

A simpler, smarter life through AI

By [Vaughan Rowsell](#)

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When you think about artificial intelligence and how it will impact our daily life, what are the images you conjure up? Intelligent robot companions that clean and cook and keep you company? A disembodied voice that controls your car, home, TV and your life? You can relax in the afternoon by demanding "Computer, turn the lights down, run me a bath and play death metal". We all relax in different ways.



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Or are you being really dark and the image of a robot army coming to retire all humans one at a time is how you imagine AI? Isn't it exciting to think about how technology is going to change (or end) our lives?

Artificial intelligence is in its basic form when a computer is able to make "intelligent" decisions that a human would otherwise make. So, lights that automatically turn on when it gets dark is a form of AI. Google Maps finding you the fastest route to drive somewhere is a more advanced version of AI, and several levels up from there are self-driving cars that can not only turn on the headlights automatically and plan the fastest route, but can also drive you there without killing anyone along the way. Soon your Tesla can express its anger at passing human motorists with a robotic finger at which point AI has completely replaced us when it comes to driving.

AI in the home

AI is also now starting to appear in our homes as smart devices like Alexa or Google home, where they listen to our every word in hope we ask it something, like what's the capital of Turkey, what's the best Jason Statham movie and what's a recipe for a good vegan lasagne. The "AI" is able to understand human speech and then, basically do a google search on what we just asked and find the best result. When it can solve oxymorons like what's the best Jason Statham movie then it can truly do more than what is human.

As more of our devices we surround ourselves with get “hooked up” to the internet, these smart speakers can also interact with our TV, lights, doorbell and even the washing machine. So Alexa can blink the lounge lights when the washing is done, or turn the TV up really loud when it detects a door to door sales person via the video doorbell.

Computers are learning so much about us and learning new tricks to pretend to be us. They can listen, talk, give us advice and drive complex machinery. Soon the AI can be with us wherever we go to, like our own personal guardian angel, or virtual life assistant reminding us when to leave home to make it through traffic to our coffee date on time.

The AI I imagine and want is like one of those spy handlers. The girl of guy in your earpiece, who lurks in a bunker at Langley or MI6 somewhere monitoring your every move and vital statistic, whispering to you the names of old school friends you have forgotten as bump into them at the mall and providing you the fastest route to escape an awkward conversation about their poor life choices.

As technology becomes more and more portable, so do we become more and more mobile. As our lives become more automated, as cars drive themselves, as supermarkets predict and deliver the groceries we need, this all frees us up to have more time to do fun things. Like shopping.

But wait, isn't automation and Amazon killing retail?

Benefits for retail

The retail industry is set to benefit immensely from technology and AI, and retail is an industry I know a bit about having helped it adapt to technology over the last 10 years. Technology and AI could do all our shopping for us. Technology and algorithms can find the right sized clothes and automatically pick items based on our preferences; AI can do this right now.

But I don't think we want to be dressed by our AI or have the gifts we buy our friends automatically picked for us based on their Facebook activity. That can lead to some really awkward “Make America Great Again” themed gifts. But mainly I don't think we will delegate all this to AI because this takes away our free will and our ability to make choices. You can drive my car, and pick the route but please don't pick my underwear.

Instead I think our personalised AI assistant will be there in our ears helping us find and navigate to the stores we are looking for, give us in-depth product information as we hold an item, manage our finances asking us if we really need that new pair of shoes and finally have someone honest at the changing room to tell us if our ass looks big in this.

AI will automate the chores in life, like grocery shopping, making more time for us to cherish things and have new experiences.

Saving small business

More practically if you are the retailer then the time that AI will save you will be the difference between business failure and amazing growth. In small business, this is where you will see AI make the biggest impact today. Every day small business owners are facing make-or-break decisions. Decisions based on data and 9.72 times out of 10 rely on solid analytical skills. Exactly the sort of thing that a computer is great at.

Smart business assistants are already popping up, powered by AI, that can process all your key business data in real time and make sensible suggestions, like what your next supplier order should be based on how sales have been. AI can help

you identify the profile of your best customers and give you tips on how to best engage with them. Every morning your personalised store AI can greet the store owner with the summary of yesterday's sales and what to try different today. Try discounting these products, and these customers are slipping away so perhaps run an online campaign to re-engage with them.

I imagine AI as being that smart friend you want to hang out with because they make you smarter. Technology isn't going to replace us, it's going to free us up for the more important things in life, like meeting friends, going shopping or seeing our family. It will become our trusted advisor, it won't run our lives or businesses, but it will give us some pretty good advice.

This, I guess, all depends on whether or not our personal AI assistant is provided "for free" by Google or Facebook. Nothing is ever free, and you will end up with an annoying friend trying to convince you to buy vitamins and mattresses all day. My hope is we'll all retain some semblance of free will in the AI-driven world. So we can all make better life decisions, and have more time to bump into old friends.

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