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AI WORLD?

How AI is being used both by and against the industry

SECURITY SOLUTIONS

Where and how AI is being used to attack and protect M&E

SMART CONTENT

Massive amounts of data now required new tools, including AI

23.02

THE PHILOSOPHY OF DISCOVERABILITY

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Years ago, it was common to hear studio executives talk about their visions for an automated digital supply chain that would result in an individualized experience. They would reference a not so far-off future where the need for a content super-supply-chain (nobody ever called it that, I'm just illustrating a point) would be needed. In this vision, they foresaw the need to deliver to a growing consumer market around the world. The individual experience of the consumer was of the utmost importance. The ability to intuit (with predictive analytics and data science) what each and every one of the billions of people on Earth would want to watch would be the distinguishing factor between the studios' survival or it's impending death.

It sounds dramatic, but if there's one thing that has stayed the same in this industry, it's that everybody loves a good dramatic story with a major plot twist. During the early days of quarantine, while our customers were home learning a second language or taking up a musical instrument, they were also watching more content than ever. Intriguingly, mobile consumption skyrocketed. Even though people were in their homes with their huge beautiful flat screen televisions, they were choosing to watch content on their phones.

Quarantine also saw an explosion in the number of streaming services available so individuals could watch any content, anytime, anyplace, and apparently on tiny screens they held in their hands. The demand for new content increased even though the studios were not producing new content because production was also halted. What is a studio to do when they need to stream enormous amounts of content and they can't make new content? They dug through their catalogs to see what they had that could be redistributed. Knowing where the content is kept and knowing if they have the rights to distribute in any given territory is only part of the battle. There are any number of accompanying assets that go

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along with the payout files. The process for delivering old content can be as complex as delivering new content. It relies on the quality of the metadata that people in the past associated with the files.

Archiving and metadata-tagging media files is practically an art form, and it is often done in bulk and a lot of times it is done by vendors. Imagine determining which content you have the rights to distribute, then sifting through millions of files to find the specific episodes and versions of a television show that was made before the turn of the century and then going through all the motions to authorize it for distribution either to your platform or to the platform of a distribution partner. Asset level metadata (including the EIDR ID) needs to be clean for the supply chain to function properly.

All of this is to say, it can be terribly difficult to find content that you control while it is still

Continued on page 3

within your own systems. The issue is compounded when we pull distribution partners into the mix. As a consumer, it is incredibly challenging to find content considering the vast array of streaming services because most consumers do not follow the industry closely enough to know which studio or streamer has the content they want to see.

These days, a lot of conversations about the future are centered around content discoverability. How can we help viewers to navigate the streaming landscape, anyplace, anytime, on any device? How can we ensure that the content they want is available? How can we improve the overall experience that streaming customers are having? How can we cleanse and prevent bad data or untagged or mis-tagged assets from polluting the environment? If an asset (or any of its accompanying assets) is misidentified or is missing key metadata, it is invisible to search mechanisms.

It is a reminder of a question we were asked to answer in philosophy courses in our university days. It is an ages-old question, “If content is tagged incorrectly, does it exist?” ■