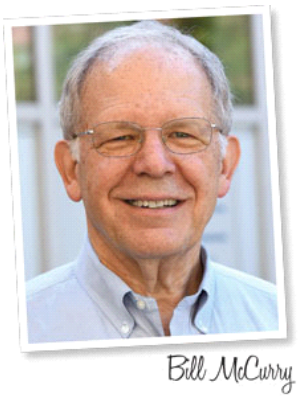
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AI in Our Retailing World

Bill McCurry



An email from Deb Foisey of Deb's Greenhouse Morinville, Alberta, always provides food for thought.

Recently, she wrote, "We are back into a winter deep freeze. Snow storms like these keep me indoors. I turn my attention to things I've been putting off for a rainy or snowy day. Starting small, I'm testing out AI technology on my employee handbook. It's the very first time I've explored the app, GoogleNotebookLM. Everything was free."

Deb sent along a rewritten employee manual and GoogleNotebookLM's suggestions on how to better communicate the manual's messages to her team. AI rewrote and reorganized her employee manual, mirroring the business' personality. Also available, currently at no charge, were posters, video and audio overviews, slide deck, mind map, infographics, data tables and reports.

Two things were instantly thrust into the readers' faces. First, this AI had more than casual knowledge of Garden Center Retailing. It had likely read through and retained everything Ball Publishing had ever printed. The graphical AI compilation of the safety and operations manual made it easy to read and comprehend.

It's challenging to get employees to go through and absorb the traditionally printed employee manual. Audio and visual versions ensure wider understanding. Especially valuable is the pseudo-podcast, "Deep Dive." Two voices, male and female, discuss all aspects of employment at Deb's, including safety tips. Formerly, duplicating materials into print, video and audio were time-consuming and expensive. GoggleNotebookLM does it almost instantly.

The conversation flows naturally and sounds like a real discussion between humans. There are many stories reporting how AI in the wrong hands can lead to increased fraud and serious scams. Listening to the video and pseudo-podcast prove that most people will have difficulty identifying AI from reality.

The news media is full of warnings that AI can eventually control us. In reality, even with U.S. regulation, AI is a global product and international bad guys won't care about our regulations. The best answer is to identify and understand about AI's potential misuses and swindles, while learning how to protect yourself against them.

Deb publishes a "recipe book" showing hanging basket designs and shopping lists. Green Profit Managing Editor

Jennifer Polanz spotted a few plants in the wrong spot in the AI illustration, proving what we already know. Like any other employee, AI needs to be monitored and its work verified. What was fantastic about the pseudo-podcast was how it handled the recipe in layman's language, including the watering and care instructions.

Some have warned AI will cause massive unemployment. Looking at Deb's experience as a road map, she'll never hire a graphic artist to illustrate her employment manual because AI did such a great job. However, Deb had never hired a graphic artist before. AI hadn't taken away a job from anyone. It helped Deb's be more productive.

Those at The Garden Center Group who questioned if AI will ever help retailers were exposed to a new concept by Sam Kirkland, a leader with Epicor and an industry veteran who's helped two generations of retailers adopt new technology. He explained, "I can't say when, but it will be quicker than we imagine. We'll match our sales and traffic with local weather, then ask AI to forecast the weather for the next three weeks and have it compare our history to the upcoming weather patterns for forecasting personnel scheduling, product selection and depth."

Deb waited for a snowy day to investigate this labor-saving process. You should start experimenting with it now. Some of us remember when personal computers began to be commonplace in the 1980s. Back then, some people hoped that if they kept their heads down, they could get through life without learning about these machines. That wasn't true—and neither is the hope AI is going away. Your best choice is to channel its good points that can make your life better or ignore it at your future peril. **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 731-8389.