

HRD

THE ONLY INDEPENDENT STRATEGIC HR PUBLICATION

the **HR**DIRECTOR NOVEMBER 2023 | ISSUE 229

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MICHELLE HOPKINS-JONES
GLOBAL PEOPLE & CULTURE DIRECTOR
YUGO



MORTAL IMAGINATION

While the swift evolution of technologies presents undeniable opportunities to reduce costs and improve efficiencies, it's important to understand the limitations and the need for human oversight. AI is not ready to go it alone. What hasn't been considered is how key stakeholders feel about the increase of automation and the decline of human interaction. It's undoubtedly an exciting time and there is clear potential, but there are serious points to consider, before developing strategies and restructuring teams to maximise on AI.

"THE USE OF AI FOR DESIGN REMAINS AT A STAGE WHERE NOT ONLY DOES IT LACK REAL BRAND INSIGHT, IT ALSO DOESN'T PROVIDE THE ORIGINALITY AND STANDARDS YOU CAN RELY ON"



ARTICLE BY SUZIE WALKER, MD & FOUNDER -
SUZIE WALKER EXECUTIVE SEARCH

While AI is likely to affect most business functions, there is undoubtedly a greater level of excitement within marketing, digital, tech and customer teams. As the renowned marketing professor, Mark Ritson, said in an opinion piece for Marketing Week, “Marketers do tend to get emotional very quickly when confronted with the exciting pornography of change”. While this is the year of AI, last year it was NFTs and we’ve had the year of AR too - there is always a trend. There are sound reasons for embracing a level of change, of course - including shifts in customer behaviour, market trends - and in this case, the opportunities presented by technological advancements. When technologies and the opportunities they present emerge, it only makes sense to embrace and drive that level of change for the business to thrive. In addition, new approaches capture the attention of customers, but perhaps we need to look at the implications of these changes too, because not all change is beneficial.

Many businesses are rushing to implement this new and unregulated technology, with many already looking at the structure of their teams. In fact, Goldman Sachs reported that AI could replace the equivalent of 300 million full-time jobs (Forbes). As with social media, it will be a game-changer, as creativity is democratised and efficiencies enable growth, but a need for human oversight will remain. Arguably, it won’t be a replacement for human creativity and connection because there are big limitations on what AI can do and how it should be utilised. More immediately, businesses simply don’t understand how AI works yet, which is leading to expectations that are unrealistic, along with a desperate need for high-quality data in order for AI to work effectively and many businesses just aren’t there yet. A more pressing objective could be to develop a data and personalisation strategy as we prepare ourselves for a cookie-free world, for example. Even for businesses that have exceptional data, AI is still proving unreliable - or surprising - because no one fully understands its decision-making process. Whether it can be trusted to respond to customer queries

en masse, for example, would be a huge gamble at this early stage and there are a limited number of AI professionals available to support businesses through the process. There certainly isn’t a full understanding of what security risks AI might pose, which is a challenge for businesses navigating data protection regulations, along with how AI can integrate much of the IT infrastructure.

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On a positive note, we can see that when businesses are ready, AI may really help to enhance output. We know that AI can automate the most repetitive and mundane tasks that are currently costly to complete, allowing teams to focus on areas that may have been neglected in recent years, as teams have been stretched in these challenging economic times. Excitingly for retail, for example, it will enable businesses to forecast stock levels quickly and accurately, which is currently a time-consuming task that allows for human interpretation and error. This will be music to the ears of any finance team seeking more accurate predictions. For marketing teams, a greater focus on data will enable AI to tailor communications to their customers’ individual preferences in a seamless manner - no longer trying to be all things to all people through the power of more manual segmentation and targeting. For customer service teams, AI will enable the automation of tasks, like responding to some queries, which simply relies on the language processing of text, freeing up teams for more complex queries and reducing response times.

There are other areas where AI can work alongside the human workforce. For example, there is no doubt that the quality of information from chat bots, for

example, is impressive, but the copy is often bland and it most definitely isn’t fact-checked. It doesn’t allow for a brand’s tone of voice, nuance and it requires careful editing before use. In addition, the use of AI for design remains at a stage where not only does it lack real brand insight, it also doesn’t provide the originality and standards you can rely on from human creatives. It’s simply not ready for that level of use, but the possibilities for small businesses who lack the marketing budget for creative agencies will be important. There is a balance to consider. While Google has confirmed its policy on AI-generated content, reassuring businesses that useful content for users will not be penalised in search rankings no matter where it comes from, many wonder when a lack of originality - and humanity - will result in mass-generated and generic content, resulting in a lack of interest and trust, from users. This could seriously damage a brand’s reputation.

So, how can AI support work alongside a human workforce right now? Firstly, businesses desperately need the training and development opportunities in place for AI to be fully understood and for talent to be grown. Training will be the essential task of listening to and learning from key stakeholders. Businesses need to understand when and how customers want to communicate - when it’s timely and appropriate to employ chat bots, for example avoiding the embarrassment of poor customer service, errors and misinformation and general frustration when trying to access human interaction. In addition, the current talent shortage, which doesn’t seem to be going anywhere, makes it equally important to listen to the workforce - understanding how new systems will work alongside employees in a way that isn’t off-putting and that will ensure retention. Quick decisions on team structures, for example, may be detrimental in the long-term. When approaching AI as anything more than a tool, it’s not a replacement for teams. AI can augment their workload, but it’s only one piece of the puzzle.

FOR FURTHER INFO
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