

COLUMNS

AI helps retailers to be human

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Evan Magliocca is brand marketing manager at Baesman Insights & Marketing

By [Evan Magliocca](#)

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Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning are powerful tools with so many possibilities to enhance insights and make marketers smarter in the future.

While those trends still have some problems to work out before they find their places in the retail mix as mainstream options, the promise that they may enhance our data, hyper-personalize experiences, and run testing campaigns at an unimaginable rate is enticing.

However, their most powerful and tangible future benefit often gets lost in the excitement over analytics and insights.

Creative with jobs

Those new technologies have implications for automationthe ability to free marketers from the tedious, heavy man-hours spent executing the marketing process.

Instead of focusing on operations, logistics and managing the entire execution process, AI's ability to automate enables marketers and creatives to do what they were hired to do instead of immersing themselves in the derivatives of their roles.

Sure, there is always the risk that automation could take away jobs from people, but there are reasons to be optimistic.

Every major technology or industrial advancement in history has created net jobs, not taken them away. The labor market might shift, but the net impact will be to make more powerful marketers, not fewer of them.

The industry might require fewer traffic coordinators and marketing operations professionals, but in its place, we will gain more analysts, more strategists, and the ability to dive even further into marketing than ever before.

What we can automate

One area of focus that causes marketers serious headaches is personalization.

Every retailer likes to think it has first-class personalization strategies, but personalization is only as effective as the

man-hours available to analyze, segment, operationalize and execute.

The best personalization teams are massive.

Think about how much those teams have grown in the last five years to support those efforts. What does your marketing team look like if you are personalizing?

Think about the number of hours spent performing those tasks and the late nights required for success.

In those departments, help is needed more than anywhere else.

Taking jobs? How about giving marketers their lives back?

Another area that gets lost in the excitement and trepidation is that new technologies allow us to focus on "why."

That is one area in which machines will struggle to answer because they cannot predict intent easily.

But operationalizing the menial tasks helps marketers focus on better personalizing experiences, building new creative journeys, and serving customers.

Are creatives doomed?

Another area of concern has been creative and the idea that losing execution will mean creatives will lose their purpose.

Again, we are looking through the wrong lens.

The areas in which automation will benefit marketers also help creatives. Resizing images, placing product in layout those are not creative. They are creative execution.

I cannot think of a group of individuals that have their souls sucked out of their work quicker than creatives focused on rote, robotic tasks such as execution.

Give it to the robots so that the creatives can focus on the actual creative process, bringing amazing, emotional, rich experiences to life for their customers.

That is why they got into that line of work automation will let them finally fulfill that dream instead of the endless stream of layouts, promotional hero images and tasks bereft of meaning.

We can be more human

Previous technologies changed the entire market with email, social, ecommerce and the data revolution.

But as they did, we lost a piece of what made marketing connect with people so much. We lost what made it human.

Email is just an endless stream of promotions.

Social is a cruel veneer taking advantage of our worst inclinations while selling them to anyone who wants to know our inner thoughts, desires and fears.

The list could go on forever on how those advances have transformed us and slowly taken the heart out of marketing.

THERE ARE UNDERSTANDABLE concerns with the future of automation.

There are understandable concerns about AI and machine learning. But they can make our lives better and they can help us get back to what makes marketing great in the first place: connecting with our customers on a human level.

Evan Magliocca is brand marketing manager at [Baesman Insights & Marketing](#), Columbus, OH. Reach him at emagliocca@baesman.com.