

Pearlstein's Corner



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Is Your Small Business Getting Ready to Use Artificial Intelligence?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the new frontier in business and entrepreneurship. It has been said that the incorporation of AI into everyday business practices will have the same impact as the introduction of the Internet.

However, according to a recent survey, most Canadian small business owners aren't ready for AI or even thinking about it.

I believe there are a few key reasons for this lag:

First, many business owners say they're just "too busy" to step back and analyze how AI could apply to their business.

Secondly, AI feels like it's for big business and doesn't really apply to small business.

And lastly, it sounds like such a big-ticket item. Who is going to pay for this? Will it really pay off?

The AI Secret For Small Business: You Don't Have to Build it Yourself

Here's the key point to keep in mind in regards to AI for small business: it's not something you build yourself. Today, the big software as a service (SaaS) companies are building AI into their platforms for their customers which, in many cases, includes small businesses.

For example, Salesforce has built Einstein, a layer of artificial intelligence into their platform. Einstein delivers predictions and recommendations based on your business processes and customer data. You can use those insights to automate responses and actions to make your employees more productive.



It does however, take some effort and training to set it up so that your business can benefit.

Analyze Your Business Processes For AI Opportunities

Start thinking about the various systems and structures that make up your business and consider how AI can help streamline them.

Think about sales, advertising and supply chain management.

For example, in addition to AI layers like Einstein, there are now software platforms that listen to and analyze the calls made by salespeople. The software then compares the calls to the most convincing calls in your category. Based on those comparisons, it makes recommendations on how sales people can improve their calls, right down to which words to use.

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Could You Use Facebook's AI to Find More "Best Customers"?

Let's say you know who your best customers are. Wouldn't it be great to find more customers like them? Facebook may be able to help using their Lookalike Audience feature. (This assumes that you have a Facebook presence for your business.)

Provide Facebook with information about your best customers, and Facebook will use artificial intelligence to analyze those customers, determine characteristics that they have in common and then find others on Facebook who share similar characteristics – in other words, people who are "lookalikes" of your best customers and have the greatest potential to be new customers for you. Then, advertise on Facebook with a campaign directed only against those people, rather than shotgunning your message to a general audience.

Leveraging AI For Small Business Processing

Many businesses are based on contracts. Depending on their complexity they can take employees hours to review. Beagle, a Kitchener-based contract-analysis service, trains computers to read contracts – who the parties are, who does what and what happens if terms of the agreement aren't met.

For example, insurance brokers traditionally go through contracts and cut-and paste provisions portions. The traditional contract review process can take 110 steps. Beagle's founder claims to have it down to nine. A contract analyst who needs to identify all responsibilities in a 40-page contract can take up to three hours. This AI application can do it in 40 seconds.

What About Your IT Security? AI May Be Able to Help

If your business involves IT, then you need fraud detection and security applications to protect your systems from hackers. Again, you may be able to benefit from technologies being developed for large companies.

For example, an AI-leveraging security application firm called Darktrace offers an Enterprise Immune System for cyber security. According to the site, the AI application "builds its own, unique understanding of what 'normal' behavior looks like within a company and can detect emerging threats in real time."

Start Planning for AI Now

The incorporation of AI into various business practices is inevitable. It's another transition riding on the back of computerization, networks and the Internet. It's made possible by a combination of enormous amounts of data being collected at various touchpoints, cloud computing, incredible processing speeds and ever more sophisticated algorithms.

Think about it this way. In 1996, Garry Kasparov, then the top-rated chess player in the world, beat IBM's Deep Blue chess computer. Later that year, Deep Blue won.

Today's best chess programs can easily beat the world's best human chess players, even when they're run on fairly conventional hardware. In other words, what once seemed impossible is now common place. I'm confident that AI will run the same course.

If you're not getting ready for AI, it's a good chance that your competition is.

Do you know someone who should read this?

Some of my clients have mentioned that they've shared my newsletters with other family members, friends or colleagues. If you know someone who might benefit from this, why not pass it on?



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