
Abracadabra; there's no fooling the robots

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There are many talented chiefs in our industry. One of them is literally a magician.

A highlight of any meeting with Trinity Mirror [boss](#) Simon Fox is that he might just make something disappear and reappear. He's a member of the magic circle, and the last time the Trinity Mirror roadshow hit our agency he did the most awesome piece of magic involving Claudine Collin's phone and the regional press.

(Who can say how much his magical skills influence the business performance – but latest [results](#) showed growth in profits of 24% – some good news in a challenging sector. Results aside, the magic show at MediaCom was a treat.)

The reason we love magic may be because we live in a world where our core senses are constantly performing magic tricks every day. When we see something, we don't see what

we think we see. Every day and all the time.

Humans [experience](#) a time lag.

It takes a fifth of a second for an image to go from your eye, to your brain to be processed, and then for you to act on it. Because you don't feel that time lag, your brain is also constantly making up for the time lag by constantly predicting the future a tenth of a second ahead at a time.

Most of the time that doesn't matter, (unless for example you're a bike rider commuting in London then you'll know how important a fraction of a second can be in terms of surviving.)

This is what a magician exploits when he does a card trick. It is misdirection. Very clever misdirection, but it is, of course, science and not magical.

Magicians use misdirection to manipulate our attention. It works because we don't ever see everything that is in front of us. Our brains couldn't possibly analyse every stimulus or every detail. There are loopholes in cognition because that is how we cope with the world. We cannot process everything and so we choose, unconsciously, what is most likely to fit an accepted pattern.

Goldsmith University Dr Gustav Kuhn studies the impact this has on our daily lives. Kuhn is a cognitive psychologist who researches human perception and cognition. Or put in a way that sounds like much more fun: he studies magic and how magicians allow you to experience the impossible.

[Kuhn](#) says: "magic happens to us all the time – our whole experience is a massive illusion, we're just not aware of it."

It is one of the key differences between you and a robot. Robots can't believe in magic, and they don't have gaps in cognition. They can process more information faster and more accurately than is possible for you in a split second. As the pace of real time business

decisions continues to increase, understanding how our brains compare at making split second judgements is crucial.

As we come to assign roles differently in the cyber future, there will be significant shifts in how money is spent when it's the algorithm that decides, based on processing every bit of data that is available, not just the information that we can grasp.

We will need to decide which decisions require strategic reflection and which will be made by the machines.

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