

## Automation threatens our current workforce

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I love the idea of robots serving humankind, and wonder just how long it will be before we see them running amok on city streets. We're a society in transition, and we're facing a real foe in the name of progress. It's estimated that almost half of our national labour force is at risk of losing their jobs to automation within the next 10 to 20 years.

This is alarming.

We've been watching it happen, slowly, right before our eyes.

We quickly warmed up to self-serve at the gas pumps. We embraced ATMs and now consider them necessary and even irreplaceable. How many of us just love the "tap" with our cards at POS machines?

I find it odd that bank tellers often tell me to consider using online banking, or the ATMs inside the branch. Isn't this self-defeating?? If we all did online banking, these people would be out of work, in the blink of an eye.

I have heard there are branches that are totally automated, with no human to be found. Sad.

Faced with rising costs due to the pending increased minimum wage, more grocery stores are opting for the self-serve check-outs. They've already appeared at many Walmart stores.

I can see this being the way of the future - replacing all warm-blooded bodies with scanners and calculators.

This will no doubt rob people of their livelihood. These are places many young people get their first jobs, and their first real working experience. What will our teens do if all of this vanishes in the next decade?

"Resistance is futile," is a famous line from a Star Trek TV series. Do we simply throw up our arms and be assimilated?

Such technological advancements are nothing new in our economy and in the retail sector. Businesses and consumers have simply found ways to adapt.

But a large-scale workforce reduction, or rather elimination, is quite another matter.

Some experts argue that this happens all the time. We simply "recalculate." Capitalism itself operates in very noticeable cycles of creation and destruction - a constant reshaping of economies.

In order to meet this challenge, our education system has to adapt as well. It has to an extent, and will continue to do so.

There are more and more technology based programs, both within our secondary schools and at post-secondary institutions. A multitude of courses now exist, compared to a decade ago. Robotics, and electromechanical engineering, offered by Humber College, is one example. Here, you can earn a diploma in automation and robotics. It covers all aspects of industrial automation, from hydraulics to automated welding.

There are business advisors who can help students tailor-make their curricula so they are employable, and give them a broad range of credentials.

This is all well and good, but I doubt all of our keen young minds will flock to this growing industry.

Some may still want to be doctors, lawyers, dentists and heaven-forbid, journalists.

Maybe our students of tomorrow have no choice. Career paths may be merging on this information highway.

Adapt or die, is often repeated as a warning to companies of all shapes and sizes.

The recent news that Toys R?Us filed for bankruptcy shows just how our shopping habits have changed. It's sad when any iconic staple fades away.

Apple just released its iPhone X to mark its 10th anniversary. Wow, it's hard to believe it has only been a decade since this device made its debut. It seems like we've had it forever and enjoyed all the neat features of this hand-held wonder. The new iPhone 8 boasts retina HD?display, a 12 MP?camera, and the most powerful and smartest chip ever in a smartphone.

The smartphone in your hand is millions of times faster and more powerful than NASA's computers that send Apollo 11 to the moon and back.

It's kind of crazy that we use our phones for silly pastimes and odd posts to social networks. Could we launch a rocket from our backyard to reach the stars using our iPad??Perhaps. Do we? No.

Smartphone technology is likely the quickest on the planet and the first to show us what's in store for the future. Money transfers -?everything from paying bills to booking vacations - is done from this little device. It talks to us, reassures us, and even translates other languages for us. The smarter it gets, the less we will need warm-blooded human beings.

We only have to look at the assembly line, made famous by Henry Ford in 1913. Today, a little over 100 years later, we have robots, not people manning these lines. Everything from cars and canned goods to candy are being spewed out, 24/7 by our mechanical creations.

On the horizon are self-driving cars. From there we can expect automated public transit and even aircraft.

No doubt, more people will be given the steel boot and be left jobless. It may very well become a cold, cruel world out there. I?only hope they put a few hearts in the tin men they create.

The future may be exciting, but it won't arrive without controversy and opposition.

A cabin in the woods is looking better all the time!