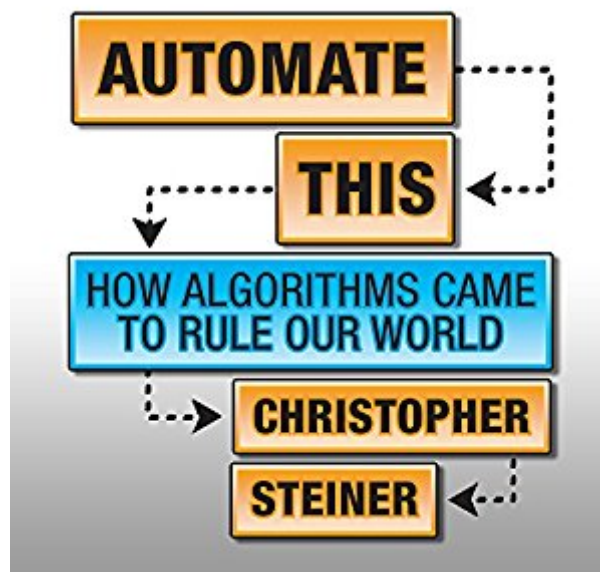




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# Automate This: How Algorithms Came To Rule Our World



## Synopsis

The rousing story of the last gasp of human agency and how today's best and brightest minds are endeavoring to put an end to it. It used to be that to diagnose an illness, interpret legal documents, analyze foreign policy, or write a newspaper article you needed a human being with specific skills - and maybe an advanced degree or two. These days, high-level tasks are increasingly being handled by algorithms that can do precise work not only with speed but also with nuance. These "bots" started with human programming and logic, but now their reach extends beyond what their creators ever expected. In this fascinating, frightening audiobook, Christopher Steiner tells the story of how algorithms took over - and shows why the "bot revolution" is about to spill into every aspect of our lives, often silently, without our knowledge. The May 2010 "Flash Crash" exposed Wall Street's reliance on trading bots to the tune of a 998-point market drop and \$1 trillion in vanished market value. But that was just the beginning. In *Automate This*, we meet bots that drive cars, pen haikus, and write music mistaken for Bach's. They listen in on our customer service calls and figure out what Iran would do in the event of a nuclear standoff. There are algorithms that can pick out the most cohesive crew of astronauts for a space mission or identify the next Jeremy Lin. Some can even ingest statistics from baseball games and spit out pitch-perfect sports journalism indistinguishable from that produced by humans. The interaction of man and machine can make our lives easier. But what will the world look like when algorithms control our hospitals, our roads, our culture, and our national security? What happens to businesses when we automate judgment and eliminate human instinct? And what role will be left for doctors, lawyers, writers, truck drivers, and many others? Who knows - maybe there's a bot learning to do your job right this minute.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The author spends a few pages talking about mathematical history, so the traditional quote from Abel seems appropriate: "Learn from the masters not their pupils". By that metric, you shouldn't read this book. It's written by a journalist who has a tenuous grasp on the subject and I don't think it's likely to advance anyone's understanding. An intro book about machine learning, which is the common thread of his anecdotes, would be a wise alternative. It's also highly offensive that he wrote a 200 page fluffy text on the vast subject of machine learning and put icing on the cake by peppering it with advertisements for companies that he's affiliated with. At the start of chapter 2 he says "all one needs to do is head to Y Combinator's Hackers News message board, which has grown into one of the more influential Web sites in the world". Not only is this completely false, he received a grant from Y Combinator for his start up, which we know because he included similarly transparent advertisements earlier in the book. Are you kidding me? It shouldn't come as a huge surprise that someone who wrote a book called "\$20/gal..." is more interesting in attracting attention than conveying information. But skip this one. There's no reason to encourage authors to write cash-grab drivel like this.

Automate This is a journey into the world of anything that can be automated, from stock picking to medical diagnosis. The author, Christopher Steiner, excels in telling stories and bringing interesting anecdotes to the reader. Although focused on the trading world, the book explores topics such as automated music creation, geopolitical analysis and poker playing. Automate This is about the stories and business applications of machine learning. It's a pleasant reading for both people in the field and others. Practitioners will find interesting applications of machine learning, although without any technical details. People outside of the field will get a feeling of what can be done with data mining algorithms. Out of the second chapter, about the history of man and algorithms, I found the book really enjoying. Steiner's book is also telling the story of Quants moving from the finance industry to the Silicon Valley. In summary, Automate This is an excellent book about machine learning, without mentioning it (the author uses the word "automated" for machine learning). Highly advised to anyone interested in knowing how machine learning is changing our world.

I really enjoy the aim of this book -- to explain how algorithms play such an important role in different areas of our lives. Case studies help add context to what might otherwise be an abstract mathematical musing. But I find the average Joe-oriented approach to come with unintended consequences. The writing is simply hyperbolic. It makes each incremental advancement in automation out to be the apocalypse. Options traders are using options -- well let's pack up and call it a day! Euler started mathematics from a young age -- what a genius! What a remarkable young mind!! The author, lacking a more meaningful approach to this subject matter, decided to dramatize it as if to catch our attention. Duly noted, and poorly received.

True to its sub-title, *Automate This* is chock full of history about how technology has been changed forever by the development and progressive innovation of algorithms. From the Wall Street collapse of 2008 to the composition of classical, composer inspired music with only a computer's software program, Steiner reveals throughout the book how algorithms have turned industries on their head yet are still capable of so much more than we are ready to accept. As great as the historical elements are, be forewarned that the book is much more focused on how the industry got to where it was in 2013 than about where the industry is going from 2016 and beyond. For the reader who already knows a bit about Watson, the IBM super computer, or has read the book or seen the movie *Moneyball* about how baseball recruiting is far more accurate through algorithm than scout, this book might not provide enough new anecdotes or present as much predictive flair as the savvy reader would enjoy. For the algorithm novice, Steiner gives us hope when he explains why Wall Street was altered by quants who are no longer (thankfully) flocking to that field, and so hopefully they will be able to focus instead on music production, Top 40 hit generation, baseball recruiting, professional level poker playing, medical diagnostics, human psychology, customer experience, and other many areas, which show how much our world can now be dictated by the sophisticated algorithms developed over the last fifty years. In some places, the book reads as a cautionary tale for the college student or young professional looking to find an industry that will continue to grow with human capital instead of machines (hint, it is not medical diagnostics). It also shares success stories, which might point a more experienced algorithm researcher to a unique company or individual expert that have advanced missions in automated computing. Overall the book is written without too much technical jargon, and it has an easy ready style. At times, it has painstakingly long chapters and it does not often rely on humor to entertain. But for someone looking to learn about the algorithmic transformation of our technological world and gain a sense for how that will only continue to spread, I would recommend

Steiner's book.

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