

A VIEW FROM JOSH KRICHEFSKI

The rise of AI in media – an exciting new world

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Last week saw hundreds of thousands of tech experts descend on London as [London Tech Week](#) took hold of the capital once again.

The series of events are a brilliant way of discovering new technology, looking ahead to what's coming and, importantly from my perspective, understanding how it can be used now – within my business but also within the media industry as a whole.

There were many takeaways from the last week but something which really struck me was how the conversation about Artificial Intelligence (AI) is shifting.

Even a year ago, a lot of the talk around AI was focussed on futuristic concepts which could become reality in 50 or 100 years. That's understandable. It's inspiring to think about what's possible and with the likes of [Westworld](#), games such as [Detroit](#) and movies like

[Lucy](#) quite literally showing society what may well be possible, it's no surprise that AI conversations tends to be future-gazing.

However this year, more than any other year, it was clear that AI has reached a tipping point. We are moving from "concept" to "everyday reality" and it's hugely exciting to be part of.

Why care?

From a business viewpoint, it's clear that investment in AI will to continue to grow across all sectors. The [UK government has itself invested £1bn in AI development](#). And with Gartner projecting that the global business value derived from AI will total \$1.2 trillion in 2018, an increase of 70 percent from 2017, clearly there is huge opportunity for businesses to invest and reap the rewards.

Importantly however, AI in 2018 isn't all about projections and possibility. It is now being used in various forms by enough businesses, in enough industries, to make a real difference in the world and prove its worth. The more real life applications business leaders see, the easier it is to understand how that technology could impact their own business and where they need to invest and innovate.

The media industry, arguably more than any other, has already been impacted by AI. I say "more than any other" because the way AI is being used really does cover every corner of the industry – from planning and advertising, to content production and delivery.

It's the reason we ourselves are running MediaCom's first ever [Transformation Week](#) from Monday 25th June – Friday 29th June. We're now in a time of unprecedented change and disruption across almost all business sectors and now more than ever industries need help with transformation. AI is a core part of that and it is a big part of the agenda for the week ahead. It has the potential to vastly improve many areas of our industry and it's our responsibility to be at the heart of that.

AI for audience understanding

The use of data to understand an audience is not new. We've been doing this for a while now in various guises and in recent years, that has become smarter. With the rise of mobile and the resulting stream of audience data available, the focus has been on creating faster, more agile ways to analyse that data and turn it into genuine intelligence.

AI has the potential to take that even further. Audiences are increasingly hard to understand and predict. Think about your own behaviour. As you've read this blog post, you've probably also glanced at your phone a few times, maybe at a TV, while checking your email pop-ups at the bottom of your screen. In short, people are busy, complex and flippant. We multitask, jump between devices and are easily distracted. Our consumer "journeys" are therefore bizarre.

AI can change all of that by enabling audience characterisation to help content providers, agencies like ourselves and brands understand the audience on an individual level. It means we can understand how people are responding to certain content, why and what the end result is – i.e. do they button-smash the 'x' on an ad or do they click through to the brand page?

Rather than being cookie-based and static views of a mass group of people, audience characterisation produces individual-level profiles that include detailed values, needs, interests, contextual qualifiers and more – and it's all constantly updated in real-time.

While some levels of audience understanding have been possible, AI takes it to a whole new level and for brands, this is vital. Advertising campaign content, and even film and TV programming, should be tapping into this. We have our own insights teams working with our planners. We also work with technology partners to push ourselves even further.

The goal for any great campaign is always to use data to deliver better content that will appeal to the right people. AI is going to be core to this moving forward.

AI in content development and delivery

IBM, with its Watson AI offering, has been testing its AI product in a variety of industries including the media.

In 2016, it produced the first ever AI-developed movie trailer for [Morgan](#). Of course, humans were still vital in finessing the final cut of the trailer but it was a big step towards using the technology to produce high-quality, mass consumption content.

In this case, the AI platform analysed the movie and created a trailer based on what it believed were key moments of “emotions, eeriness, frights and loving” alongside audio analysis of “music and tone of voice” in the movie – i.e. the moments which would appeal to an audience. From there, human editors used that to cut a final edit of the trailer.

As a way of producing advertising content, it’s an innovation which could become the norm. A mix of machine and man to produce great work – if it works, who would argue against it?

Sticking with content but moving to delivery, on-demand clearly offers huge opportunity for using AI to improve the visual quality of the content being streamed.

Netflix is currently developing its Dynamic Optimizer, which uses AI to analyse each individual frame of content to compress it as much as possible without diminishing the image quality. This reduces the amount of data used and is largely targeted at the growing number of viewers who watch video over mobile and tablet devices.

I would expect other streaming services to pursue similar techniques. As more and more people watch TV or movies on phones and tablets, that kind of smart delivery system will be vital. After all, it is content quality above all else that will keep audiences coming back for more.

These are just a few ways AI could, and I believe will, change our industry. It isn’t about AI replacing humans or stifling creativity. It’s about fine tuning our thought process and

enhancing creativity by using smart data and creating the very best content possible.

This is a pivotal time in the media and the role of technology within it. I truly believe that every part of the media journey is going to be changed by AI in some way – even if that change is subtle, it will be there. And as a major player in the industry, it's our job to be at the forefront of that, making sure our clients are confident and able to use AI and make the most of it.

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