

Auto and AI

Inns and rooms to rent have existed for millennia. You may recall an innkeeper turning away a young couple in Bethlehem roughly 2,025 years ago.

This December marks the 100th anniversary of a different kind of shelter for the weary traveler: the motel.

The first motel opened in December 1925 in San Luis Obispo, California. Its name—*Mo-Tel*—was a simple blend of *motor* and *hotel*, reflecting the moment. It was a practical response to technology quietly reshaping daily life: the automobile.

Travelers no longer arrived by train on fixed schedules, funneled into city centers. They arrived by car, on their own time, and needed lodging designed for that freedom—parking out front, easy access, no formality. The original structure in San Luis Obispo still stands today, complete with a historical marker.

The internal combustion engine was patented in the late 1800s. Roughly thirty years later, Henry Ford paired that technology with process and scale, changing the world with the Model T. The excitement was real—but so were the concerns.

Paraphrasing the sentiment of the day: *jobs and trades will be replaced; automobiles are moving faster than regulation can keep up; they will enable new forms of crime; they travel faster than human judgment and reaction.*

Sound familiar?

AI is replacing jobs. It's moving faster than humans can understand or control. Deepfakes and misinformation are undermining trust. Regulation is lagging.

Could anyone in 1925 have predicted national motel and hotel chains? Fast food and franchising? Gas stations and convenience stores on every corner? The suburban boom? Big-box retail surrounded by acres of parking? Or the idea that middle-class family vacations would become a cultural norm?

None of that was obvious at the time. Those outcomes emerged not because anyone set out to build them, but because the automobile changed how people moved—and business rushed in to serve that new behavior.

Last week, Time magazine named the builders of artificial intelligence its Person of the Year. The recognition wasn't about a single product or company. It acknowledged that a foundational technology had crossed an invisible line—from interesting to unavoidable.

Artificial intelligence, like the automobile in its early years, is undeniably disruptive. It *is* replacing people in certain roles and tasks, and that reality isn't abstract or hypothetical. Every meaningful technological advance has displaced existing work along the way.

But history suggests something else.

Every major leap—sailing, steam power, electricity, the automobile, the computer, the internet—has been followed by periods of extraordinary expansion and futures largely unrecognizable to those at the start. The short-term disruption was real. The long-term creation was far larger.

The automobile didn't just eliminate horse-drawn transportation and its supporting industries. It created entirely new ones—new professions, new ways of living, and enormous wealth—much of it in places no one could have predicted. Its most lasting impact wasn't the machine itself, but the second- and third-order effects that followed as society adapted.

AI appears to be traveling a similar path. Its greatest influence may come less from what it replaces than from what it enables: new workflows, new services, new ways of organizing work and decision-making, and opportunities that don't yet have names. Many of its most important outcomes will likely arrive quietly—and only make sense in hindsight.

The lesson isn't that change is painless or predictable. It's that durable progress often begins with discomfort, unfolds unevenly, and ultimately reshapes far more than anyone expects.

The car didn't change the world on its own. It was simply a practical response to a new way of moving through it.

A century later, we find ourselves at another such moment.

This is a truly fascinating time to be alive. I have been—and will continue to—use these tools thoughtfully and responsibly for the benefit of my clients; while keeping an eye on the opportunities they create along the way.

My Very Best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'JG', with a stylized, cursive flourish.

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