

AI Unlocked: The Realistic World Behind Optimistic Pitches of AI-Enabled Systems



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“Come one, come all! Feast your eyes on the amazing AI-powered city! Witness our AI bots as they eliminate menial tasks from your to-do list like walk your dog, clean the dishes, mow your lawn, even sort packages and laundry.” “Our well-trained AI bots will even yell at your neighbor with where to shove his dog’s excrement if you catch one more dropping on your lawn!”

“Our AI world – conveniently named ‘NotGonnaHappenStan’ – will offer you zero carbon, zero waste, zero traffic, zero pollution, zero crime, and most of all... zero people!” “That’s right, our AI ecosystem will fail to bring forth consumer one due to costs, privacy concerns, impracticality of hardware or software or another insurmountable obstacle. Hence, how it delivers zero carbon, zero waste, zero traffic, zero pollution and zero crime!”

I was recently invited by the Saudi Arabian government to give a training on AI. After picking up my mouth from hitting the

floor at this wondrous opportunity, it was time to go to work and prepare my talk. I wanted to highlight the dangers of blind reliance on AI-enabled ecosystems. To support my claim, I gathered several case anecdotes on the inevitable gaps in implementation from seemingly solid AI proposals across the globe.

Case after case, I documented three elements for each example: (1) proposed AI vision, (2) unexpected obstacles and (3) the result, exposing the gap between idea and practical effort. Such an analysis came from multiple optimistic projects across the globe.

South Korea’s Songdo. *Proposal:* A modernized city managed by varied sensors, cameras, AI-enabled traffic systems, automated waste disposal and automated building management. *Obstacles:* Severely high cost of living, highly inflated commercial rentals, lack of community buy-in and capability to survive inside such a costly lifestyle and overreliance on tech. *Result:* A visualized modernized city now labeled a ghost city. Once proposed as a \$30B - \$35B operation in 2001, now calculated as a more than \$50B anchor.

Masdar City’s (UAE). *Proposal:* A 100% renewable, AI-managed, car-free city supported by clean energy and autonomous transport pods. *Obstacles:* Costs that skyrocketed beyond initial forecasts, lack of community buy-in and premature reliance on tech capabilities. *Result:* A much-truncated version of the

pitch that was made in 2006 for an independent city.

Toronto, Canada. Proposal: Sidewalk Labs (an Alphabet company (parent company of Google)) proposed a smart neighborhood on Toronto's waterfront with varied sensors, AI enablers, smart curbs and an urban design. Obstacles: Public concerns of data privacy and corporate control, lack of transparency, unclear impact on the city and restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. **Result:** The project was cancelled by Alphabet in May 2020.

India's Smart Cities Mission. Proposal: An aggressive overhaul of 100+ Indian cities that offer AI-enabled traffic systems, command centers, digital governance and modernized infrastructure. Obstacles: Significant bureaucratic delays, missed funding opportunities, tech vendor inconsistency and a lack of integration with older infrastructure. **Result:** Although a portion of the project reportedly continues, the vision as a whole has significantly fallen short of its full 2014 proposed smart-city vision.

The above examples are not intended to kick dirt into the eyes of anyone or any institution. The above scenarios act as reminders that the reality of AI project implementation can vary greatly from its forecast. From costs to constrained infrastructure to societal pushback to political suppression and so forth, AI is simply today's modern tool within yesterday's project fascination. Having said that, it doesn't matter if you're pitching AI or old-school gumshoes techniques. Nuisances exist. Oh, and so does Murphy's Law. Combine the two and you've got a prospective Molotov cocktail etched among the wording within your proposal. As we know, any tool – including Molotov cocktails – can bring success or failure.

I routinely beta-test AI programs for companies. Current headlines propose the idea that AI is great and a sort of "silver bullet" to your modern problems. Yes, there are plenty of problems that AI can generate – as the media has reported – but, in a general sense, many people – including some PI's – envision AI-based projects to be absolute gold. One, this is not the case and two, even AI-based projects don't always go as planned.

I've been engaged by several PI's to support their interest in installing AI structures in their investigations, data management or their general business operations. Once I lay out the intricacies of these possibilities, I can see the proverbial deer-in-the-headlights look. I'm not interested in insulting anyone, but my point is there is a large amount of misinformation on how AI can be enabled into various systems. Considering the above forewarnings and their aforementioned budgets, it would be dismissive if we simply believe that AI can solve our problems willy-nilly without properly forecasting its impact within our preferred vision.

AI is not a silver bullet. A silver bullet does not exist inside the world of technology or investigations. Frankly put, a silver bullet does not exist in life! It is critical that we broadly stress test our own tech visions, vet our suppliers/vendors and adopt specific short-term beta testing within large or important AI-based projects. While sectional failure can be an inevitable component of building something, such failure can be mitigated through ade-

quate preparation and drafting realistic visions of these projects at the forefront. If you deploy this type of mentality, any failure will be minimal and, therefore, overridable inside a world filled with Murphy's Law and nuances. In my opinion, this strong preparation plan is just as valuable as the sought AI within the project. Some may argue that the plan is even more valuable than the AI, given that a lack of proper planning has led to impractical AI projects or cancellations of them altogether.

We all know that managing the expectations of our clients is key to success. As such, we should also adopt this same cautionary phrase when building valuable and sensitive AI processes that can hugely benefit us or cripple our systems and wallets.

I identify myself as a good AI-enabled investigator and consultant. Human analysis will always be necessary inside our tech world. Maybe one day, tech will overcome some of the cited problems above and deliver what we want it to. Until then, human management of AI is critical to delivering a solid AI process for ourselves and for our clients. Once technology overcomes our concerns and AI fully replaces human influence, please look for me in the unemployment office. I'll be happy to autograph your bus ticket... for a small fee, of course. **PI**



Christopher Salgado is the CEO of All Points Investigations, LLC, a global cyber and physical investigative firm serving Fortune-listed corporations, law firms, and other entities. A former Facebook investigator, he brings over 20 years of expertise in cyber investigations, OSINT, cryptocurrency, social engineering, and threat management. His work spans corporate risk, brand protection, cults, cyberstalkers, SIU matters and others. In 2024, he was named a Top Investigator by PI Magazine. Christopher is a member of the London Speaker Bureau and a keynote speaker at industry events, including CrimeCon. He has briefed agencies such as the FBI, DEA, HSI, CBP, Interpol, Europol and members of the EU Commission. He is also the Founder of Anti-Hackathon, an online safety initiative, and AGGOSO™ Training, an advanced OSINT education program. He may be reached at csalgado@allpointsinv.com

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