



Next Year AI Will Eat Itself

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What's your AI story ? What's your AI strategy ? If this isn't a recurring question and theme, prepare for it to become one in 2017.

But before we get stuck in the world predictions and trends and all that jazz, lets be clear this (like a lot of Science Fiction) is a provocation not a prediction. I'm not a massive fan of predictions. If I was good at those I would be trading technology stock – or probably bio-technology stock. – or betting on politics.

So, what's my provocative AI story ?

My story involves great hulking zetabytes of machine marooned on the planet MarTech slowly gnawing on themselves.

It is set in the year 2017 in a mash up between Hunger Games, Neuromancer and Blade Runner where only one AI will survive and she will rule us all (Wintermute or Neuromancer?).

Well, she will rule those of us who have stopped believing in the power of brands. Those of us like the Tessier Ashpool's in Gibson's novel who worship at the altar of something otherworldly.

Are you one of those people? Are you one of those people who believes that data and data alone will make what we do more effective? Are you contributing in ever increasing circles to the cacophony of chatter around the Martech Industrial Complex?

What if you're wrong? (Clue – You are)

What does that do to your brand, your business, your career? (Clue – it will leave you high and dry)

Go and get enough input from the outside world to have a better understanding of both sides of the story (the echo chambers of recent politics tell us what happens if we don't).

Stop living in a world of fiction. If you want to know what to think about machines that think I would recommend reading the most recent John Brockman curated edge.org book of that name. It is a collection of the world's leading thinkers (Pinker, Dyson, Kelly, Sterling, Eno, Coupland, Anderson, Thaler) writing a couple of pages each on What to Think About Machines That Think. These people know much better than us what is going on with AI.

One of the recurring themes in the collection is the empathy issue – what Harrison Ford's character is testing for with the Voight Kampf test in Blade Runner ... the AI don't have any. This is a massive issue for brands as they plough headlong into the world of data, marketing technology and partial AI.

A strong brand is a great and powerful thing. A strong brand understands people. For an AI

to do that is an astonishing leap of faith – for a start the people programming it would need to have a hugely nuanced understanding of how emotion works. Then they would need to be able to programme this as an organic construct. The vast majority of current programming in this area is a set of pathway choices. Admittedly, millions of paths analysed and chosen from in milliseconds. But these are still binary choices. Empathy and emotion? Less so.

So, here is part two of my provocation – 2017 will be the year that brands become fashionable again. If they don't we're all heading for a dystopian world in which what we do doesn't matter because the machines with their learning will have taken over.

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