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Automation stands to empower advertisers and make campaigns more effective. Nadine Thomson, Global Chief Technology Officer, explains.

When we hear the word ‘automation’, many assume that it means “the robots are coming for our jobs”! The reality is that automation is an ally, not a foe.

In truth, automation enables us to make quicker decisions and removes time-consuming manual tasks from our ‘to do lists’. In our industry, it allows teams to spend more time on vital and interesting tasks such as post-campaign analysis, investigating future trends, as well as generating insights that can make client messaging even more powerful.

Rest assured that however influential AI becomes, it’s still a long way from understanding

context and ethics, two frames only a human can add. An automated solution using AI might, for example, crunch historic data and recommend that advertising in cinema would be an ideal fit for the next month. A planner would then point out that given the large number of coronavirus related lockdowns across Europe, now is not the right time for this channel – let's not forget, it takes people to interpret data and to use it intelligently, not just the availability of data alone.

At MediaCom we have focused on automation of areas that will most benefit our clients such as smart dashboards solutions, ad placement, compliance to our media standards, data collection and aggregation.

We've already produced transformative work. For an entertainment client, we've made it possible to understand their media investments in real-time across 75 markets and which of these investments are "firm" and what is "flexible". This solution allows our team to track 800 media plans each year and more than \$250M in media activity.

By shifting this process from Excel spreadsheets and manual work to an automated data solution, we've eliminated 1300 hours of staff time per month and can now generate real-time reports at the touch of a button.

Such projects bring multiple benefits to advertisers by enabling everyone working on the account to have much greater input on the effectiveness of all media activity. It enables the marketing team to manage their internal stakeholders with greater ease because they have up-to-the-minute information at their fingertips, every minute.

From an agency perspective, it means less time is spent manually pulling information together and more time focusing on the insights that can deliver a step change in business performance.

Importantly, from a people perspective, it cuts the time people spend on manual tasks down from hours to minutes, freeing them up to imagine a wider range of strategic options and execute smarter.

Automation also makes work more challenging and puts constant training and skills development at the heart of any [career development](#) plan, according to Pew Research. The top two reasons employees are bored at work, as reported by [Udemy](#), is the lack of opportunity to learn new skills (46%) and unchallenging work that doesn't use their education (44%).

Delivering automation may be business critical but it isn't simple. Underpinning success is time taken to understand the business process.

Second, you need to engage everyone involved and get them excited about how the effort to change the way everyone works. Adopting new tools and creating a consistent way of working across business functions and markets will make their work more interesting. The reward for them is the chance to learn new skills and spend their working days doing more interesting things. Training and change management efforts are an important part of any automation project.

Automation is going to be one of the vital conversations we have over the next few years. It's a business-critical challenge that all advertisers and their agency partners need to overcome. Freeing up staff to add value rather than having your brightest minds occupied with manual and repetitive tasks can only be a major business advantage.

OPINION