



“With AI in place, interactions with customers will move from straightforward transactional models to multidimensional conversations spanning a variety of complementary channels.”

Kevin Dherman, SYSPRO

When analytics is infused with AI, businesses can start to truly enhance productivity among the human workforce, adds Clinton Scott, MD at TechSoft International, adding that when analytics is augmented with AI, to automate tasks, improve workflows, and discover insights, everyone is empowered.

“Knowledge workers are already comfortable with the use of AI-led technologies and insights as a means to improve day-to-day non-technical business functions. AI is being used in financial services chatbots, in call centres and even in ad-serving software when transacting online,” says Scott. “But we are only scratching the surface of how AI can help when augmented with day-to-day analytics; AI can help fuel and lead massive productivity gains in business. The argument for AI-enhanced productivity in the human workforce is not a new concept, nor is augmented analytics. But they are still widely misinterpreted by businesses that are still unsure as to how best to deploy them in their organisation, or who still believe they should only be accessed by the data experts. By its very nature, augmented analytics is defined as the ability to enable technologies, such as ML and AI, being applied to data generation and, in turn, being used for better insight generation and explanation. In short, it augments people’s behaviour with data, how they use and explore it, and pull this through to BI and analytics platforms. Now, when it is coupled with AI-infused analytics and ML technolo-

gies, that is where the real magic starts to happen. Augmented analytics was cited by Gartner as a top strategic trend for this year, and as harnessing and driving innovation in business. Where it starts to work is when it’s used to augment the intelligence and behaviour of multiple users to create automated insights that can then be copied and carried over to business functions, ultimately guiding favourable business outcomes.”

Streamlining AI

So where to begin on an AI journey? For business, any AI implementation should always begin with the customer experience in mind, says Van Wyk. When you adopt this approach, the only limitations for the application of AI are human imagination, and often, more importantly, business budgets. The first and arguably the most important step in any AI implementation is to have a solid understanding of business processes, available resources, business requirements and customer needs. Once you have this, you can identify areas that can be adjusted and streamlined using AI. It’s important to remember that AI is not a one-size-fits-all approach – not every business requires 24/7 communication channels, for example, nor do all businesses require a chatbot solution. For some businesses, an SMS offering might be the most appropriate, given the needs and preferences of their customer bases. For others, webchat apps might be apt and well-received. At the end of the day, AI works best if it is channel-agnostic and

offers full two-way communications. This is essential to ensure adoption rates are high and return on investment is maximised, streamlining customer experiences. Understanding what your business needs, what you can afford, and then investigating the best options to achieve this, is the foundation for success.

The best starting point is to gain a clear understanding of your current environment and to ask the fundamental question: What do we want to achieve from AI deployment and digitisation in general? The answer will help guide your decision-making and define the way forward, says Dherman. “Once you have a good understanding of your current situation, you will be in a better position to define a clear strategy and implement a step-by-step plan of action that will support your organisation’s transformation journey.”

Sartini believes AI can be a mammoth task to implement and requires the right foundation for it to be successful. The key to implementing successful AI solutions lies in the company data. “A key challenge to avoid in implementing AI is data silos. For AI to be successful, data needs to be combined to prevent duplication and avoid data drift, which occurs from using outdated or inaccurate data. Getting through this data is the biggest challenge to putting the right foundation in place for AI to succeed. As such, companies need to start with a data refinery that collects and sorts through all the data before implementing an AI solution. Another challenge companies face is opting for AI initiatives that offer the greatest potential for the business without considering the requirements to get to the big prize. AI requires slow and steady progression for it to be successful and companies need to meet several technology and regulatory requirements before they can fully implement AI solutions. As such, companies should adopt a phased approach to AI, starting with automation and moving up towards AI solutions focusing on the short-term gains that each solution offers in the journey towards AI.

Possible pitfalls

AI is really only as effective as the communication channel it’s deployed on, so this needs to be considered too, says Van Wyk.