

RoboMarketer: Using Artificial Intelligence for Marketing Success



As a kid, my brother had a knee-high toy robot with a remote control/walkie-talkie device that he could use to make the robot move through the house and “talk” to people. It would carry a little tray, on which my brother would place two pieces of candy. He’d then navigate the robot to the living room where my sister and I were sitting and make it ask, in my brother’s nerdiest robot voice, “Would you like a treat?”

When I hear about how artificial intelligence (AI) is being used in marketing, the memory of this little robot pops into my head. This isn’t because the toy was, in any way, “intelligent” or bore any resemblance to the AI technology of today, but because it reminded me of our interactions with a likable artificial being that was finding us, presenting us with something we wanted and making us smile (even chuckle) in the process.

Today’s marketers are using AI to locate their customers

They are finding out what customers want and giving it to them, making customers happy with the interaction as well as the outcome. And because it’s working, AI is taking the marketing industry by storm. Ideas on how to leverage it range from simple robots handing out flyers on sidewalks to sophisticated supercomputers offering up everything from chatbots to campaign strategies.

The numbers clearly reflect this trend

According to research by Forbes Insights, 84% of marketers surveyed said AI was five times more important to the company than other tech innovations, such as the Internet of Things and cloud computing.

Here are just a few of the ways marketing professionals are using AI today

Data-Driven Marketing Decisions and Strategies

Businesses are facing a flood of marketing data, so much that it has become impossible for humans alone to figure out what it means. AI is helping to solve that problem by first gathering all that data—including buying preferences, location, demographics, behavioral factors and more. Its sources: ecommerce sites, social media, search and all the other places where people share their information. AI tools then analyze the data using key algorithms and turn it into the insights marketers need to effectively run their campaigns and predict their success.

Highly Personalized Content

While many people, mainly concerned with privacy issues, may find AI data collection and highly targeted appeals a bit creepy, customers and prospects nonetheless want content that's relevant to them and have little patience with content that's not. Serving up this personalized content to the right people, at the right time, and on the right devices is paying off for marketers. In a recent study, 80% said personalized content was more effective than content that wasn't.

Chatbots That Advise Customers and Create Content

Open up a chat on one of your favorite shopping sites, and you're likely to find yourself in a conversation with a friendly, helpful individual who's more than happy to assist with your shopping needs. But, if you haven't figured it out by now, there's a very good chance you're speaking to an AI-based chatbot.

For businesses ranging from banking services to office supplies, chatbots assist people with all kinds of buying processes and decisions. And while they've been around for a while, chatbots are now being used to gather more customer data and actually create content based on customer preferences. For example:

- Sephora's Kik chatbot gives customers a little "quiz" to determine their makeup needs and preferences. It then creates tailored makeup tips, shows appropriate products, offers tutorials and provides makeup recommendations.
- Staples is partnering with IBM's Watson (yes, the supercomputer that won Jeopardy in 2011) to create a chatbot that answers common customer questions and checks to see if items are in stock. In the future, Staples hopes to use its chatbot to analyze buying habits and advise customers on purchases.
- National Geographic used a Facebook Messenger chatbot to promote its show, "Genius," on the life of Albert Einstein. The chatbot, "Einstein," would answer Messenger questions from users about all sorts of subjects, from physics to Einstein's love life.

A host of other companies are finding new ways to use chatbots to assist their customers and improve their marketing efforts, including Aeromexico, Lyft, Starbucks, Uber, Taco Bell, TechCrunch and Whole Foods.

These chatbots and other AI-based tools are becoming essential for today's marketers to compete successfully in a digital business climate.

Just like that candy-toting toy robot that so charmed my sister and me way back when, even a little AI effort can bring you rich rewards. The most important of these is happy customers who stick with you and spread the good word on your brand.

By Julie Vallone



When writer/editor Julie Vallone isn't blogging about marketing hacks, lifestyle trends and quirky little grammar tips, she's turning complex technical concepts into clear, engaging content guaranteed to remove the knitted brow from your favorite technophobe. In her "free" time, she's a dedicated stage mom, creating big, elaborate props and calming her resident thespian, or she's busy at home herding way too many cats.