

Artificial Intelligent Agents

What we all need as we journey down the Information Super Highway is help, and help is at hand, in the form of agents – Artificial Intelligent Agents. Just like the secretary, or personal assistant, of days gone by we will use these new agents to sort, sift and pre-digest the mountains of information that will surround us if not completely swamp us in the near future. In the “Always On Real Time Access” (AORTA) Networks of the future we will continuously be offered pertinent information by these agents as they autonomously roam around the always-connected network.

Referring to Artificial Intelligent Agents is really a misnomer – these agents are not intelligent, nor are they artificial. They are simply small packages of software that are there to help us. The agents will know our preferences, our likes and dislikes. We will not need to programme these agents using a QWERTY keyboard they will learn from previous examples – or even from voice commands. Armed with this knowledge, they will ruminate in the vast expanses of the information world seeking and sorting the information that might be useful to us. This information will then be offered to us for executive decision. I do not see these agents making decisions – they are not that smart, well, not in our life-times.....

Like all new inventions, everyone is at a loss as to how, or why, they would use such agents. I see them being used in everyday situations. For example, I see you using a TV watching agent! You will not buy the agent it will just appear in the box in the corner of your lounge, that you will still call a television set even though it will probably be the biggest computer that you have ever bought. Just imagine in 6 years time when there are over 4,000 channels of digital TV streaming into your home! Are you going to read the programme listings? Because the listing is going to arrive as a book over a metre thick – every day! No, you will use an agent. It will watch what you watch, know what you like and dislike, and will seek out programmes and offer them to you. It might even have a conversation with your diary-agent and automatically record those programmes that are transmitted when you are out.

I see you having many agents, for example one for Finance, another for Shopping or Music downloads, etc. Each one will attend to its own area of expertise and will cull the available information into manageable quantities. But, I hear you say, “What happens when they make mistakes?” Well, did human assistants never make mistakes? I see the biggest mistake being bringing too much information back from the mountain.

And these Agents will have faces. At technology demonstrations recently you will probably have seen Avatar Booths. You stand in the booth and 2 photographs are taken of you (one from the front and one from the side). In the time it takes you to step out of the booth the images are rendered onto a model and you became a full motion, full colour virtual actor in an artificial reality space! As well as faces and bodies these agents will have voices – a

natural voice, not that twangy American voice that computers always used to have. They will be able to listen and understand, without training your voice to the computer or the computer to your voice. With a little more application the lips can be synchronized to the words being spoken and the whole process becomes very conversational! Relating to these agents is going to become a simple conversation. And when control is that simple everyone can do it – it will be as natural as talking to another person and the fear associated with “programming computers” will be a thing of the past.

I even see these agents travelling with you in your 3rd Generation mobile phone, another Always On real Time Access device. As you walk down the street they will be interrogating the environment looking for things in which you might be interested. You have wanted a copy of a particular CD for a while. A bleep and a simple message on the phone will indicate that the shop to your right has a copy in the “bin-ends”. They might even be scanning the local area looking for your friends and will announce that someone you might like to share a coffee with is nearby – “Would you like me to phone them?” the agent will ask.

These mobile agents will ensure that you will live in a world in which you are continuously surrounded by information which is pertinent to you, at all times and in all places.

These Agents might even have personalities.... HAL the computer from the film 2001 might not be science fiction for very much longer!