

24102 ChatGPT took their jobs. Now they walk dogs and fix air conditioners.

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When ChatGPT came out last November, Olivia Lipkin, a 25-year-old copywriter in San Francisco, didn't think too much about it. Then in April, she was let go without explanation. When she found managers writing about how using ChatGPT was cheaper than paying a writer, the reason for her layoff seemed clear.

Some economists predict artificial intelligence technology like ChatGPT could replace hundreds of millions of jobs, in a cataclysmic reorganization of the workforce mirroring the industrial revolution. For some workers, this impact is already here. Those who write marketing and social media content are in the first wave of people being replaced with tools such as chatbots, which are seemingly able to produce plausible alternatives to their work.

Experts say that even advanced AI doesn't match the writing skills of a human: It lacks personal voice and style, and it often churns out wrong, nonsensical or biased answers. But for many companies, the cost-cutting is worth a drop in quality. Artificial intelligence has rapidly increased in quality over the past year, giving rise to chatbots that can hold fluid conversations, write songs and produce computer code.

In a rush to mainstream the technology, Silicon Valley companies are pushing these products to millions of users and — for now — often offering them free. AI and algorithms have been a part of the working world for decades. For years, consumer-product companies, grocery stores and warehouse logistics firms have used predictive algorithms and robots to help make business decisions, automate some routine tasks and manage inventory. Industrial plants and factories have been dominated by robots for much of the 20th century, and countless office tasks have been replaced by software. But the recent wave of generative artificial intelligence — which uses complex algorithms trained on billions of words and images from the open internet to produce text, images and audio — has the potential for a new stage of disruption.

The technology's ability to produce human-sounding prose puts highly paid knowledge workers in the crosshairs for replacement, experts said. In March, Goldman Sachs predicted that 18 percent of work worldwide could be automated by AI, with white-collar workers such as lawyers at more risk than those in trades such as construction or maintenance. "Occupations for which a significant share of workers' time is spent outdoors or performing physical labor cannot be automated by AI," the report said.

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