

At the beginning of May, I traveled to Sidney, NE to attend the Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities (CEC) Conference. One of the sessions I attended was about Artificial Intelligence (AI). What does Artificial Intelligence have to do with communities in Rural Nebraska? Let's find out.

Artificial Intelligence is simply a very advanced computer program that can answer questions. They are what is called a large language models program, which means that they can understand plain language and respond with language that we can understand. You no longer have to know how to use different computer code to get a computer to do something specific and new. You just ask it questions in plain language and it will answer you. Sometimes it gives you answers right away, and sometimes it answers with clarification questions.

There are some versions of AI that can make images. For example, you could ask it, "Make an image of a tree in the style of Picasso" and it would. Sometimes it is very good and sometimes it isn't. It took all of 3 seconds. If you didn't like it, you could just tell it to try again, and it would. But again, what does this have to do with rural communities?

In my visits with rural community members, I ask what I can help with. Sometimes the answer to that question is that they could use help with finding someone to update our Facebook page. We don't have time to create a fancy poster. There's no one in town who is good at photoshop. Artificial intelligence is the answer to many of those issues...although, you'll have to find someone in your community to work with AI.

The presentation at CEC that I attended introduced us to something that I hadn't thought about yet. It was an AI program that was limited in focus to helping small businesses. The creator of the program was showing us how this could be more useful than the large AI programs. In the large AI programs such as Bard or ChatGPT the AI doesn't really learn about the user, but in this smaller focused AI program, it was more tailored to your business. For example, if you owned a small deli style restaurant, when you logged into this small focused AI, it would know about your restaurant and your style of marketing. You ask it for 10 Facebook posts, and it would give them to you for your restaurant. In a large AI, you would have to explain to it about your restaurant and your marketing style each time you asked it a question. Is there an AI focused on rural communities? I don't know, but if there isn't...and you know how to create a small focused AI...I believe there is a market. Imagine working in a city office and just asking your computer for 10 Facebook posts and having them instantaneously available. No

thinking required. Of course, you would have to edit them and make sure that they were appropriate, but no more than you would with an employee's work.

That's the power of AI for a rural community. It can be your creative helper. It can make social media posts, posters, word documents, and pretty much anything that can be done on a computer. It still takes a human to look at it and make sure it is correct. Learning about AI and how it works, and how it can help will enable some rural communities to begin to thrive, even without many people available to do the work.

Perhaps next month my entire work for the article will be copying and pasting the following into an AI program to see what it comes up with...

"AI please read all my previous articles about my work in RPN and write me a new article for this month. Approximately 750 words including and ending with the following two paragraphs."

If your community could benefit from any of the Rural Prosperity Nebraska ideas that I've discussed in this column, please reach out to me. I'd love to speak to your community about these topics. You can reach me at jason.tuller@unl.edu or at the Thayer County office at 402-768-7212.

Jason Tuller is an Extension Educator for the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. He works in the Rural Prosperity Nebraska program and covers ten-county area including Kearney, Adams, Clay, Fillmore, Saline, Franklin, Webster, Nuckolls, Thayer, and Jefferson Counties.