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Dear Publishing Professional,

I hope you're not completely burned out from all the talk about AI. If you are, consider plumbing as a good career move.

Things I did with AI this week

Look up the reputation of your company, or a company you're considering doing business with. I did that for a former client. I wish I'd done it before I signed on with them!

To do this I switched to ChatGPT model 4.5, which is better for research. I asked, "Are you able to look up a company and tell me about the brand and its reputation?" When it said yes, I asked, "The company is called [company name and website]. I'd like to know how they are perceived by their partners, customers, and employees, and any controversies they've been involved in."

The response took about 20 minutes to generate, but it was good.

Solve a software problem. Rather than poking around blindly, or spending hours with support, ask AI. Be as specific as possible about what version you're using. The answers are not always exactly right, but they're good enough to get you where you need to be and save lots of time.

This also applies when you want to customize the settings on your phone. An update to my Android phone removed a feature I liked. AI helped me find the appropriate setting and switch it back.

Repurpose content. I uploaded my book about customer data platforms to Google's notebookLM tool. It created an amazingly good podcast where two virtual hosts discussed the book, drawing out its main points. Use the QR code at the right to give it a listen. It's scary, it's amazing, and it's worth your time.



Is this something you can do with your content? Would your readers like the chance to listen to an AI-generated podcast as an alternative?

Convert a rough idea into a practical outline. I often have a germ of an idea for an article or podcast and I need help developing it. AI does a good job with that. Sometimes I'll spend five minutes chatting about the idea, then ask AI to generate an outline based on our discussion.

Finding the connection. Similar to the previous. "These five things seem to have something in common, but I can't explain it. It's something like" I frequently use ChatGPT when I have a suspicion about something that I can't quite put into words. It often helps me find the missing link in my thoughts.

Generate "reader" questions. If you run a Q&A section in your newsletter or podcast and are light on the questions this time around, ask AI to invent some for you.

AI and the death of “engagement”

Everyone in media is obsessed with “engagement.” Here’s the truth: **AI is going to kill engagement, and we’ll all be better off.** Here’s an illustration.

I saw a link to a video titled, “These are the 7 musicians Linda Ronstadt hated.” I was mildly curious – like maybe “one minute curious.” Certainly not sixteen minutes curious.

AI to the rescue. I pointed the “YouTube Transcript Generator” at the video (search “Kome YouTube transcript generator” and bookmark it), got the text, uploaded the text to ChatGPT, and asked Hal to tell me who the seven musicians were. Done.

My total investment was about 35 seconds. (In case you care, the seven musicians are Don Henley, Jim Morrison, Neil Young, Frank Zappa, David Crosby, Elvis Costello, and Paul Simon. ChatGPT gave me the list plus a quick reason why Linda held a grudge against each.)

That is precisely what’s going to happen to “engagement.”

Two types of content

Let’s divide content consumption into two categories.

Experiential content. This is the stuff you want to engage with. You want to leave the world for an hour and experience the life of a New York City cop, or find out what Frodo is up to, or enjoy a Brandenburg concerto. You don’t want a quick summary. You want the experience.

Transactional content. You have a question, and you want the answer. Now, dammit.

The end of clickbait

Clickbait is the disreputable (but profitable) practice of teasing the answer, but dragging the poor customer through page after page, slide after slide, minute after minute of “content” the user doesn’t want, all so the publisher can get more ad revenue. This kind of content forces “engagement” on a person who desperately does not want to be engaged.

AI is going to destroy all that, not because everybody will do what I did with the Linda Ronstadt video, but because new tools will do it for you, at the click of a button. You might have a plugin on your web browser that says, “summarize this video for me.” (Hey, tech guys, build that already.)

It’s the same process that happened to search engines. They used to give you a list of pages that might or might not answer your question, and then you had to go check them out for yourself. Now they give you an answer plus a bunch of links if you want to dig in further.

That process will continue. Consumers will be able to get the answer without wading through all the superfluous junk. And thus, AI will be the death of phony, forced engagement.

- How will this affect your content strategy?
- How will it affect your KPIs?
- How will it affect your revenue model?

You’d better start thinking now. If you need help, give me a call.

Pick conference speakers, wait on the topics

With the pace of change in publishing today, is it possible to pick topics today for a conference a year from now? I have my doubts. The smarter strategy might be to line up the speakers and keep the topics open until shortly before the conference.

That reminds me of an old idea. Why not **crowdsource the topics**? Or some of them.

Promise the line-up and ask your audience what they want to hear from those speakers.

Sure, it's a lot more work, but as my brother says, "most people miss out on opportunity because it comes disguised as hard work."

Trouble with your Email Service Provider?

A friend who's been using a radically customized version of some old listserv software for his email program recently did a careful search for a replacement and found a great option. If you're curious, let me know and I'll put you in touch. (No, I don't get referral fees.)

As Thomas Sowell says, there are no solutions, only trade-offs. You'll never find a perfect technology solution, but you can often find a better one – if you know what you're doing.

A good requirements document is essential for an effective technology review / search.

I'm very good at developing and writing those. If you need help along those lines, let me know.

Security issues with PDFs

The same friend sends a paid newsletter to subscribers as a PDF attachment to his emails. ESPs don't like that, and many won't support it. Subscribers love it.

Distributing a PDF raises questions about security. E.g., what prevents subscribers from sending copies to non-subscribers? There are services that try to solve this problem by putting security in the PDF document. My friend asked my opinion.

PDF security isn't worth it. It may thwart copyright abuse, but you will certainly increase customer service complaints. (Remember, there are no solutions, only trade-offs.)

Such tools never work perfectly because a large part of your audience has a non-standard configuration: a weird PDF reader, a strange browser, an old operating system, etc. Also, the people who want to cheat will find a way no matter what you do.

My recommendation? Remind subscribers that forwarding copyrighted material without permission may violate copyright law and create legal liability.

Hacks and tips for AI prompts

One of the traditional problems with using a computer is that it doesn't understand context. If you ask an inaccurate or imprecise question, it will do exactly what you ask, and you'll get accurate, precise, and useless results.

That's not true with AI, which is not as computer-ish as you might think. Even the people who design AI systems aren't entirely sure how they work. They have a tendency to go off script.

People often confuse these two concepts. They think that if they get the perfect prompt, the computer will do exactly as it's told and give the precise answer. That's not true.

With clever prompting you can get *closer* to what you want, but there's always an element of chaos and uncertainty.

Having said that, here are some ideas to help you refine your prompts.

Don't use Wikipedia! There might be a source out there that you don't trust, and you want to make sure AI isn't relying on it when it generates a response for you. You can request that – e.g., “summarize this topic, but don't use information from Wikipedia [or whatever source you don't like]” – but you can't rely on it completely. The AI might not always know where it gets its information.

What would a conservative say about this? An article distributed by Bo Sacks says the *LA Times* is using AI to generate opposing viewpoints. It's an interesting concept for a newspaper, but I think it's a good idea to apply in your own searches. “Identify any bias or ideological slant in this article.” “How would a liberal / conservative reply to this?” Or even better, name someone. “How would William F. Buckley respond to this article?”

No hallucinations, please. AI has this strange habit of making stuff up when it doesn't know the answer. (I think my kids used to do that too.) Try this. “When summarizing this report, if you're not sure about a number or fact, say so explicitly.” Again, even a perfect prompt won't fix AI's flaws, but you can try.

Style checks. “Compare this draft to AP Stylebook rules and flag deviations.” Don't trust it as a final editor (on anything!), but a prompt like this can help you improve your text.

Anticipate objections. “What questions would a skeptical reader have after reading this article?” You might be able to tweak things to address likely misunderstandings. Even better, “Play the part of a skeptical CEO. What questions would you have about this report?”

Better prompts can improve your outcomes but remember that you can always follow up. It's a chat. Nobody says you only get one bite at the apple (unless you've programmed it!). If the response isn't exactly what you wanted, say so.

Sincerely,



Greg Krehbiel



P.S. -- I'm looking for new clients. If you need help, or know a friend who might, please let me know. I'm also open to job offers.

P.P.S. -- Please forward this letter to a friend or colleague.