AI update from the Information Training Team by Phil Bradley

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(Minor emendations have been made)

It's been a long time since I've done an AI update, so I thought I'd sneak one in before Christmas, plus it's also almost a year to the date that ChatGPT 3.5 was launched onto an unsuspecting world.

ChatGPT and other chatbots

If you've previously looked at ChatGPT but haven't been back in a while, it may be worth looking at again, because OpenAI has made so many improvements and changes that it's not the same tool at all. It's become much more streamlined with greater functionality. The free version has been updated to January 2022, and the paid version to April of this year. Still not perfect, but an improvement. However, it's now possible to use plugin tools to do much more than could be done previously. Plugins are available in the paid version (circa £20 a month) and they act as a sandwich between ChatGPT and external resources. So for example I can now search academic bibliographic databases, I can get it to search Wikipedia, find me holidays, use it to interrogate webpages or PDF documents. It will draw images for me, or look at images that I upload and answer questions on them. It has a mobile version which allows you to speak to it. GPT-4 boasts an impressive ability to process up to 100,000 words, equivalent to about 300 pages of text. This enhancement allows for more complex and sustained interactions with the AI, making it an invaluable tool for educators, researchers, and professionals alike. You may well say that you can do a lot of this already, and it's true – you can of course search a bibliographic database yourself. However, the difference is that you can get it to find you papers on a particular subject using the plugin, and once you have found a paper you are interested in, ChatGPT can summarise it for you, or answer any queries that you have on it. Because you're using a discreet unit of data ChatGPT isn't going to hallucinate as the free version is prone to do.

Furthermore, you can now create your own version of ChatGPT (again in the paid version) with a few mouse clicks. You can upload your own data, give it instructions on how it is supposed to answer the questions put to it and so on. You can make as many of these as you want, for whatever purpose you have. For example I've created one that is focussed on AI for librarians, and I have used them to help with technical support queries, creative writing, mathematics, and several others.
The importance of these changes cannot be overestimated – the criticisms that it's not current, and that it makes stuff up are still valid – but more so with the free version, but the addition of plugins means this is much less of an issue with the commercial version. I use ChatGPT multiple times every day.

 If you don't like ChatGPT there are now plenty of other chatbots available for you to try out. Claude.ai is my second favourite, and acts in a similar manner to ChatGPT, so do give it a go. If you don't like that, try Perplexity, or Bard – Google's offering. I've been really critical of Bard in the past, but I have to say that I'm becoming increasingly impressed with the way that it has developed and it's a serious contender in the field at the moment.

AI Search

Another area that has been developing quickly is AI assisted internet search. Let's be clear at the outset – ChatGPT and other Chatbots are not search engines, but they can be used to assist searchers. However, there are now more than a dozen search engines with a large AI component in them. They will all give summaries to answer questions put to them, and most will also link to the webpages that they used to obtain the information they used to craft the reply. So again, currency and hallucination problems are not nearly the issue that they were a year ago.

Perplexity.ai stands out with its unique approach, combining the functionality of a traditional search engine with the conversational ease of a chatbot. Users can ask questions in natural language and receive precise and comprehensive answers, along with the ability to ask follow-up questions for deeper insights.

You.com is a search engine that prioritizes user privacy and personalization. It uses AI to customize search results based on user preferences and interests, ensuring a more relevant and tailored browsing experience. Moreover, it emphasizes keeping user data private, addressing growing concerns about data security in the digital age.

Bing has integrated AI capabilities into its search engine, providing more nuanced and contextually relevant results. This integration allows Bing to understand and interpret complex queries better, offering responses that are not only accurate but also more aligned with the user's intent.

As we move forward, the landscape of online search will continue to be shaped by these AI-driven changes. The challenge will be to balance the efficiency and user-centric advantages of AI search engines with the need for critical thinking, exposure to diverse sources, and maintaining the digital ecosystem's health. This transformation presents an opportunity to redefine how we access and interact with information, making it more aligned with user needs while upholding the values of accuracy, diversity, and reliability.

Content creation

AI's role in content creation cannot be overstated. AI tools are now capable of generating not just text but also visual content, offering new avenues for creativity and expression. These tools are not replacements for human creativity but rather enhancers that open up new possibilities for content creators. When I first started looking at AI tools there were barely a couple of hundred of them. My AI tools course was centred around a small number of these and the focus was on the tool, and how it could help users. Now there are over five thousand, so the focus of my course is now centred around the activities that information professionals undertake. I look at content creation tools that will write for you, create slide decks, create videos, search through videos and documents to answer your questions, creating images and so on. I'm pretty jaded when it comes to new tools but even I was astonished at one particular tool which took a video that I had created, translated it into Japanese, retained the sound of my voice and synced my lip movements so that it looked as though I was actually speaking the language.

Summary

I could of course carry on in a similar vein for many more pages, but hopefully you'll have a better idea now of what is possible. There's no doubt in my mind that AI is going to change everything that we do, and it should affect your work, and indeed your day to day life in multiple ways. AI is this generations Internet, except that it's going to be much more impactful.

As information professionals we are perfectly positioned to take advantage of AI to work harder and

smarter, but more importantly we should be positioning ourselves as the 'go to' person in our organisations. We understand information and the way it can be collated and used, and I like to think we will have an intuitive grasp and understanding of the power of AI. But in order to do that, we have to explore that. So please, play around with ChatGPT, or Claude, or try some of the many other AI tools that are out there. I'm happy to help to answer any questions you might have or point you in the right direction. And of course, I'm running courses on various aspects of AI as cheaply as I can to enable the largest number of people to spend an hour at a time checking a lot of this stuff out – spend that hour with me and save yourself many more countless hours trying to find this out by yourself.

But whatever you do – come on my courses or undertake your own explorations – please, please, please just do it. Play around with tools, and see what's available and then utilise that knowledge to position yourself as the company AI expert, keeping you and the library front and centre in this explosion of tools and resources. Also, if you're an expert in a particular subject that you'd like to teach to other people in your own power hour, we'd be happy to work with you to make it happen - just let us know!