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The KIT

Knowledge & Information Technology



No. 276 - 16 November 2020

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Gartner's Top 10 Strategic Predictions for 2021

With COVID-19 in full renewed force in much of the world, predictions for 2021 are both a risky game and a tempting challenge. Each year around this time, Gartner offers IT predictions; this time, they added "... for resetting everything in 2021 and beyond" to the title.

Readers of the KIT know that we don't shy from calling out analyst firms when they make obvious or questionable forecasts. On the obviousness scale, Gartner does not disappoint, leading the paper with statements that include "we're living in a world of uncertainty" and "the world is moving faster than ever before." I kid you not. But here are some more interesting points:

- *Generalized recording of work conversations* will help organizations discover "added value or risk." While this may be relatively easy in some countries, and is already done in call centers, it seems unlikely to be expanded to all work conversations elsewhere, for privacy reasons.

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- *Synthetic DNA storage* as a new means to cope with the amount of data to be stored. Don't feel bad if you never heard of DNA storage before; instead, [read about it here](#).
- Automation of packaging and shipping of products, so that *"the consumer will be the first human to touch the product."*
- More customer service issues will be resolved by *paid freelance contractors* than by the technology seller. We find this debatable. First, most people already find from their search engine free help that is often much better than the supplier's call center answers! Second, customers will probably demand that the suppliers, not them, hire such experts. Why should the customer pay this extra cost?

→ LinkedIn Still Blocked in Russia

It's been exactly three years since Russia blocked access to LinkedIn, which had refused to comply with a requirement to store all its data about Russian users within the country. We reported this at the time as an example of the challenges posed by data residency regulations. Some countries have enacted such restrictions to protect the privacy of their citizens; in the case of Russia, "please pardon us if we think that the government's motivation might be the exact opposite.

The contact who confirmed to us that the ban is still in effect also confirmed that many people are accessing the service through virtual private networks (VPNs) or proxy services. Instructions on how to set this up (for people who are not experts in computer networking) are probably circulating widely. This reminded us of the famous maxim from John Gilmore, of the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF): *"The Net interprets censorship as damage and routes around it."*

→ BigQuery

BigQuery is a ten-year-old cloud service from Google (technically, it is a PaaS -- platform as a service) allowing the user to perform SQL queries over massive amounts of data. In Google's marketing words, it is "a fully-managed, serverless data warehouse that enables scalable analysis over petabytes of data." ACM offers, through its Skillsoft service, a tutorial (80 minutes) on the [fundamentals of BigQuery](#). The course is free to ACM members. An ACM login is required to access the above link.

→ Managing a Business Intelligence Program

Elsevier's Science Direct collection has added a new book, *Business Intelligence -- the Savvy Manager's Guide*, by David Loshin. The book is [available for download](#), for free, to ACM members. It discusses "the objectives and practices for designing and deploying a BI program. It looks at the basics of a BI program, from the value of information and the mechanics of planning for success to data model infrastructure, data preparation, data analysis, integration, knowledge discovery, and the actual use of discovered knowledge."



AI and Computer Vision for Hygiene Monitoring

Intel's insight.tech newsletter brings us this month two ~~commericals~~ articles related to the use of sensors, computer vision, and AI to monitor compliance with social distancing, fever checks, and hygiene in general. "[Computer Vision Puts a Focus on Hygiene](#)," by Erica Stevens, is a barely disguised commercial for a company called Wobot. Similarly, "[AI Fever Detection Checks Crowds, Protects Privacy](#)," by Diana Adams, touts the screening capabilities of iOmniScient, which replaces individual fever scanning stations with a system that scans an entire group of people at longer range, cutting down costs and delays in facilities such as airports, where many people need to be screened in a short amount of time, and those who test positive need to be visually tracked through the facility.

As an aside, there is a whole market of freelance writers (you can hire them on Upwork or Catalant, for example) who produce such "puff pieces" for companies and place them with publications. These articles have some benefits: they inform you about solution providers you probably did not know, and they usually include at least one use case or (purported) success story. But then you need to perform your own due diligence to separate the reality from the hype.

Seen Recently...

"Changing random stuff until your program works is 'hacky' and 'bad coding practice.' But if you do it fast enough, it is 'Machine Learning' and pays 4x your current salary."

-- Prof. Ben Schafer, University of Northern Iowa, on the first slide of his course CS 4620, Intelligent Systems

"Digital animalities detection"

-- Seen on a slide listing use cases for digital twins (author name withheld to protect the guilty)

