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Don't put an Idiot in Charge (A short story about AI)

By Marci De Vries

Raise your hand if you've heard some version of this lately: "In the next 10 years, robots with Artificial Intelligence will replace all rote jobs." Now, raise your OTHER hand if you heard this same thing in 2005, 2000 and 1990. After researching a while, I learned it has been a constant drumbeat since the 1950s.

And Now Artificial Intelligence:

AI in combination with serverless technology and large computing networks is improving by leaps and bounds versus the steady steps forward that we have become accustomed to, which may be the reason we are hearing so much about job replacement. Computers are even able to do some basic learning such as "if person X does this same behavior 55 times out of 59 times, it can be assumed that person X wants to do that behavior all the time, so we will just go ahead and do that for them."

The net result is a sort of 'idiot assistant' that interprets actions absolutely literally – disregarding context. For instance, I had an advertising campaign that was "optimized" by a well-regarded AI provider. After 2 months, the AI had made decisions based on behavioral forensics, and came to the conclusion that the people most likely to purchase my product were 14-year-old boys playing Fort Nite online. Unfortunately, I was trying to sell solar panels. The AI chose this audience because these boys were so incensed by solar panel ads that they filled out lead generation forms with swears and death threats, but the AI only looked at the fact that a form was filled out and then sought to get more of the same action.

To date, AI 'thinking' is very useful for people/jobs/situations that never evolve over time. However, I can think of zero situations where any of these things stay the same. As our technology evolves faster over time, so do we, and so do our jobs. We each push each other faster and faster.

Contrast this with actual brains:

In 2017, a neurological study found that the human brain spontaneously creates structures within itself to problem solve – and these structures form in up to 11 mathematical dimensions. DIMENSIONS. And, there are tens of millions of these objects even in a small speck of the brain. This misunderstood neurological horsepower is the engine behind neuro plasticity, creativity, emotion, understanding, and innovation.

So where does that leave us? Say it with me: Computers are experts at remembering things and doing rote activities such as calculations and a small amount of behavioral learning within small boundaries. People are better at interpreting the meaning of things and making decisions about future actions and strategy. These are also the skills that make us human…but we all knew that already because we're smart. We didn't need to Google that.