

A New Law Means California's Bots Have to Disclose They're Not Human | Quartz

By Dave Gershgorn

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California governor Jerry Brown signed regulations into law last Friday (Sept. 30) that should make it easier for Californians to know whether they're speaking to a human or a bot.

The new law goes into effect on July 1, 2019—Botageddon, as we're going to call it—and could have far-reaching consequences for how automated systems communicate with people online. It will require companies to disclose whether they are using a bot to communicate with the public on the internet (something like “Hi, I’m a bot.”) A representative for California state senator Robert Hertzberg, who authored SB-1001, says the law specifically targets deceptive commercial and political bots, not those meant to help you, for example, pay a bill on a company's website. Still, companies that have built their businesses around automated messaging and chatbots will in coming months need to figure out whether their approaches are compliant with the new law.

“The bill was really written around social media accounts, Twitter and Facebook bots in particular,” says Carl Landers, chief marketing officer of Conversica, which sells conversational bots for marketing and sales. “[We’re] still studying that to figure out what the impact might be on a website chatbot or an email bot in our case.”

Landers says his company tells customers who are buying an automated bot service to think of it as a new employee: That employee could send messages on behalf of an existing (human) employee, or it could have its own identity. Customers can currently choose whether to disclose that their new “employee” is a bot, meaning the bot says it's a bot in the script, or discloses it in a note in the email's signature.

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