

AI: From origin to extinction

 By [Craig Johnston](#)

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Is Artificial Intelligence just a rather very intelligent system?

In Dan Brown's 2017 mystery thriller novel, *Origin*, much of the book's narrative involves Winston, an artificially intelligent computer, who interacts so seamlessly with the story's protagonist, Robert Langdon, that Winston (named for Churchill) simply becomes another character and one has to remind yourself that he is in fact not human.



Craig Johnston, marketing manager at Bluekey Seidor

This is at once a credit to Brown's storytelling ability and, perhaps more tellingly, testimony to the almost imperceptible way in which Artificial Intelligence has sidled into our everyday lives.

However, while Winston can in many ways be likened to Iron Man Tony Stark's very own J.A.R.V.I.S, these fictional AI characters both have one fatal flaw in common. They speak with male voices.

Studies have shown that, overwhelmingly, people prefer the sound of female voices to that of male voices when it comes to robots. Gender and voice pitch aside, another famous (real life) robot Kismet, the ominously named robot built in the late 1990's is reportedly able to recognise emotions by observing human body language, interpreting tone of voice and reading facial expressions.

The age of the machine

Fast forward to 2018 and into the trenches of customer service, two decades post-Kismet, and robotic assistants are routinely interacting with customers in commercial environments, employing facial and voice recognition abilities to better serve their patrons.

So extensive is the impact of AI, specifically in customer service, likely to be that this technology is expected to end human customer service.



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Broad research around this subject has shown that by the end of 2020, a staggering 85% of customer interactions will not require any human customer service whatsoever. Across the table from the robotic assistant, consumers are not just warming up to the idea, but actually seem to prefer not dealing with a human customer service agents since their requests are reportedly dealt with more simply and expediently. This form of optimised automation not only saves companies money, it also meets consumers' needs for enhanced customer experiences.

And its not stopping there. AI innovators and manufacturers are promising AI led customer experiences in future that are so ethnographically accurate in their mimicry of human agents that conversation will be able to flow freely, and customers will be assisted across channels without any perceptible transitions.

So confident are manufacturers of AI robots that Nina, for example, a virtual assistant created by Nuance, is boasted to handle intelligent dialogue and transactions so well that she appears to have “a PhD in customer service”.

AI and customer retention

While not all AI has reached the existential planes achieved by Nina and her cogent comrades, right now AI is being employed to augment the work of human customer service representatives in the following ways:

- Taking care of messaging across business platforms and social media networks. Chatbots are sorting and routing support customer inquiries from a virtual assistant to human engagement.
- While there is little doubt that the end-goal of AI augmentation is to entirely take over customer support. In the interim, there are transitional (between man and machine) activities where AI can work collaboratively with human agents. Through machine learning, processes are being streamlined and optimised, resulting in human effort being more efficient.
- The cost of recruiting, training and retraining staff in an industry that is notoriously volatile. With an undercurrent of employees moving from one company to another is cost-prohibitive in the long-run. AI, through machine learning comes pre-loaded with all the information you need and is updated in real-time. Always up-to-date, never late and you only have to train machines once.

The beginning or the end?

Customer support facilitated by AI is however just the tip of the spear. Already, AI is being integrated into many other facets of ERP systems.



Source: pixabay.com

Using insights gained from initial customer interactions, organisations are now harnessing this information as blue-prints, to not only keep improving customer experiences, but also to pivot other processes within the business; optimising efficiency, becoming more agile, expediting decision-making and collaborating in smarter ways.

It was Winston Churchill who once said, “we shape our buildings, thereafter they shape us”. In the context of artificial intelligence, a more prescient statement may however well be that we shape our machines, thereafter they shape us.

ABOUT CRAIG JOHNSTON

Craig Johnston is the marketing manager at Seidor Bluekey and has been in the marketing industry for almost a decade. With vast experience in marketing strategy and campaign execution, he has developed a solid foundation in both traditional and digital marketing.

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