Is AI Really the Future of User Interface?

The internet is always speculating and wondering about what's to come, in terms of access modes, once mobile and screens have ceased to be the latest shiny new thing.

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The theory is that artificial intelligence (AI) is going to be the next evolution; and precisely because of that prediction about AI (plus its other uses), we witnessed an unprecedented technology gold rush in 2017.

The craze about AI had people investing millions of dollars into new products and services, and hand-wringing skeptics forming think tanks to postulate about the end of the world. But, for all of the speculation, what did AI actually do in 2017? What's it doing now? And, what's it poised to do in the coming year?

First, AI broke through the legitimacy barrier.

AI had its first victory as an up-and-coming technology when it broke through a crucial legitimacy barrier, proving to everyone that it is not only viable but also a competitive advantage when deployed well.

A report by PwC estimated that by 2030, AI could contribute upwards of $15 trillion to the global economy — more than the outputs of China and India today, combined. PwC's statistic is one of many that suggest that our future with this technology is almost unimaginable. AI will destroy and create jobs, invent new industries, accelerate innovation

to a new level and fundamentally change the way business is done across the board.

En route to that point, there are questions being posed: How does AI actually create value? What applications of the technology have worked so well that we believe it will change the future in such radical terms?

Interestingly, applications for sophisticated tasks like smoothing out supply chains or detecting risks are still maturing. What AI already does well and what we can expect to see a lot more of in the coming years is helping humans to interface with increasingly complex computers.

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Sean Nolan, founder and CEO of Blink, weighed in on these issues during a chat we had the other day.“Humans in the workplace experience ‘technology fatigue’ because the computer they interact with all day is robotic – oddly organized, clunky, impersonal, and slow,” Nolan told me. “The reality is that computers are so powerful and store so much information, and we need them to do so much, that our ability to utilize them with just a mouse and a keyboard is becoming insufficient.

“AI comes along and opens up the possibility of creating a new interface between the complex, impersonal nature of the computer, and the intelligent, complex nature of its human operator.”

Next, AI is poised to take on immensely complex tasks.

By utilizing simple AI applications, like chatbots and micro applications, immensely complex tasks will – one day soon – be able to be reduced to simple commands. For example, instead of

spending an hour searching a company's servers, shared folders and cloud drives for every relevant document pertaining to a specific task, you'll be able to simply ask a smartbot to do it for you. The task will be completed in seconds, saving valuable time – which PwC estimates will add up to $6.6 trillion in added efficiency by 2030.

While the benefits of added human productivity carry an obvious financial upside for the market, reducing AI to the role of human-computer mediator seems like a demotion for a technology that is supposed to change the world. This view does not properly account for the magnitude of that accomplishment. In fact, AI's role as a mediator between humans and technology is perhaps its greatest triumph.

The myth that humans use only 10 percent of their brain power has been soundly debunked, but we know for a fact that we use only a fraction of our computers' potential at any given moment. Afterall, our interactions with them are analog in nature; and, as a result, fall far short of achieving maximum potential.

AI's untapped potential

AI as a user interface opens up vast untapped potential. This year, it's chatbots and voice recognition. In 10 years it will be some version of Elon Musk's Neuralink (one of his new companies, which is working on linking the human brain to a computer).

Today – right now – there are available a number of tools to help you interface with customers and users by implementing AI. They include:

1. Chatbots. Chatbots can provide the additional layer between you and your consumers to answer their questions, and to interact with potential or current customers.

2. Website builders. There are now new platforms like Grid, which use AI to build your entire website.

3. Smartbots. Smartbots are another form of machine, which can be used internally, like a personal assistant, to handle tasks like scheduling your calendar. This is how X technology works.

“What businesses need to know about AI is that the application they need to use it for first is workforce productivity,” said Nolan. “This single competitive advantage will determine which companies survive the first round of AI and which ones do not. Thinking about AI as UI [user interface] and a means to access the untapped potential of our computers is what we can expect to see in 2018.”

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Meanwhile, the urgency to adopt AI is very real. Companies that successfully incorporate it as UI in their businesses will reap enormous dividends while their competitors will struggle to modernize. In a new report titled *AI is the New UI,* Accenture made the following observation, summing up my point perfectly:

“Getting started can be as simple as using AI to bring more human-like interactions into existing interfaces,” the report stated. “But if businesses want to do more than just keep pace, there’s no time to waste . . . The early adopters are already pulling ahead, but many of the necessary tools are openly being shared. The question to answer is simple: What could a company accomplish if every interaction with technology was an intelligent one?”

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