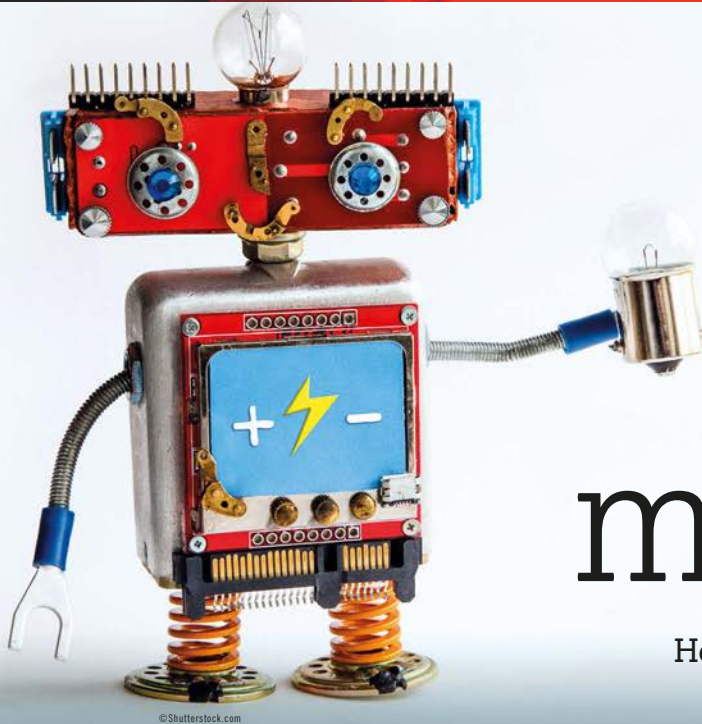**TECHNOLOGY**

Dream machines

How robots are making business friendlier

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A chief executive wants a detailed report on the performance of his business and his nearest rival over the past decade as he considers a strategic merger.

Such a task would usually take a small army of staff many hours to complete. But the use of artificial intelligence (AI) means such data is just seconds away from appearing on his desk.

AI is revolutionising everyday business, making everything from the manufacture of car parts to shifting through millions of pages of data quicker and more effective.

Over the next year more businesses, including small enterprises, will start to see the merits of adopting sophisticated software to take repetitive and mundane jobs out of the hands of humans.

Companies can already access specialist cloud-based software providing robotic

> ## 2019 PREDICTION
> "User experience will be the new battleground."
> **Andy Bell, chief technology officer of Edenhouse Solutions, on the need to make digital platforms easy and enjoyable to use.**

process automation systems for just a few pounds per month. It frees staff from the drudgery of processing orders and enquiries, so they can be moved to added-value jobs such as talking to customers.

However, humans will still need to work alongside robots. This is because AI relies on machine learning, which can only happen if someone is on hand to correct mistakes, from which the machine then learns.

"By doing the task and learning from the problems they encounter, these robots are able to build up an algorithm which makes them better and even more efficient," says Andy Bell, chief technology officer of Edenhouse Solutions.

AI can also use 'natural language processing', which allows senior executives to quickly call up information about their business, either through a voice or traditional search system. As most businesses now store their data digitally, it can make getting hold of vital statistics as easy as calling up your favourite show on a smart TV.

Experts predict ease of use will become the great differentiator of products and services, overtaking quality and cost.

"User experience will be the new battleground," says Bell. "Not only is this

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applicable for ordering fast food, but more complex services such as conveyancing, and the wills and probate work carried out by law firms. The ability to provide a slick and enjoyable service will be what make brands stand out."

New 5G networks, due to be trialled across the Midlands in 2019, will enable the experience to be even slicker.

AI will be used to create market disrupters – such as the next Amazon or Uber – more efficiently by providing real-time feedback on new business models and using this data to tweak or change course completely if the market response is not favourable, says Paul Docherty, executive director at Coventry-based software specialist i-Nexus.

"Using AI to help run a business will become as commonplace as using systems such as accountancy software or enterprise resource planning." ∎