Deep Learning." A deep learning model is designed to continually analyze data with a logic structure similar to how a human would draw conclusions. To achieve this, deep learning uses a layered structure of algorithms called an artificial neural network (ANN). The design of an ANN is inspired by the biological neural network of the human brain. The tricky part is that a deep learning model doesn't always draw correct conclusions, and we run the risk of making decisions based on faulty premises. But when it works, deep learning is a scientific marvel of true artificial intelligence.

Those same techniques can apply to stages of external communication outreach or customers' purchase journey wherever automation, analysis or even content creation and reporting is needed.

Using AI to create content and reporting narratives

To create high-quality reporting requires extensive data analysis which is manual and time-consuming. One way of using AI is in the field of Natural Language Generation using Narrative Science to translate structured data into text. Qlik, a business intelligence and visualization software company, allows you to plug a structured graph or data into its software program, the tool can "read" and "analyze" the data and create narratives in short, long and bullet-point formats. Companies are using this capability to report out on threats and opportunities as a starting point for strategy planning. The automated narrative helps data analysts find insights quickly.

AI is also being applied to journalistic reporting. For content creation, the "Washington Post" developed its home-grown AI-based publication tool, Heliograf. Here is how it works: editors create narrative templates for the stories, including keywords and phrases which account for different potential outcomes. Then, they hook Heliograf to credible sources of structured data. Heliograf will match the data from the template with relevant data, then merge and publish them to different platforms.

"USA Today" uses Wibbitz, an AI-driven software application, to create short videos by condensing news articles into a script with images or video footage, and even adds a synthesized newscaster voice.



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Using AI as an external communications assistant

RapidMiner, a company that provides an analytical tool for data scientists, offers free trials but was struggling to serve the high volume of users that took advantage of the offer. Many new users also need assistance to get the most out of the trial. Their sales team was overwhelmed — and spending a great deal of time — sorting through the chat sessions to find qualified prospects.

They implemented DriftBot, an intelligent chatbot to answer users' questions, qualify leads and book meetings for the sales team. The team established a workflow and mapped out possible communications scenarios. When visitors ask questions, the bot can "understand" the inquiries and "find" the best ways to respond based on different scenarios. The bot conducts about a thousand chats per month, resolving about two-thirds of the customer inquiries. It routes those that it cannot resolve to salespeople.

These tools are just a few examples of the hundreds of applications which address different stages of external communications. No AI machines or bots can do a comprehensive end-to-end reporting, marketing communications, or sales engagement YET. Human intervention to set up the processes, conduct quality checks, and connect different tools is still essential.

AI was able to make huge strides due to the massive amount of data that we've generated in the past several years. A fun fact: 2.5 quintillion bytes of data is created every day by 3.7 billion people on this planet. With the colossal volume of data, we will continue to "train" machines to help them "learn." As AI's utility continues to grow, we should also continue to develop new skillsets to take advantage of the insights that AI can offer. The machines continue to learn, and so should we.