

Implementing Ethical Artificial Intelligence

By: RJ Talyor

This holiday season, more than [59 percent of retailers](#) will introduce new methods of presenting their products. Among those, 23 percent plan to fundamentally transform the way they present their products.



What's the one tool those retailers will use to determine how to measure their new presentation methods? Artificial intelligence (AI). AI has the power to analyze billions of data points in the blink of an eye and translate them into actionable insights.

For a human, this would take an entire lifetime. With tools such as natural language processing and computer vision, AI can translate data into marketing components that are guaranteed to provide the greatest return. As a result, marketers can streamline strategy and execute campaigns at the right time and place with the right copy and photo.

But there's a catch. As AI becomes more common across multiple industries, ethical questions surrounding its creation, transparency and bias become more pressing.

This is because AI was not born out of thin air. It was created by humans and, within it, carries human biases. It measures what a human tells it to measure, aggregating a lifetime of knowledge based on a human directive. So, if that human directive is biased, the AI is biased and will learn more through that biased lens. Even if the AI is built with noble intent, humans can still develop this technology with objective and personal opinions that make it deeply flawed.

Let's look at an example to see how this bias might be expressed. Say that a company wants to create an ad campaign that promotes body positivity along with its product. That company may use a collection of photos of 12 women with different body types and skin color. The marketers are tasked with understanding which pictures perform best based on consumer engagement, so AI is prescribed to measure all the elements of each photo.

Do you see the problem already? AI labels the elements of the photos and prescribes values to what it sees. Essentially, it could label what the human has told the AI to see in the photo based on subjects' body type or size, skin color, hair length and more. Based on these insights, AI can tell what type of body or type of individual drives the highest return.

This is not ethical.

Of course, it's necessary for humans to have discussions about diversity in ads and to account for different body types and ethnicities in their marketing. There are many brands that do this very successfully. But when a machine does it, we need to carefully examine its practices to ensure they're ethically sound. When a machine does it, there is no conversation or discussion. Instead, a machine has been programmed to tell the difference between which photos are "good" or "bad" based on how many conversions it's driving.

Marketers must use AI in a bias-free manner. This can be done with the right tools and the right humans behind them.

Building Ethics from the Ground Up

If you want to deploy AI to improve overall marketing strategy and grow your return on investment, success starts with ethics. And ensuring ethical AI implementation requires several steps.

Implement guidelines first

This seems obvious, but it's still important. And there are many resources available that are designed to accomplish this exact goal.

For instance, in April 2019, the High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence—made up of 52 representatives from academia, civil society and industry who were appointed by the European Commission to issue recommendations on implementing artificial intelligence in Europe—presented “[Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence](#).”

The report outlines seven key requirements that AI systems must meet in order to be deemed “trustworthy.” This includes human agency and oversight, transparency, diversity and more. These guidelines are a great place to start when implementing AI. One continental legislative body, however, cannot ensure the entire world follows its guidelines. AI is built in different nations intrinsically and with different contending biases.

In response, a company should also compile several advised guidelines and incorporate them into its own ethical principles. These guidelines should reflect the makeup of a team and its core values. This means building a team or working with a software provider whose team represents a country in terms of gender, age and ethnicity. In the United States, for instance, a team's makeup should statistically be 50 percent female and 27 percent people of color. Committing to diversity and representation allows for the humans behind AI to bring varied perspectives and ask necessary questions. As a result, the AI solution will be as ethically sound and unbiased as possible, so it can find the best solutions for its users.

Adhere to a set of best practices

AI adoption is still in its infancy, which means many companies lack a strategic focus on its integration. And sadly, there's not a one-size-fits-all approach. That's why there are also technological best practices that AI must adhere to. These include understanding how AI learns, how it prescribes tags to images and words, and how data come together to serve users' recommendations.

In addition, teams must also be mindful of eliminating biases in race, religion and other dimensions. Eliminating these biases and prejudices of humans means AI works objectively to make the best determinations for its users.

Have open communication about algorithmic outputs

Per the High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence, transparency is a key ethical requirement for AI systems. This means that you must explain to users how your AI works, how your business works and how it affects outcomes of the technology.

Any company that is unwilling to be transparent about how its AI works presents a red flag to potential customers. What is it hiding? Is its AI not true AI, but instead machine learning with regular human inputs? Does it have something in its algorithms that is unethical—and that it wants to keep confidential?

Transparency must be far-reaching, too. It's not just between a service provider and its customer, but among a customer's team members, too. Make sure to educate your organization about the implications of AI, how it works and how it will fit into their jobs. This human-centric approach will improve the success of AI and should be integrated into the process at the outset.

Overall, an ethical company deploying AI should be able to answer any question a user has about the software it is deploying and be nothing less than fully open in

communication.

Find the right partner

AI is an emerging technology that is taking the advertising world by storm. It will transform how businesses communicate with customers and influence their purchasing habits. However, it is up to you to ensure that AI is being implemented in an ethical manner.

If you decide to move forward and partner with an AI company, you must demand transparency and insight into its technology and guiding principles. Your values must align, and it is important you feel comfortable that they do.

Ethics in artificial intelligence will only improve when users—marketers, advertisers, and creative content directors—demand it. Make sure to partner with companies that regard ethics as a cornerstone of their technology rather than simply a box to be checked.

Let's Get Ethical

Remember, infusing AI into a marketing strategy, or into overall business operations, is about more than just incorporating a flashy new technology. AI can have a profound impact. We need to ensure ethics and bias are being addressed from the beginning to achieve the best results.