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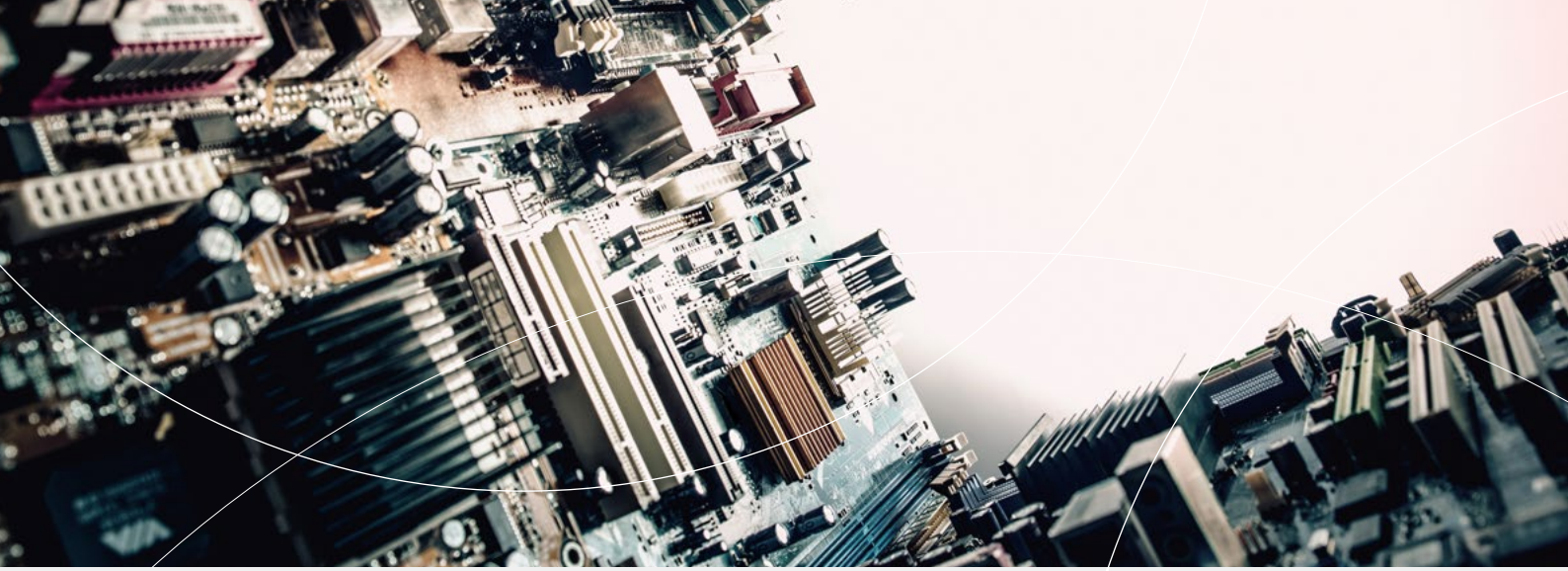
Demystifying artificial intelligence in B2B marketing

What AI means for you, your department and your business

B2B Marketing

Insight · Development · Training · Events





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Introduction



Danielle Howe
Reports editor
B2B Marketing

Artificial intelligence (or, because everyone prefers an acronym, AI) is the latest trend to hit B2B marketing. And it's not even a trend that marketers can get really excited about, as it appears to mean that all marketing will be run by robots by 2020. Okay, perhaps a slight exaggeration, but you get the idea. There's a lot of hype around AI, and with some marketers feeling like they've only just got to grips with MA, we thought a comprehensive guide to this new way of working was needed.

The purpose of this guide isn't to tell you that AI signals the demise of the marketer – that wouldn't be particularly helpful (and would also mean I'd be out of a job). We're here to help you understand what on earth it means, both in the context of the wider world, and, more specifically, B2B marketing. What does the term 'AI' encompass? Why is everyone talking about it now? And what, if anything, should you be doing about it?

We won't be going into too much technical detail (let's leave that to computer scientists and engineers), although along the way we'll clarify how AI works and provide some practical examples of what it can do. Firstly, though, we'll be defining what it means, and next, outlining what it means for you, both in terms of marketing and the wider business. Then we'll examine the AI/tech landscape – which tools currently incorporate AI, and what problems they solve (if any). Along the way we'll be including examples to help you gain an understanding of the practical implications of AI, and its marketing potential in the future.

> *"People have been talking about AI as a big story – it's been at the heart of sci-fi movies for a long time – but as it was so familiar as entertainment and theory, people weren't aware that it was actually encroaching on their everyday lives too."*
>
> **Ben Pring, VP and director, Cognizant's Center for the Future of Work**

The experts

This guide has been written with help from the following experts:



Riaz Kanani
Joint-MD, Radiate B2B – the ABM agency



Ben Pring
VP and director, Cognizant's Center for the Future of Work and author, *What to do when Machines do Everything*



Justin Hall
Director, Protocol and co-founder, Soto



Michelle Huff
CMO, Act-On Software



Don Schuerman
CTO and VP of product marketing, Pegasystems



Guillaume Roques
VP marketing EMEA, Salesforce



Richard Dennys
CEO, Webgains



Jim Smith
Head of artificial intelligence research group, University of the West of England



Parry Malm
CEO, Phrasee



Graham Wylie
VP marketing EMEA, ADP

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Section 1
What is AI?

1.1 What is AI?

Before we define *artificial* intelligence, let's have a think about intelligence itself. Most of us recognise an intelligent being when we see one (it's important to note that intelligence does not necessarily mean *human* intelligence – as Jim Smith, head of artificial intelligence research group, UWE notes in the quote opposite) but in order to understand artificial intelligence, it's helpful to think about the meaning of 'intelligence':

intelligence

[noun] The ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills.[1]

Based on this, the simple definition of artificial intelligence is therefore the creation of an artificial approach to acquire and apply knowledge and skills – and, as you might expect, computers are capable of doing this:

artificial intelligence

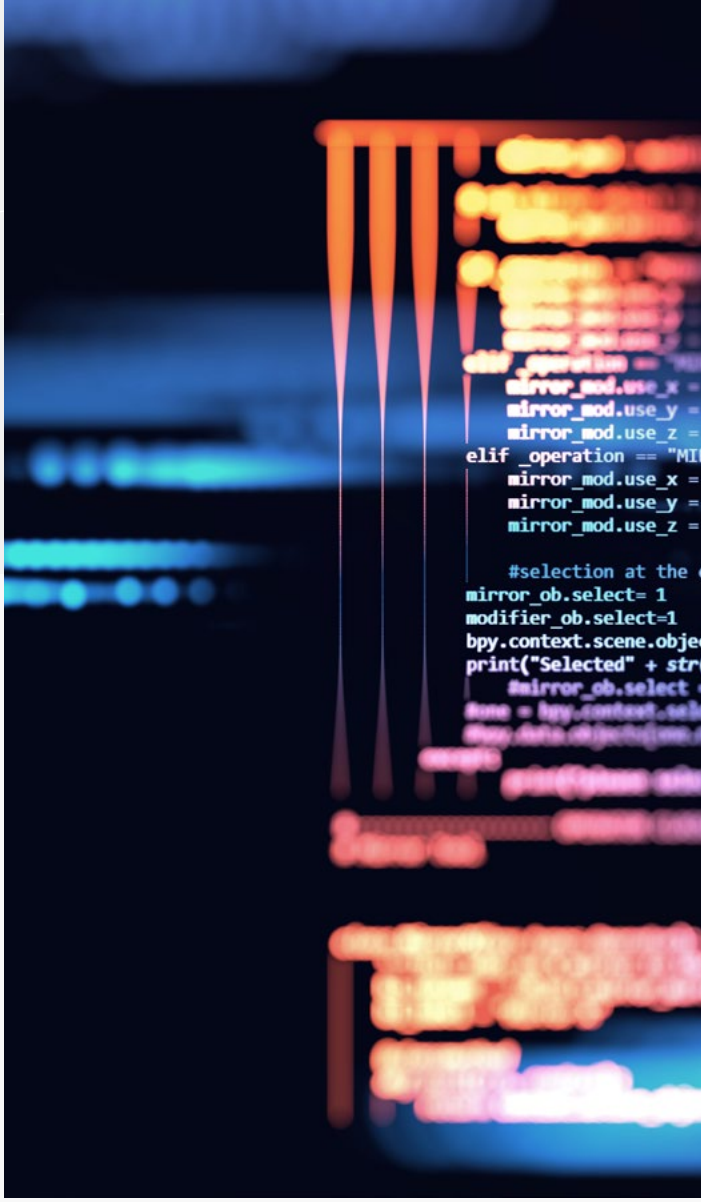
[noun] The theory and development of computer systems able to perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages.[2]

It's possible to pick a couple of holes in this definition: AI is also capable of tasks that a human couldn't feasibly do – at least not in any manageable amount of time – such as processing and organising huge amounts of data (which is where it gets interesting for marketers). And, as we've seen above, intelligence doesn't always strictly mean *human* intelligence.

> *"There's a hugely mistaken theory that intelligence is the same thing as human intelligence. There's proof now that so many other animals do things that appear to be intelligent – problem solving, birds making tools, meerkats using up energy to teach their young... a lot of the things that we thought to be the preserve of the human are now changing."*
>
> **Jim Smith, head of artificial intelligence research group, UWE**

> ***"The working definition I give my students is that AI is an attempt to automate the process of problem-solving. A lot of it is stuff that you could quite conceivably imagine people doing (e.g. spotting patterns in data), it's just that it'd be really, really expensive. Or it would just take you too long."***
>
> Jim Smith, head of artificial intelligence research group, UWE

① *en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/intelligence*
② *en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/artificial_intelligence*



Replacing, mimicking or complementing human intelligence?

The questions around what AI can – and should – do are, for obvious reasons, providing us with more food for thought than ever before. Why are we designing computers to do what we could do ourselves? Is it a sufficient goal in itself, or should we always be looking to develop AI solutions that have some sort of useful purpose?

The ideal scenario for many is that AI actually complements human intelligence, as demonstrated by the oft-cited example of a computer/human duo always beating a human or a computer on their own. At the extreme end of this discussion is talk about AI implants: check out Elon Musk's recent launch of Neuralink[3], a company whose focus is on creating devices that can be implanted in the human brain, thereby improving memory.

While there are many schools of thought when it comes to what AI could and should achieve, the best way to understand its potential at the moment is in this 'complementary' sense. At its best, it could (and some would say, already does) take on mundane, day-to-day tasks, allowing marketers to concentrate on the more valuable or creative facets of their roles.

> ***"You could argue that some people believe the ultimate end game of AI is to mimic humans. But I don't think that's necessarily the case."***
>
> Riaz Kanani, joint-MD, Radiate B2B – the ABM agency

If you've still got questions, don't worry. What we've addressed here is just an overview – later we'll examine exactly what comes under the AI umbrella, including where terms like 'machine learning' and 'natural language processing' fit into the mix.

"The ideal scenario for many is that AI actually complements human intelligence, as demonstrated by the oft-cited example of a computer/human duo always beating a human or a computer on their own"

③ *theguardian.com/technology/2017/mar/28/elon-musk-merge-brains-computers-neuralink*

④ *bbc.co.uk/news/technology-18475646*
⑤ *What to do when machines do everything, p. 187*
⑥ *kurzweilai.net/singularity-q-a*
⑦ *vanityfair.com/news/tech/2014/11/artificial-intelligence-singularity-theory*

1.2 A brief history of AI

The idea of some form of artificial intelligence has been around since ancient Greece, but in the context of modern history, Alan Turing was already contemplating whether or not machines might be able to think before the term 'artificial intelligence' even existed.

> ***"Ever since Turing was at Bletchley Park using computers to crack code, we've been making things that are artificially intelligent."***
>
> Don Schuerman, CTO and VP of product marketing, Pegasystems

The development of AI technology has obviously seen huge progress since then, although it has experienced peaks and troughs of innovation over the decades. Predictions about what AI could achieve were often over-confident, and only in recent years have we seen AI achieve some of what had been predicted in the early days.

There are two key drivers behind the recent explosion in the development of AI technologies – computer processing and data.

> ***"The biggest difference in recent years has been the great availability of cheap computing power driven by the games industry. This, and the availability of masses of data. In theory we've been able to do deep learning since the early 1980s. But we've never really done it before now because we haven't had enough data and it would've taken too long."***
>
> Jim Smith, head of artificial intelligence research group, UWE

A few things you may not know about AI

- Computer scientist John McCarthy coined the term in 1956.[4]
- Seminal moments for AI often happen in the context of beating humans at their own game: IBM Watson beat two Jeopardy champions in a special edition of the game show in 2011, and last year Google-owned company DeepMind beat a human at the ancient Chinese board game Go.
- Different theories abound surrounding what AI means for the future of humanity: Elon Musk says AI is "our greatest existential threat", while Stephen Hawking prophesises that it might be the last major event in human history.[5]
- You may have heard that AI could trigger what's known as 'the technological singularity'. This is the predicted point at which technological progress accelerates beyond the predictions or comprehension of present-day humans. Futurist Ray Kurzweil says it can be described as the "point of no return" – when machine intelligence will match that of humans and then soar past it.[6]
- Autonomous machines now make half the trades on Wall Street.[7]

> ***"Discussions about AI and the singularity seem to be completely worried about the 'Terminator' scenario. This is massively unhelpful and childish."***
>
> Jim Smith, head of artificial intelligence research group, UWE

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1.3 Why all the hype?

As we've seen, AI isn't exactly new, so why is everyone getting so excited about it now? Some of the reasons include:

- Only in recent years have we had access to the amount of data and processing power needed to make practical applications of AI feasible, so it's no longer a concept that sits within the realms of sci-fi movies.
- As a result, some of the biggest consumer brands on the planet are using some form of AI every day (e.g. Amazon, Spotify, Netflix and Apple), thereby raising its profile.
- A new swathe of vendors are incorporating AI into their product offering (or claim they are), fuelling discussions on the subject within the marketing sector.

> *"AI is receiving hype now because of the nature of the revolution we've been through. More and more data has become available, but what really started to make the difference was the cloud. You could store massive amounts of data in the cloud that could then be used with AI. On top of that, social helps us understand how people behave. And then there's mobile which helps us with geolocation. Finally there's the IoT. AI is the natural consequence of all this: finally it can provide some really meaningful insights."*
>
> Guillaume Roques, VP marketing EMEA, Salesforce

> *"About five years ago (2011/2012), we made some big leaps, especially in NLP (natural language processing), which allowed computers to understand us much better. It meant things like real-time translation (e.g. Google Home) became possible. On the other side, the cost of processing power, memory and our ability to consume large amounts of data also came online. Put those two events together and you start to be able to deliver new types of tools."*
>
> Riaz Kanani, joint-MD, Radiate B2B – the ABM agency

You probably benefitted from AI in the last 24 hours

AI is already a part of our daily lives, even if you don't realise it. Everything from product recommendations on Amazon, personalised playlists on Spotify, movie suggestions on Netflix, and of course, Siri, Cortana and 'OK Google' are all powered by AI. Fast-growing companies like personalised music service Pandora and luxury concierge travel company John Paul are also set to change the way we experience the world as a result of AI, and in future we can expect it to take an increasingly prominent position in our daily lives.

> *"Given all the hype, marketers are entirely justified in feeling less than comfortable about AI. To be clear, we're not talking about a coming singularity, where computers reach a level of conscious awareness and decide they want a career in B2B marketing instead of taking over the world; but there are real and profound changes in what computers can now do and we all need to understand and adapt."*
>
> Graham Wylie, VP marketing EMEA, ADP

1.4 What does AI encompass?

"The term 'AI' itself doesn't mean very much – it's just a catch-all solution for a whole bunch of modern technologies."

Parry Malm, CEO, Phrasee

"AI is a huge, broad field. So broad that the attempt to define it is almost meaningless."

Jim Smith, head of artificial intelligence research group, UWE

It's therefore important to understand that AI encompasses a range of areas (each of which have sub-areas of their own). To help you understand what AI includes, we've broken it down into seven key areas and given examples within each:

This diagram should help you to understand the different areas encompassed by AI – although don't worry if it doesn't make complete sense. As Don explains, you should see AI as a toolbox – it contains various different elements, some of which might come together, and it's really up to vendors to understand how they could best be used to help marketers.

"One way of looking at AI is as a toolbox. NLP, speech recognition, machine learning, predictive analytics, decision management and deep learning are all different tools, and depending on the problem you're trying to solve, the trick is to be able to figure out which tool is right for that particular problem. Our job as a vendor is to put together the tools we think are most appropriate for B2B marketers."

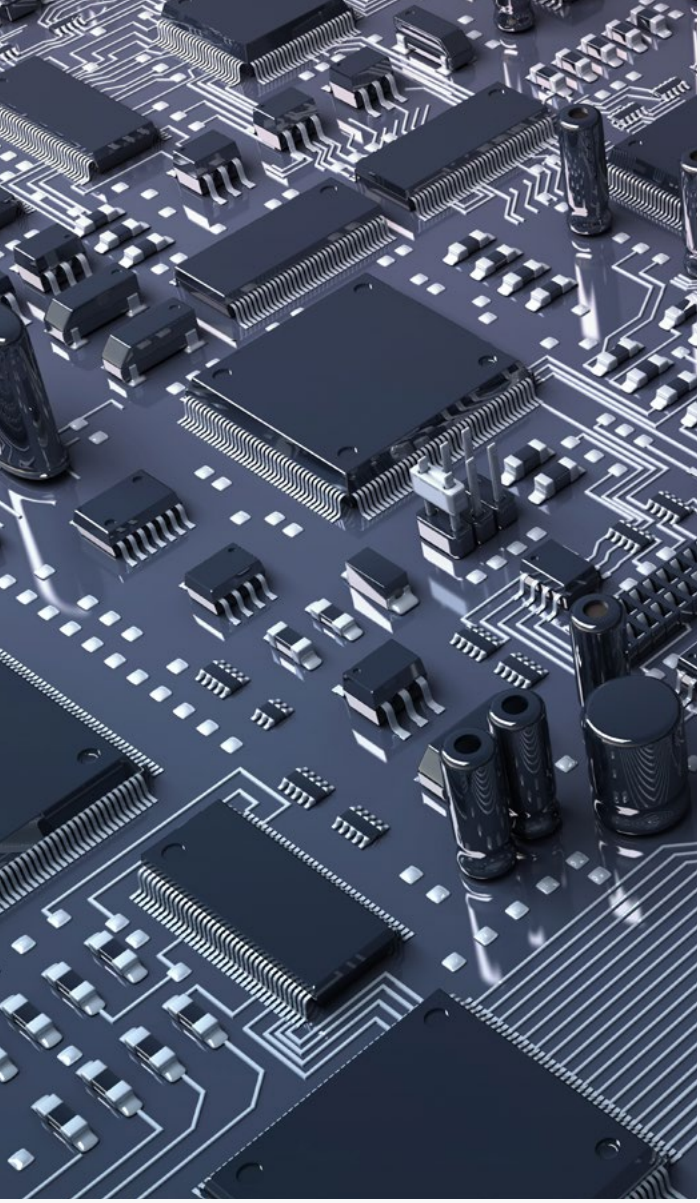
Don Schuerman, CTO and VP of product marketing, Pegasystems

AI includes:

Vision	Speech	Machine learning
Facebook's ability to recognise faces in photos and tag them	Amazon's Alexa or Apple's Siri	DeepMind's AlphaGo

Natural language processing	Robotics	Expert systems	Planning
Google translate	Honda's Asimo robot	Diagnosis applications used by doctors	Systems used to automate car manufacturing

Source: Sam Madden, commercial director, Wiraya Solutions AB



"Given a large enough data set and some initial parameters computers can now teach themselves a specific task and build a competency that surpasses human experts in surprisingly little time"

⑨ *ibm.com/developerworks/community/blogs/jfp/entry/What_Is_Machine_Learning?lang=en*

Why machine learning is of particular interest

One of the key subsets of AI, at least as far as the marketer is concerned, is machine learning. It's almost certainly the most compelling part of AI for marketers. But what is it?

Arthur Samuel, one of the pioneers of machine learning, defined it in 1959 as:

"The field of study that gives computers the ability to learn without being explicitly programmed."[9]

> ***"Machine learning is grabbing all the headlines at the moment. It means that you've got lots of bits of data that might be labelled, but you don't quite know what the relationship is between the set of values that describes each data item, and the labels attached to them. So you apply a bunch of algorithms and the machine tries to learn the pattern that matches the inputs to the right outputs."***
>
> Jim Smith, head of artificial intelligence research group, UWE

> ***"With machine learning, the machine is continuously updating the algorithm. Instead of the algorithm being mined by a data scientist and then put into practice, the machine learns the algorithm and then continues to learn and refine it with the data."***
>
> Don Schuerman, CTO and VP of product marketing, Pegasystems

> ***"With the advent of machine learning, computers no longer need someone to build their decision-making process manually, but given a large enough data set and some initial parameters they can now teach themselves a specific task and build a competency that surpasses human experts in surprisingly little time."***
>
> Graham Wylie, VP marketing EMEA, ADP

Section 2
What AI means for you

You should hopefully now have a decent understanding of the general meaning of AI. But what about marketing? What does it mean for you and your team and what could it enable you to do now and in the future?

2.1 Are your jobs under threat?

Believe it or not, as an increasing number of AI-driven tools emerge onto the market and computers' capabilities continue to advance, there could be a reduced need for data scientists on marketing teams. As vendors develop tools with increasingly user-friendly interfaces, it's likely that AI will be doing the hard data crunching in the background, leaving marketers to focus on other areas such as creative development and copywriting. This does not mean data skills will become obsolete, but simply that those whose core skills are data-heavy may need to expand their skillsets.

In reality, it's actually pretty hard to predict the impact AI will have on the future of the employment market – let alone marketing specifically. The most plausible predictions focus on what could happen with more junior marketing roles.

> *"In his book 'Rise of the Robots – Technology and the Threat of a Jobless Future', Martin Ford shows how the 'grunt work' of legal discovery (once the preserve of paralegals), has been digitised and automated. Now AI is taking the process further, as the machine learns how to tell if information is relevant or irrelevant to the case – the kind of subjective judgement that was once the preserve of a highly qualified and expensive lawyer.*
>
> *"Unfortunately, a large part of today's marketing workload is digital grunt work, and the machines are primed to do this faster, better and cheaper than interns or social media managers. It's never been more important for B2B marketers to develop a broad and strategic skillset but I worry that our profession has got so caught up in specialisation that AI will present a real challenge."*
>
> Graham Wylie, VP marketing EMEA, ADP

As Graham notes, the (often more junior) marketing roles that involve the 'digital grunt work' could well be replaced by AI-driven machines in future. So what does that really mean for the B2B marketer's skillset? How will it need to change and adapt in the coming years?



"B2B marketers tend to have fewer data points to contend with, which is a disadvantage – the more data you give an AI system, the more it has to learn from"

2.2 How will AI change skillset requirements?

Before getting too dramatic, let's make it clear that it looks unlikely that marketers will need to fundamentally change their skillsets any time soon. There are two key things to bear in mind here:

- While understanding what data can achieve will remain important, AI is unlikely to require specific training (other than anything offered by vendors to use their own tools).
- The fundamental strategic and creative aspects of marketing will remain as important (if not more so) as they are now

Some argue that AI will allow marketers to focus on the more creative side of marketing, and this might be true, but again it's hard to predict as it's such early days. It's clear though that a strategic understanding of the business and a creative streak will (at least for the foreseeable future) be skills that machines cannot provide, and will remain at the forefront of the marketer's skillset.

> ***"The job spec of the marketer will shift. Anyone who wants to grow their career in marketing now has to have analytics and data skills to bring to the table, and that's increasingly going to be the case. But at the end of the day, driving a marketing strategy is something you need a human being to do."***
>
> Don Schuerman, CTO and VP of product marketing, Pegasystems

> ***"B2B marketers won't need to be trained on AI – it's a tool that will create a platform or service that marketers can take advantage of."***
>
> Riaz Kanani, joint-MD, Radiate B2B – the ABM agency

2.3. What could AI enable you to do?

This, understandably, is the exciting part of the discussion – but it's also pretty theoretical right now, particularly in B2B. In fact, we searched for examples of B2B brands currently using AI technologies as part of their marketing, but couldn't find anything significant (so do let us know if you're using AI successfully!).

Why is B2B a step or two behind?

It's impossible to deny that B2B is behind consumer marketing when it comes to AI, but, as always, there's a reasonable and understandable explanation for this:

- B2B marketers generally have less data to play with: There tends to be fewer data points to contend with in B2B marketing, which is a disadvantage with AI – the more data you give an AI system, the more it has to learn from.
- B2B marketers tend to be more risk-averse: perhaps not a statement that everyone would agree with, but true nonetheless in many cases.
- The tools haven't been developed yet: as we'll see in the next section, more and more AI-driven marketing tools for B2B are emerging, but it's still very early days.

> ***"B2C marketers are a step ahead, firstly because consumers are more demanding, and also because B2C marketers tend to operate with higher quantities of data. Teaching algorithms is easier and quicker if lots of interactions are happening."***
>
> Don Schuerman, CTO and VP of product marketing, Pegasystems



But before you start worrying about having enough data, it's important to question whether you actually need AI in the first place. As Parry Malm, CEO of Phrasee, explains, AI-driven tools could help you solve problems, but you shouldn't look to use AI just because you might get left behind.

> *The important question is not: 'Do I have enough data?' The question is: 'What problem am I trying to solve and what data do I need to solve it?' AI can be applied to small data sets – but it really depends on what the problem is. AI in itself is not an inherent solution to every problem, and data is not necessarily a limitation. It ultimately depends on what business problem you're facing, and then assessing whether you have good data, and then whether AI is an appropriate solution."*
>
> Parry Malm, CEO, Phrasee

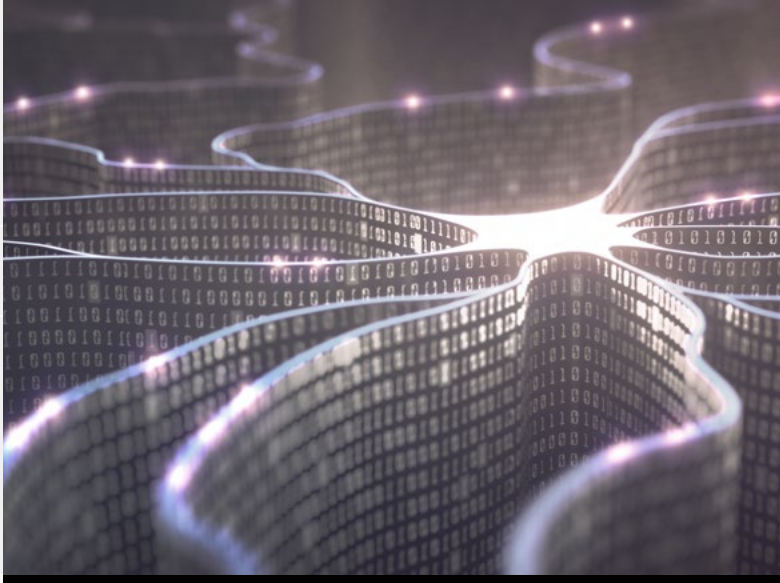
Real-time personalisation and 'next best actions'

Assuming B2B marketing does catch up (which it does look set to do), where does its biggest potential lie? One of the key things AI could enable marketers to do is engage with customers and prospects in real time and in a highly personalised manner. Michelle Huff, CMO at Act-On Software, explains what she calls 'adaptive sending' in the context of individual leads.

> *"One common question we ask is: 'When's the best time to send emails?' To figure this out, marketers traditionally test a few different options, look at the data and discover that more people open their emails on, say, Thursdays at 9am. The benefit of AI is that we can learn from individual use cases. This means taking all the data – not just when a person opened but when they're engaging on your website or social channels – and using this to find out their individual optimal engagement time (when they're most likely to engage with you). Then, when you click 'send', the email will go out at the best time, specifically for them – say, Wednesdays at 11am."*
>
> Michelle Huff, CMO, Act-On Software

This is one specific example of how AI could dramatically improve the personalisation of your communications with customers and prospects. But the next area that's causing much excitement is the idea of 'next best action'. Simply put, this means that a machine powered by AI could gather and understand all the data specific to a person (e.g. the last time they visited your website, engaged with your brand on Twitter or spoke to the sales team) and recommend the next best action for that specific lead – whether that's sending them a webinar invitation or arranging an in-person sales meeting.

"One of the key things AI could enable marketers to do is engage with customers and prospects in real time and in a highly personalised manner"



"Instead of planning an idealised user journey through the website and manually configuring marketing automation and adtech tools to complete a set of pre-ordained steps, AI can be used to interrogate the data, decide on the next best action and A/B test the result to optimise in real time."

Graham Wylie, VP marketing EMEA, ADP

"The way Salesforce's Einstein capabilities are infusing themselves into all aspects of the sales and marketing pipeline is a good example of how tools are going to help people take what they do to the next level – the 'next best action' is a very powerful example of how this is going to play out."

Ben Pring, VP and director, Cognizant's Center for the Future of Work

"The bit that's really missing from all our businesses is the 'Now what?' – what are you going to do next for this client that's going to make you more money? I'm now talking about developing a 'Now what?' business."

Richard Dennys, CEO, Webgains

It's important to note that the notion of 'next best action' is one of the more prominent examples of what AI could do in marketing. But other areas where it could assist B2B marketers include content optimisation and audience analysis (tools for these either already exist or are being developed). And as the market develops in the coming months and years we're likely to see hundreds of tools emerge to help a whole host of marketing problems (and some of them may not even mention the fact that they're driven by AI).

How some B2C brands are using AI in their marketing

- EE now uses AI to drive all its upsell and cross-sell decisions – it used to have no means of creating consistent offers for customers, but it now uses real-time context, big data and analytics to create and present personalised offers to customers, on whichever channels work best for them.
- Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) uses AI to optimise every single interaction it has with the customer, whether that's online or in branches. This does not just mean personalising sales messages, but also making relevant content recommendations and wishing customers 'Happy Birthday' to drive deeper engagement.
- Coca-Cola: Salesforce's Einstein has been trained to recognise the varieties and quantities of Coca-Cola bottles you see in a cooler/fridge. It can then take that count and make a prediction based on known seasonal variations, weather information and upcoming promotions to automatically calculate a restocking order.

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Section 3
The AI landscape in 2017

"Let's think about it in human terms: while print advertising is taking its pension and email is enjoying its mid-thirties, martech is only just starting secondary school and AI is still at nursery."

Graham Wylie, VP marketing EMEA, ADP

3.1 Predicting the future

No predictions are completely reliable, but here are some trends we can expect to see in the AI vendor landscape in the future:

- An increasing number of vendors will jump on the AI 'bandwagon', and attempt to incorporate AI capabilities into their platforms.
- As the market matures, AI will become a standard part of tech vendors' offering, and the hype around the term 'AI' will begin to wane.
- As a result of this, and vendors struggling to differentiate their offerings, the focus will shift to the problems these tools can solve for marketers.
- The vendors that prosper will be those that make their tools as accessible as possible, negating the need for data scientists to run them.

"One thing will happen: everyone in the martech landscape will start saying they have AI."

Don Schuerman, CTO and VP of product marketing, Pegasystems

"Initially AI will have to be tied into things that impact revenue… it's easier to test things when you can show there's a connection to pipeline and revenue."

Michelle Huff, CMO, Act-On Software

"Vendors know that the market will pick the technology that effectively threads the needle between being powerful enough to meet marketers' needs and accessible enough for them to be able to use it."

Don Schuerman, CTO and VP of product marketing, Pegasystems

Buyer beware

As might be expected, many vendors are jumping on the AI bandwagon, and there is little way to know whether or not AI is really part of their technology offering or not. However, we'd suggest looking beyond the hype and focusing on what the tool will offer your marketing team. What problem does it solve? Will it make your life easier and provide ROI?

"We're very much in the hype mode. I've seen companies position themselves overnight as being AI businesses when they're not."

Riaz Kanani, joint-MD, Radiate B2B – the ABM agency

"There's more than a whiff of BS from many of the vendors talking about their 'machine learning algorithm' and 'powerful artificial intelligence'. But that should be a stimulus for action – for marketers to learn more and get comfortable, not to try and sit out the change on the sidelines."

Graham Wylie, VP Marketing EMEA, ADP

"There are also many tools delivering solutions and solving problems that many people are surprised AI technology can do (from personalisation and research to content curation, and account selection)"

3.2 The vendor's perspective

We asked Justin Hall, CEO and founder of Protocol and co-founder of Soto – a cognitive marketing cloud for B2B content marketers – for his thoughts on where the technology is heading and the opportunities and challenges it will present.

What's the single biggest thing that will change in marketing as a result of AI in the next five to 10 years?

Justin Hall: The single biggest change will probably be the additional resource that AI will bring to marketing functions. Discreet applications powered by machine learning and cognitive marketing will undertake the heavy lifting for research, automated analysis, segmentation and personalisation.

How will marketing departments deal with the changes that AI will bring?

Justin: Marketing teams will deal with the changes very well. Many marketing functions struggle with the challenges of limited resources, time, budget and skills. AI will empower them to undertake the projects with the confidence, rigour and detail that they've always wanted to do but have struggled to realise in everyday life. AI will usher a new renaissance in the marketing world.

Which marketing skills will become more important, and which skills will become obsolete?

Justin: Looking through the lens of modern marketing teams and demand centres there's usually a mix of research, operational, technical and creative skillsets. We think it's unlikely specific job roles will become redundant, but many manual, time-intensive operational and research tasks may be delivered by AI – as well as many low-level creative and technical tasks that could easily be given to AI to learn. We believe technical skills will become increasingly important (roles such as machine learning analysts, marketing automation analysts, data scientists and AI trainers) – as will high-end creative functions such as art direction and thematic development.

With new vendors appearing all the time, how can marketers keep up?

Justin: We think it's important to keep your ear to the ground on developments, but every organisation has its own unique challenges. Ultimately staying in the loop at B2B events is critical to ensure you're not getting left behind. There are also many tools delivering solutions and solving problems that many people are surprised AI technology can do (from personalisation and research to content curation, and account selection).

What are the most significant changes you expect to see in business as a result of AI?

Justin: We think there are some existential issues that will need to be addressed down the road with AI, particularly how society leverages it, governs it and manages the economics (taxation, for example).

This is probably a way off but you can imagine a scenario where many critical tasks and decisions are machine based. In the immediate future there's the issue of trust. How well can a machine mimic a human response? Should business-critical decisions be based around digital intelligence? Who gets the blame if and when things go wrong?



"Are we ready to trust machines to make these decisions for us, and how do we get around the fact AI can't explain the reasoning behind its decision-making?"

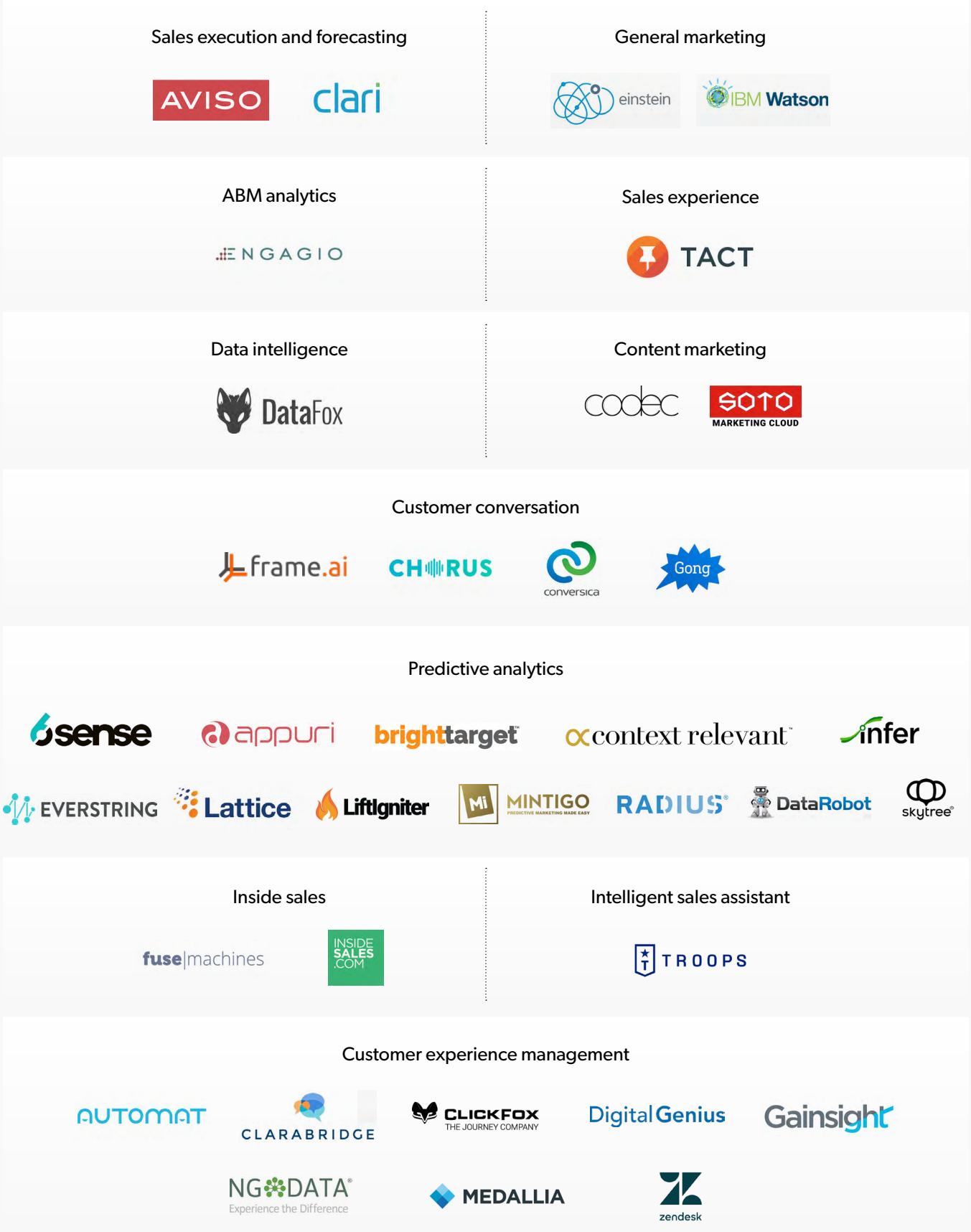
3.3 The issues of trust and reasoning

Everything we've covered so far has been pretty positive – although in its early days, AI is set to make marketers' lives easier, and it's just a matter of time before you start adopting it within your own marketing department. But AI isn't all a bunch of roses. There are some drawbacks too – the most prominent surrounding the issue of trust and decision-making. Are we ready to trust machines to make these decisions for us, and how do we get around the fact that AI can't explain the reasoning behind its decision-making?

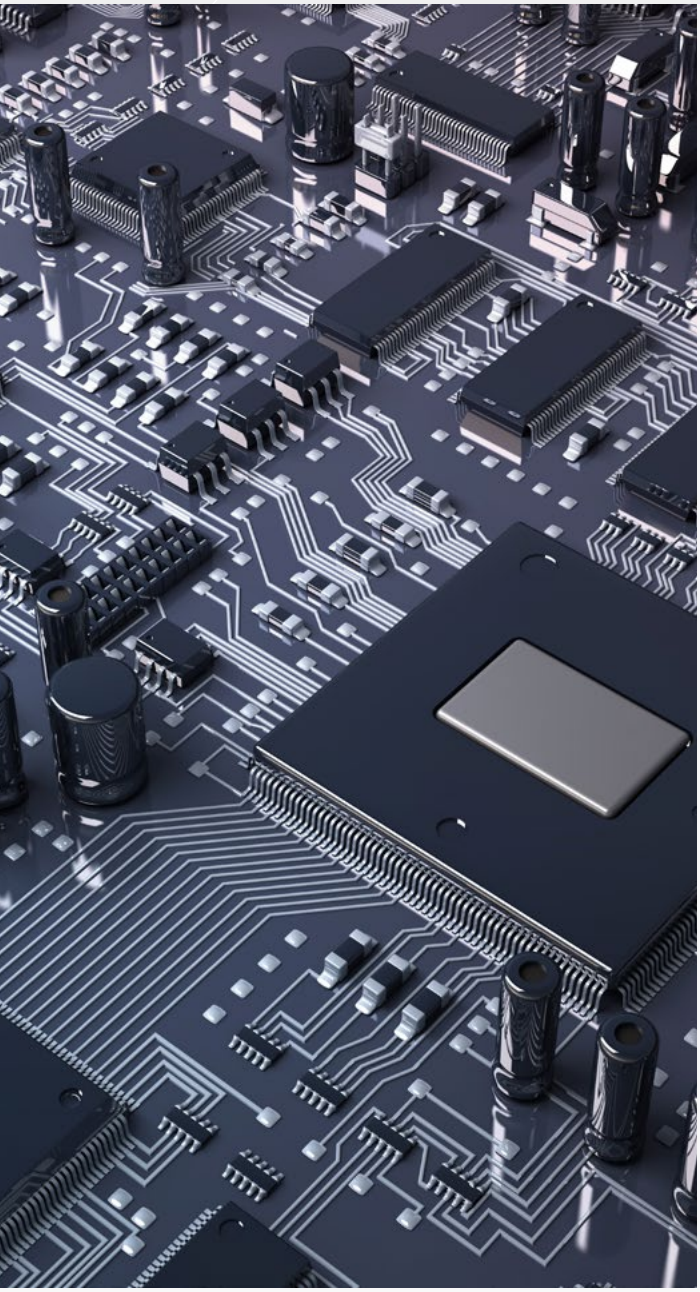
> ***"There are some things we're okay with, and there are some things we still want to have control over – we're more comfortable if a machine makes a recommendation which we can then pick or reject. Having to go to the board and explain why you're doing what you're doing when it's hard to figure out what's going on is a challenge."***
>
> Michelle Huff, CMO, Act-On Software

> ***"There are all kinds of techniques, and machine learning can do wonderful things, but it can't explain what it's doing to humans. If the constraints of your system are that you need to be able to explain why it made a decision or a prediction, then that very much limits the kinds of systems you can use and technologies you can have."***
>
> Jim Smith, head of artificial intelligence research group, UWE

3.4 A map of the AI marketing and sales landscape



Conclusion
Key takeaways, and what you should do next



In summary, here's a handy list of the key takeaways:

- AI is already here and encroaching on our everyday lives.
- Areas such as machine learning and deep learning fall under the AI umbrella – machine learning is currently the most interesting element of AI for marketers.
- AI doesn't necessarily mean you'll lose your job – in fact, core marketing skills such as strategy and a creative mindset will become more important than ever.
- The day-to-day business of marketing continues unabated – the changes that AI brings will occur gradually, so it's important to stay aware of what's happening, without racing to change your marketing strategy tomorrow.
- The biggest potential for AI in marketing, at least currently, is the possibility of hyper-personalised, real-time engagement with prospects and customers – this is encompassed in the term 'next best action'.
- We're currently seeing innumerable vendors jumping on the AI bandwagon, but once the hype has subsided and AI is no longer a differentiating factor, we can expect to see a focus on what tools can actually do, rather than the fact that they're driven by AI.
- Marketers should not be looking to 'invest' in AI for its own sake, but stay focused on their marketing objectives, while investigating whether AI can help solve specific problems they're facing.

Six practical steps to take in the future

1. **Speak to your existing suppliers**: find out if the vendors you already work with are planning to incorporate AI into their offering, if they haven't already. This will help you understand where they believe AI is going and how they believe it could help you in the future.

2. **Keep an eye on the market**: attend events, read reports (like this one) and take an interest in new emerging solutions. This is a rapidly evolving field, and marketers can't afford to be left behind.

3. **Ask yourself lots of questions**: before you start allocating a chunk of your budget to advanced AI solutions, ask yourself plenty of questions. Graham Wylie, VP marketing EMEA, ADP suggests the following: does AI have a role to play in our product offering? Can it improve the customer experience? Will it drive efficiency in our operations? Can it help us communicate more effectively? Will it take my job?

4. **Think about testing**: based on the above, think about areas you could test with AI. Incorporating the use of AI into your marketing strategy doesn't mean a wholesale change to your approach – you can test small things, for instance optimising the recommendations you give to inbound customers arriving at your website. There might also be add-on tools you could incorporate into your existing martech stack, helping you to solve specific problems.

5. **Stay on top of your data**: this means keeping it as clean as you can (although it's likely that AI will be able to clean it for you in future) and also understanding the data you're collecting and why. This is crucial, as machine learning requires data to learn from – if the data is inaccurate or incomplete, it won't provide you with meaningful insights.

6. **Review your skills and those of your team**: is everyone in the team able to develop a broad range of skills? Too precise a focus might be damaging as AI begins to take over more mundane jobs; possessing a strategic and creative mindset will be paramount.

> *"Keep an eye on AI and understand it as an opportunity, not a threat. At the same time, to an extent it'll be business as usual for the next 5-10 years."*
>
> Richard Dennys, CEO, Webgains

> *"Initially it's more noise that marketers will have to filter when setting their strategy and making technology decisions. It's a good time to understand the opportunity and ask questions. Depending on the answers you find, it might be something you need to address in the coming months or something you can prepare for over the next few years."*
>
> Graham Wylie, VP marketing EMEA, ADP

> *"I do think everyone should start getting familiar with it – you don't want your competition to get ahead. To prepare, you need to have a good baseline set of data."*
>
> Michelle Huff, CMO, Act-On Software

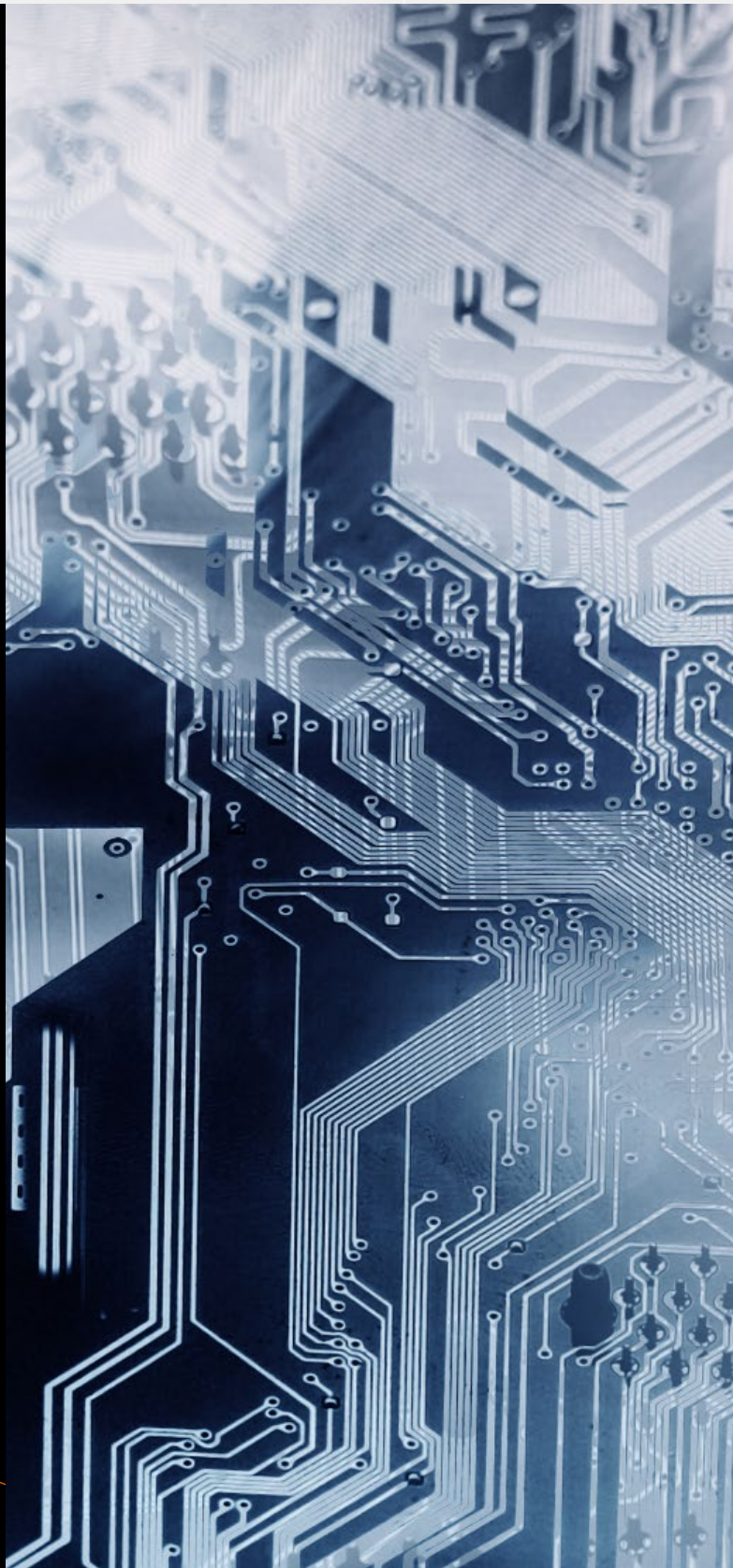
How to discuss AI with the board

Whether your board of directors is picking up on the AI hype or not, it's important that you're able to speak to them about its implications – for marketing and the wider business – as competently as possible. Here are some tips for handling this continuously evolving topic with the c-suite:

- Stay informed about AI's implications on the world of business, as well as marketing – examples such as these will become increasingly common in future, and sharing them and encouraging discussion on the topic with fellow members of the c-suite will help you all to discuss it's impact in a more tangible manner.

- Demonstrate leadership and encourage discussion by exploring practical steps your department and your business can take to keep up with the fast-moving AI landscape. Whether this means suggesting the hire of a chief artificial intelligence officer or simply demonstrating small tests you might be doing in marketing, helping the rest of the c-suite to think in a practical way about the impact AI can have will no doubt prove worthwhile in the longer term.

- Encourage the c-suite to add AI as a top strategic priority across the business – it may seem like early days, but this is an area that will move incredibly quickly and will almost certainly impact every facet of the business, ranging from business services to product development and HR. By ensuring AI is a priority at the top, your company can make sure it's not left behind – and may even benefit from a first-mover advantage.





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Contact us

B2B Marketing
Clover House
147–149 Farringdon Road
London
EC1R 3HN

Tel: +44 (0)20 7014 4920
info@b2bmarketing.net
b2bmarketing.net