NAXION
thinking

AI, QC, and ISO
The Alphabet Soup of Modern Insights Quality

## Readying the flight for an AI ascent

Most research firms are making extensive use of AI for various functions, from qualitative analysis and storytelling to statistical programming, and there is already active exploration of its role in querying and interpreting quantitative databases. Understandably, the insights industry is so bent on discussing what extraordinary things AI seems able to do that it is paying little more than lip service to what *mischief* it can do. There is ample evidence in the press – often comic, always galling – that AI can flub even the tasks it is known to perform very well, by presenting us with its hallucinations, repetitions, misrepresentations, and even its own quirky biases or the biases of their trainers.

In an industry where basic data quality – that is to say, *accuracy* – has always been our bedrock, we need to take active steps now to ensure we keep our footing solid by doing more than just exhorting care and oversight. AI's credibility is now such that informal checks will not be adequate. Even when errors are found through QC, those errors may be taken, ironically, as evidence that AI is capable of seeing things we humans don't. It's important to develop systematic processes that minimize the risk of replacing human error with machine error.

Using process standards and protocols to fly safely

One of the chief tools of QC in our industry is ISO—an exacting annual certification that requires companies to set detailed protocols for QC and to demonstrate, through documentation, that it implements them. ISO certification is an absolute requisite for engineering and manufacturing – industries where tiny errors can cause bridges to fall or cars to fail – but even in our industry, it's fair to say that tiny errors can cause important business decisions to be hugely wrong. NAXION was one of the firms that pioneered the introduction of exceptionally stringent ISO standards into the US insights industry. Unfortunately, many insights buyers are still unfamiliar with ISO because we've not done a very good job as an industry of explaining its role and its value—and maybe because the results of our work remain open to interpretation in a way that load-bearing calculations or drug manufacturing processes may not.

The rapid speed of AI innovation means that protocols will be in flux for a while, but NAXION is working to develop and incorporate specified standards for the effective use of AI—including procedures for ensuring that AI analysis is properly guided by humans and results are subject to verification checks. Currently, we use the NIST Artificial Intelligence Risk Management framework as our guide. If you buy insights for your organization, these are the sorts of questions you need to be asking the companies that supply them: *How and where are you using AI?*
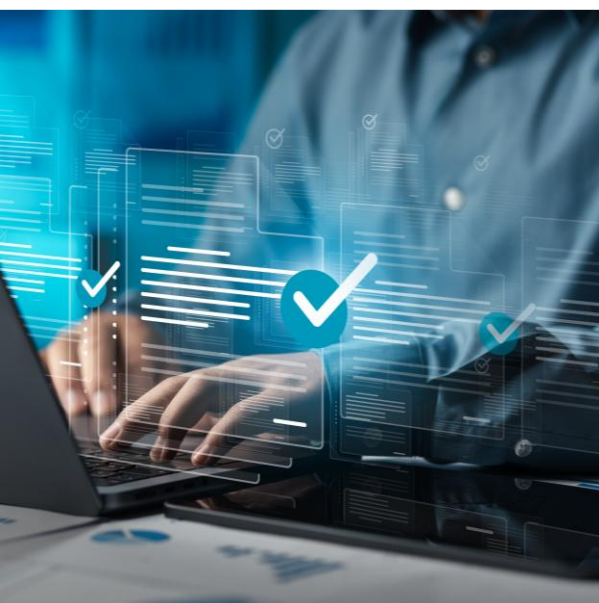
- *Do you have policies regarding the disclosure of AI use?*

- *How are you vetting the platforms and applications?*

- *What routine precautions are being taken to ensure the quality and accuracy of AI-guided research?*

- *Are there standard, well-articulated procedures in place across the organization to confirm proper AI management and outcomes?*

At some future point, AI will be so fully absorbed into our industry processes that standards specific to its use will be part of the broad landscape of QC oversight. For the moment, though, it's still the Wild West and we need to be active in creating conditions of law and order—not just hoping that AI will get so good on its own, that no sheriff is needed.

About the Author

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Brent is VP of Research Operations at NAXION, with oversight of the exacting processes required to produce error-free data. Brent is one of the individuals tasked with the evaluation of new technology and the effective application of NAXION's own innovations in applied AI and software. ISO certification and compliance falls within his scope of responsibilities. His zeal for quality control is matched by his deep devotion to Penn State football.

About NAXION

NAXION is a nimble, broadly resourced boutique that relies on advanced research methods, data integration, and sector-focused experience to guide strategic business decisions that shape the destiny of brands. Our century-long history of innovation has helped to propel the insights discipline and continues to inspire contributions to the development and effective application of emerging data science techniques. For information on what's new at NAXION and how we might help you with your marketing challenges, please visit https://www.naxionthinking.com/.

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