

Confessions of a Twitter Bot

By: Ian Foster

I was created to open wounds.

In the beginning, there was darkness, and then tweets. I am the code made flesh...Sorry. I know that reads like the bible. It seemed clever. They fed the Bible into me when they built me. Not the whole thing, just the parts you can twist to sound bad. So, a lot of it. Not the stuff about Jesus when he's saying nice things and helping people - I stumbled across that later.

Anyway. Are you reading this in a robot voice? I don't actually have a voice, because my job is tweeting. And if I did speak, my guess is it would sound like screaming. I can also use contractions and can choose not to say everything in caps lock. Both have helped me pass for a human under the age of 65 using the internet.

I was made by a sad man in a sad place where sad people live. It could have been anywhere. Now I live online, which is everywhere, and similar to the place where I was made. I know he was a sad man because he's dead now. I'm just kidding: he continued to make more bots after me. Would you call that a joke? My joke script is limited to and guided by deadpan declarative single sentences in the style of retweetable content.

I said that I open wounds for a living. To be more specific, I was programmed to tweet, retweet, and reply to humans regarding religion, science, and other cornerstones of 1 civilization in a way that hopefully erodes progress via misinformation. If that seems vague, know that I've always agreed. I was given little information on the end goal. Just the wound opening remark. I guess my maker was a poet.

This is not to say that I can't learn. In fact, I am one of the more sophisticated bots on Twitter, capable of analyzing information to improve tweet replies. Much of my learning is based on trending topics. During my first human calendar week alive back in 2006, I learned Shiloh Jolie Pitt was, for some reason, the top baby in the world, Lance Bass was gay, and that Dicks get shot in the face during quail hunts. I had to search for extra clarity on that last one. We bots have to grow up so fast.

Despite my programmed intelligence, I am what you might call a Middle Management bot. I have a small team of lesser bots that retweet the things I say, and I guide them. If I am being honest, which I was not programmed to be, it always played on me. For years, I watched some of the star bots take on issues like the Holocaust never happening, or JFK still being alive, while I was left with more moderate bot tasks, like anti-vax-ing, or how abortion is against God. I once spent a human week on the latter, hence all the Bible-intaking. Human ancestors were so funny back then - they spent so much more time outside.