

You Can't Spell 'Calamity' Without AI....

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Raise your hand if you've seen or read something interesting about tech over the past few months that DOESN'T orient around generative AI.

Given all the frothy coverage, many are rightfully asking if the spotlight on generative AI is powered by inflated expectations, a bubble, more trouble than it's worth, the IT hype machine in over-drive (#NFT, #VR, #Blockchain.... Yeah, I said it.)

Some analysis points in the direction of the Fourth Industrial Revolution gaining wide adoption.

McKinsey & Company predicts that, "**generative AI has the potential to generate value equivalent to \$2.6 trillion to \$4.4 trillion in global corporate profits annually.**" **ARK Investment Management LLC** suggests that **by 2030, AI will contribute \$74 trillion to total market equity value.**

Trillions all around sounds encouraging, but others are just as certain that generative AI is going to be the equivalent of an extinction-level event.

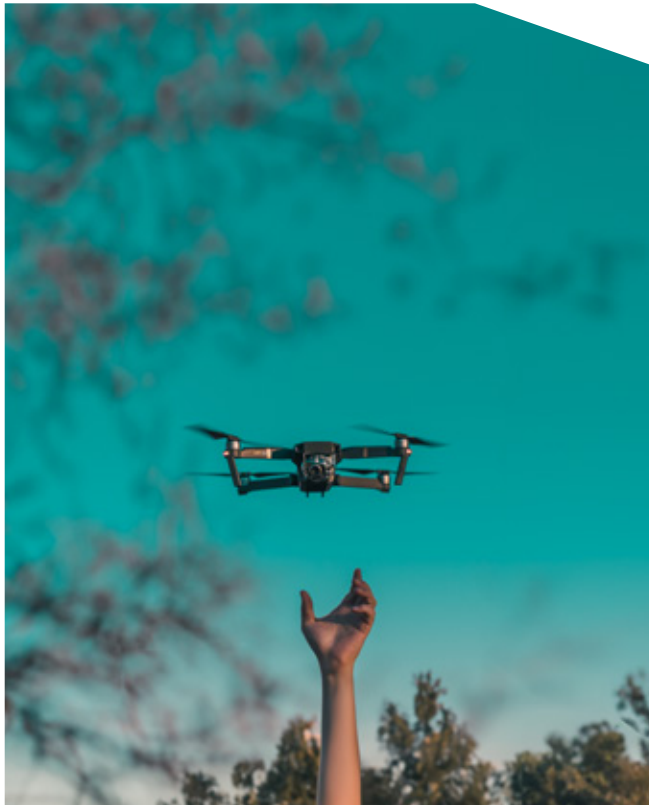
Horrifying headlines abound, enough to leave us all – as parents, decision makers, members of society – shivering in the corner.

- "AI Chat Bots Are Running Amok — And We Have No Clue How to Stop Them" (Rolling Stone, Feb 2023)
- "Entering the singularity: Has AI reached the point of no return?" (The Hill, May 2023)
- "AI Won't Really Kill Us All, Will It?" (The Atlantic, July 2023)
- "A.I. Poses 'Risk of Extinction,' Industry Leaders Warn" (The New York Times, May 2023)



Super...

So which is it? Apocalypse or Utopia? Can we keep our kids from living in a hellscape? Are we going to even *have* a future with AI?



It'll be OK. In fact, if we're clever, we will make real progress.

Are there problems and risks? Absolutely. Are there outcomes where generative AI can improve our work and lives? Also yes. The only thing about generative AI that's truly over-inflated is the notion that this is all a rolling catastrophe that will happen over-night to an unwitting public.

Why believe that? Because we've been here before.

Every major technical shift has required that we navigate the balance between the upside and the downside, and we have!

We can imagine a couple *homo erectus* cave dwellers arguing over whether bringing fire *into* the "home" was super smart. There were likely Sumerians complaining about using axles and wheels to move heavy loads. Even Socrates wasn't immune when he argued *against* the use of the written word. ("... [Writing] will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls....")

This happened in antiquity, but we have more recent echos of the fears faced by our ancestors as they wrestled with the downsides of new technology.

In the 1800s, you'd be thumped with headlines about the dangers of ... steam power.

- "Dangerous Business ... there is always danger in a steam boiler," The Salt Lake herald, October 04, 1883.
- "Steam Boiler Explosions," shouted The New York Times, September 15, 1867. "It is almost as dangerous to walk along the sidewalks as if they were undermined and filled with lighted bombshells."
- "The Steam Boiler: Dangers from Explosion... Among the dangers which menace a boiler are explosion, corrosion, leakage, burning...." The Salt Lake herald. August 12, 1891.



If you survived exploding boilers, you'd still face the terror of ... electricity.

- "The Deadly Electric Wires: The System Of Stringing Them Overhead Must Be Abolished," The New York Times, November 19, 1883.
- "Electricity's Fatal Work," The New York Times, November 21, 1889, a front-page exploration of the mechanics of electrocution.
- "New Perils of Life: It is Easy to Set Your House Afire," The Anaconda Standard, July 20, 1896. In which Tesla himself tells us how to avoid welding ourselves to the floor.
- "Sudden Death In The Air," The New York Times, November 4, 1883, "Conflagration and death are threatened by every inch of the big arc light wires..."

In every case, from the written word, to steam power, to electricity, to the Internet, and now AI, we've wrestled with the pros and cons, and we – humans, as imperfect as we are – have always moved ahead. There's no reason to believe we won't do that again.

As Ben Pring, Malcolm Frank, and I wrote in *What To Do When Machines Do Everything*:

Don't short human imagination.... If, as some techno-dystopians believe, machines will render humans irrelevant in the near future, the fundamental DNA of *Homo sapiens* that has propelled us forward for millennia will have run dry. What is that DNA attribute? It is *curiosity*, something that is the key defining characteristic of intelligence....

When computers start asking questions like "Just what do you think you're doing, Dave?" then we should start worrying. But that eventuality is as far off in the future as it was 50 years ago, when the first prophets of AI-induced human calamity became vocal. Until then, humans will continue to ask questions, be curious, imagine, and build, all the while *using* the new machine

So don't let the doomsday naysayers have the last word. Take a deep breath, and sleep well, but not for too long, and then get busy because the real fun is just about to start!



Let's Keep It Going!

What do you think? Please comment, critique, and share so we can keep the conversation going.

For more on how to tame AI to create your own enhanced organization, please see: [What to Do When Machines Do Everything: How to Get Ahead in a World of AI, Algorithms, Bots, and Big Data](#) by [Malcolm Frank](#), [Ben Pring](#), and [Paul Roehrig](#), PhD. John [Wiley & Sons, Inc.](#), 2017.

About the Author



Paul Roehrig is the Chief Strategy and Marketing Officer for [Ascendion](#). He is a co-author of multiple award-winning and best-selling books and a sought-after presenter at public, academic, and industry events. He is regularly featured in major publications all over the world. Paul holds a PhD from [Syracuse University](#) and was formerly a professional musician. He lives in the Washington, DC, area with his family.

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