

ChatGPT and GPT4: a fresh starting point for society or Wikipedia 2.0?

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The annals of the internet are replete with tales of warning, ranging from apocalyptic scenarios that never materialised - such as the Y2K bug - to groundbreaking technological advancements that were once widely celebrated, but have now become insignificant elements in the fabric of the world's digital landscape.



Joe Baguley, VP and CTO, VMware EMEA | image supplied

The nature of technology and its cycle of self-perpetuating betterment means that there will always be 'the next big thing'. In this regard, step forward ChatGPT and its subsequent updates such as GPT4.

The claxon of caution

Since the tail end of 2022, ChatGPT has been that thing. The white knight to solve the ills of modern society. Depending on which news source you read, it will improve; how we study, write, research, code, work, create and evolve in the workplace. There is more, of course, because the potential use cases are endless, but there are also grounds to sound the klaxon of caution.

For a start, we've been here before. People of a certain age will recall the fanfare to which Wikipedia arrived. That too was going to revolutionise how we learn and research. That too was going to change the world. And did it? I'm afraid not quite.

What happened is what is almost certain to happen to ChatGPT and the innovations that follow after it. That it evolved to become a tool, albeit an incredibly useful one. A tool in the box that helps our day-to-day lives alongside the other incredible tools that have been developed in recent years, like Alexa or next-day delivery. On its own, will it change how we operate? Almost certainly. Will it change the world? Almost certainly not. Like Wikipedia, we will grow to learn its limits.

An AI-infused world

Perhaps the key question is, where and how far will it catapult society? The excitement around ChatGPT stems from what it is, not necessarily what it does. By consumerising an artificial intelligence (AI) product into something everyone can use it has opened our eyes to the realities of an AI-infused world.

The fact is, that this is happening already in sectors such as [healthcare](#) (for early detection, image scanning and analysis and predictive care to name a few examples) and [manufacturing](#) (for instance, to increase production capabilities and cut emissions) but those applications are limited only to a select few, hence the massive disparity in reaction.

The reality is, we are already in an AI-infused world of which ChatGPT is simply the next chapter and it won't be the last. It is, however, a very clear signpost as to where we go from here. The Genie is out of the bottle as far as the positive impacts AI can have but beyond the excitement and appetite to use it as a digital travelator to get to the next point more quickly, society needs to harness it appropriately.



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This means starting at an education-level. We're already seeing reports of it being used in exams. In a recent test, it passed law exams in four courses at the University of Minnesota and another exam at University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business, according to this story on [CNN](#). Unsurprisingly, we're also seeing [tools](#) being developed to detect and prevent its usage. This creates a developmental cat and mouse whereby students will want to use it both because they can't, and because they shouldn't.

But this sends out a wrong message and arguably fuels the fire of scepticism around AI. Knowing that they're here to stay, we should accept ChatGPT and other AI tools into education and encourage people on how to best engage with them. Essentially, to use every tool in the box to get the job done better and quicker because this is the world of work they will walk into.

Embrace AI to do something better

The same message applies to businesses. It is far too linear to suggest that these types of AI advances alone will kill job X or Y while that, in and of itself, isn't the end of the chain anyway. Just because ChatGPT can create job adverts, brand copy or legal letters does not mean businesses ought to dismiss their HR, marketing and legal teams. Far from it.

These teams are more vital than ever because their years of experience, diverse backgrounds, soft human skills and unique personalities are not only what is required to get a job done today, they're the foundation of society tomorrow.



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The cleverest businesses and the ones who will come out on top in the end will be the ones who get to grips with these types of innovation. To learn them, incorporate them into day-to-day operations and evolve the skills of their teams accordingly and in lockstep with any new development. Microsoft's new 365 Copilot is just another example of such tech rapidly being integrated into existing business tools.

The leaders will be the companies that embrace AI to do something better than they are doing today without jettisoning the people and skills required to adapt to our ever-changing world.

Another way to look at it is that early machine code developers didn't disappear because we invented compilers - what in fact happened was that more and more people could access the power of computing as coding became progressively easier and easier with each generation; with generative AI such as GPT4 now generating code and creating websites from sketches it will just enable even more people to engage and create.

Understanding limitations

We will, of course, reach a point where enough is enough as far as AI is concerned. Perhaps in years to come we'll reach that moment and identify this period as the start of that journey, but it is a long way from now. What it will look like is an age-old question. A moral and societal issue far too deep to cover here, though Professor Stuart Russell did so expertly in his [2021 Reith Lectures](#).

All we have now is a new technology, no more, no less. ChatGPT is a computer system taking big steps forward in communication and generation, and that is an amazing advancement, but using this tool and combining it with other tools alongside the scientific method and human intelligence is where the real excitement is. In short order we are already discovering its flaws and limits.

Thinking critically about combinations and application is how and where we can realise the potential of AI to change lives for the better. Once again we should look at how technology augments humans and advances us all. In order to do that, we first have to understand limitations and that we're always in the middle of history, never the end.

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