



SMARTER ROBOTS MOVE INTO THE WORKPLACE

A machine that administers sedatives recently began treating patients at a Seattle hospital. At a Silicon Valley hotel, a bellhop¹ robot delivers items to people's rooms. Last spring, a software algorithm wrote a breaking news article about an earthquake² that The Los Angeles Times published.

Although fears that technology will displace jobs are at least as old as the Luddites³ there are signs that this time may really be different. The technological discoveries of recent years are enabling machines to do knowledge jobs and service jobs, in addition to factory and clerical work.

And over the same 15-year period that digital technology has inserted itself into nearly every aspect of life, the job market has fallen into a long malaise.

"It is literally the story of the economic development of the world over the last 200 years," said Marc Andreessen, an inventor of the web browser⁴. "Just as most of us today have jobs that weren't even invented 100 years ago, the same will be true 100 years from now."

Artificial intelligence has become vastly more sophisticated in a short time, with machines now able to learn, not just follow programmed instructions, and to respond to human language and movement.

There are certain human skills machines will probably never replicate, like common sense, adaptability and creativity, said David Autor, an economist at M.I.T.

Elsewhere, though, machines are replacing certain jobs. Telemarketers are among those most at risk, according to a recent study by Oxford University professors. Watson, the computer system built by IBM that beat humans at Jeopardy⁵ in 2011, has since learned to do other human tasks. IBM, like many tech companies, says Watson is assisting people, not replacing them, and enabling them to be more productive in new types of jobs.

Adapted from an article by Claire Cain Miller
New York Times, Tuesday, December 16, 2014

¹ Bellhop : groom

² Earthquake : tremblement de terre

³ As old as the luddites : qui remonte à la nuit des temps

⁴ Browser : navigateur

⁵ Jeopardy : nom d'un célèbre jeu télévisé américain

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