The Future of Video Advertising Is Artificial Intelligence

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Imagine you're a video editor in 2019. You're handed a script and given thousands of shots to craft a 10-second pre-roll ad, promoted on social media to viewers with specific interests and viewing habits, living across North America and Europe. You crack your knuckles and get to work: You sift through hours of footage, you slice the whole thing together, you bundle it up and send it out. All in all, a day's work.

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The client approves it the next day, uploads it onto various social channels and suddenly millions of people are watching it across the western hemisphere, responding in different ways. Most drop off within the first three seconds. A data team nods along at the analytics streaming in, deliberating whether it's worthwhile to reshoot and recut another video to minimize moments where the viewing masses drop off, optimizing those sacred few seconds your audience is actually watching.

Meanwhile, somewhere in another office, in that same year, a different team is creating a different digital video. Except they're not shooting a single video: They're shooting multiple iterations of it. In one, the actor changes shirts. In

another, the actor is an actress. In another, the actress is African-American.

After finishing the shoot, this agency doesn't pass the footage off to a video editor. They pass it off to an algorithm.

The algorithm can cut a different video ad in milliseconds. Instead of taking one day to edit one video, it could compile hundreds of videos, each slightly different and tailored to specific viewers based on their user data. Then, as the video analytics flows in, the algorithm can edit the video in real-time, too – instead of waiting a week to analyze and act on viewer behavior, the algorithm can perform instantaneous A/B tests, optimizing the company's investment in a day.

This isn't science fiction – this is happening right now. We are witnessing a moment in video marketing history, like moments experienced across other industries disrupted by the digital revolution, where human editors are becoming obsolete. This is the next step in personalized advertising, tailoring content to individuals rather than the masses. Savvy agencies are turning to artificial intelligence for help making those new, specialized creative decisions. It's the same logic that's long overtaken programmatic banner and search advertising, machine learning and chatbots: There are some things computers can do faster, cheaper and more accurately than humans.

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At my agency, Cimaglia Productions, we're working with data to incorporate viewer statistics with video production to create exactly the reality I've described above. By the 2020s, I expect to rely on a fraction of the editors I've worked with since starting my company in 2002. The duality of an agile company is exactly that: accomplishing more with less, reducing overhead and maximizing efficiency. You can't hold up

an older version of your company simply because it is, as too many corporate executives bemoan, “the way we’ve always done things.” Agility means adaptation.

In this future of data-driven dynamic content, viewers’ information is siphoned to AI that determines aspects of the video based on their data. Women may see their version of the video ad star a woman, for example. It may sound like Big Brother is watching you, but this model works with customer data that’s already available. Plus, as a video producer, I wouldn’t be privy to specific customer data; instead, I would simply create an algorithm that looks at that data, reflects it back on the user, then walks away.

The options for customization extend beyond user data, too. If it’s raining outside, it could be raining in the video, if the agency plugs in a geolocating weather script. If it’s nighttime, the video could mirror reality. This is a logical progression for a society already accustomed to exchanging their privacy for free services: advertising tailored toward individuals, rather than masses.

I would also argue that this customization model of video production is more effective than the current model of creating a single video for the masses. In my dealings with large-scale ad agencies, I’ve found executives routinely preoccupied with investing tremendous resources in single, groundbreaking commercials. It’s all about producing a multimillion-dollar, 30-second mini-film that screens during the Super Bowl, gets viewed on YouTube 10 million times and wins a Cannes Lion.

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Such massive projects are valuable, and I certainly have a great appreciation for the craft. But, what does that say about the agency’s priorities? It isn’t really about the

viewer at all – it's stroking creatives' egos while delivering a one-size-fits-all product to millions of prospects. I'm not arguing there isn't a place for them in the future of advertising and communications (the best of these commercials are often are prestigious, beautiful and downright fun to watch), but to make them the centerpiece of a multimillion-dollar campaign is foolhardy in an era when companies are sitting on more customer information than ever before – and when AI is even taking over that arena. Personalization is the way of the future, but, unfortunately, most companies simply don't know what to do with their stores of customer data.

You can't have a revolution without breaking down the past.

In a recent article, Chief Marketing Officer and Senior Vice President at Riverbed Technology Subbu Iyer compared the future of connective networks to Google Maps: The future will see companies finding the best route to deliver their products to their end users.

I love that analogy, and it perfectly applies to this method of video production. If two New Yorkers – one in Queens, one in Manhattan – input "30 Rockefeller Plaza" into Google Maps, they will see two very different routes leading them to the same place. With video production, we are seeing a shift toward this same concept, whereby the video is the route and the product is the location. We're customizing the way people discover new products.

While working with a multinational ad agency earlier this year, I informed them of this impending reality. But, they wouldn't sign off on it. I wasn't surprised. As a former video editor and producer, I understand the effort and structure that goes into making a creative campaign. But, my career history also positions me well to understand how, and why, AI can mimic what a human editor can do, and I'd rather be

spearheading innovation in the industry than lagging behind it. Besides — I've seen this sort of transition happen before.

When I was 20 and cutting my teeth at NBC News, part of my job was to introduce new technology to the network. At that time, they were still shooting and editing in analog. Most of the staff didn't believe there was a more efficient way to edit, and senior management sent me to bureaus around the country to prove them wrong. After six months, once it dawned on everyone that the future was digital, NBC began commissioning multiple digital editing bays across its bureaus and investing in large servers to locally host all their content.

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That was more than 10 years ago, and since then, technology has been developing at an astounding rate. The broadcast media industry has already seen another revolution in automated lights and cameras; hundreds of technicians and operators have lost their jobs to a few producers in control rooms. Nobody should be surprised that post-production will follow.

Yes, this digital progression is costing — and will continue to cost — jobs, but realistically, it's the direction the industry is taking. You can either try and uphold an older version of your company because "it's the way we've always done things," or you can step into the future and stay ahead of the technological curve.

It's a lesson all leaders can learn from. These are not stable times: Technology is constantly evolving, major companies are adjusting their algorithms every day and there is more competition in almost any digital market than ever before.

It reminds me of a Steve Jobs quote from a speech he gave in 1997. "To me, marketing is about values," he said. "This is a very complicated world; it's a very noisy world. And we're not going to get a chance to get people to remember much about us.

No company is. And so we have to be really clear on what we want them to know about us."

He said that in 1997. Now, more than 20 years later, the world is only more complicated, and marketers have even less time to craft and make their statements. In order to communicate clearly, efficiency is critical – and that means AI, big data and staying ahead of the curve.

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