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**Comment: AI for Business**

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**Calum Chace** <cccalum@gmail.com>  
To: Oliver Pickup <oliver@pickup.media>

1 May 2018 at 12:54

Hi Oliver

Yes, this is in my playground. Happy to help.

Some thoughts below, and feel free to call with any follow-up. 01903 810409 today.

Calum

On 1 May 2018 at 12:30, Oliver Pickup <oliver@pickup.media> wrote:

Hi Calum,

I hope this finds you well. Thanks for asking your contacts to comment on the outsourcing AI piece; no problem that they were not up for it.

I'm crossing my fingers that you – or some of your friends in this space – will be able to assist with another AI-focused piece.

I've been commissioned to write the concluding article in the *Raconteur*-produced *Times* report *AI for Business*, which is scheduled to be published on May 23. The 1,200-word piece deals with the expectation and the reality of what AI can do right now – and explores how to narrow that gap.

The editor wants me to begin by referring to the example of Uber's AI-powered autonomous car killing a pedestrian that caused uproar – but that missed the point. While questions were raised about its safety, the latest National Safety Council statistics reveal that 110 people suffer (non-autonomous) traffic-related fatalities in America every day, on average (there were 40,100 in 2017).

You're right. Human drivers are committing a holocaust - killing 1.2 million people every year on roads around the world, and maiming another 50 million or so. Road accidents are the most common form of death for people between 15 and 29. The sooner we can stop this carnage the better.

Self-driving cars have already proved themselves far safer than human drivers, but it is entirely reasonable that we hold them to a higher standard than human drivers, so more time will be taken to remove the "edge cases" that they can't handle. My guess is that will be complete well before many people expect. Judging by his recent tweet on the subject, Richard Hammond is probably in for a surprise, for example.

Some people say the road infrastructure needs to change before self-driving cars can use it. This is demonstrably not true. Google's self-driving cars (now in a spin-off called Waymo) have already driven more than five million miles on the existing road network. In Phoenix Arizona, members of the public are now using these cars as taxis without a human driver and even without a human engineer being present.

To me, the really interesting thing about the tragic fatality with the Uber car is not much uproar it caused, but how little. Uber very sensibly stopped all its testing, but Google and the other forty-plus companies currently testing self-driving cars on American roads did not. And there has been no outcry.

Final point on the Uber case: the police commented very quickly that the accident did not appear to be caused by the car. Looking at the video, I don't think I would have been able to stop the car in time if I had been driving.

Here are some general areas I would like to explore in the article:

– What did the raging debate tell us about the expectation of perfection that we have for AI?

See above

– And how is this being reflected in the world of business?

Pretty much every large company is now working on how to deploy AI, and so are very many medium and small businesses. Frustratingly, the results are not being shared, so companies are not learning from each other's

successes and failures - except insofar as the consultants they use are allowed and able to share them.

– How do solution providers manage expectations, and explain where AI can help and, crucially, where it cannot help?

We are still in the early days of implementing machine learning-based AI, and its applications are still fairly basic. Crude chatbots are increasingly common, and robotic process automation is very much flavour of the month, although much of it is not actually AI yet.

– How should business leaders approach AI – where should they go / who should they trust to find the best solution(s) for them?

There is always the buy-or-build question. Large companies should definitely invest in building up internal AI expertise, but most of them will also lean on their preferred consultancies to help: the usual suspects like McKinsey, BCG, Accenture and the big four audit-based firms (KPMG, PwC, Deloitte and EY) have all invested heavily in building up expertise to overhaul their own businesses and assist their clients. There are also good specialist IT services like Ultima.

– What is being done to better educate business leaders, and what are the examples where AI has been a costly mistake?

See above, and I can't think of a publicly disclosed AI application which has expensively gone wrong, although I'm sure lots of companies will have invested a lot in projects which were dead ends. Unsurprisingly, they don't talk about them.

One final point: the tone of the article will remain positive about AI and its potential value to businesses, but support the argument that we need to understand how and when AI is best placed to deliver results.

Would you like to contribute to this one?

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Very best wishes,

Ollie

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