

The Editor Still Wins

A Story About AI, a Horror Movie, and What Communication Work Requires Now

35 MIN LECTURE 10 MIN Q&A IN PERSON OR REMOTE UNDERGRADUATE & GRADUATE

THE TALK

In 2016, IBM Watson watched 100 horror films, tagged 22,000 categories of emotional and visual data, and returned 10 scenes for the trailer of a film called *Morgan*. It did this in 24 hours, and the work was real. No human team could have done it at that speed or that scale.

What the system did not do was decide which of those scenes mattered, or in what order, or what an audience should carry out of the theater with them. A human editor did that, working from what Watson found. The trailer that resulted was neither the machine's nor the editor's alone, and figuring out how to describe that honestly turned out to be harder than making it.

That project was a small and unusually clear picture of what is now happening across the entire communication function. Narrative development, content systems, research, campaign design, team structure, governance: none of it is being replaced, and all of it is being rebuilt.

The people who will lead that work need two things at the same time. They need genuine fluency with the tools, because a leader who cannot do the work cannot direct it. And they need judgment that survives the tools, because the systems in front of you today will not be the ones you are using in five years.

WHY THIS TALK, FOR THIS PROGRAM

Most programs are under pressure to put AI in front of students, and most of what gets offered is a tools demonstration with a shelf life of about eighteen months. The alternative usually on offer is a philosophical session about what it all means, which students correctly hear as an evasion of the part where they need to be employable.

This talk is neither. It is one documented professional project, told by the person who ran its communications, used to make a specific argument about what the work now requires. Students get a real case to reason from and a frame that holds up after the demo is obsolete.

WHAT THE TALK COVERS

- The *Morgan* project in full: what Watson did, what the humans did, and where the line between them actually fell
- Why the interesting question was never speed, and why it was authorship and attribution
- What it takes to direct AI-assisted creative work rather than just operate it
- How the whole communication function is being rebuilt: narrative, content systems, research, team design, governance
- One more layer. *Morgan* itself is a film about an AI shut down the moment she becomes inconvenient, and the people who made its trailer had to decide what to say about the thing they had built

WHAT STUDENTS LEAVE WITH

- A documented professional case study of AI-assisted creative work, rather than a hypothetical
- Working language for authorship and attribution when a machine is in the process
- A clear picture of what the communication function is becoming and where their own work sits in it
- A frame for evaluating any AI tool they meet later, including the ones that do not exist yet

THE SPEAKER

Adrienne Sabilia was the communications and marketing lead on the *Morgan* cognitive movie trailer project at IBM. She championed it internally, brought it to leadership, prepared the scientists who spoke about it, ran the media strategy, and sat in the editor's office while the trailer was cut. She is telling this story from inside it.

She has spent 16 years in strategic communications, in leadership roles at IBM Research and IBM Watson Health and most recently as Director of Content Marketing and Brand at Komodo Health. At IBM she built a science communications program that scaled to the company's global THINK conference, and placed work in *TechCrunch*, *Quartz*, *Time*, the *Washington Post*, and *Axios*.

She now runs Twin Bayonets, a fractional marketing and content strategy practice for healthcare, life sciences, and pharma, where she designs and runs AI-assisted content systems for regulated clients. That work is where this material gets tested: the frameworks here are current practice rather than recalled experience.

She holds an M.A. in Science Writing from Johns Hopkins University and an M.A. in Integrated Marketing & Communications from Marist College.

LOGISTICS

LENGTH	35 min + 10 min Q&A
FORMAT	In person or synchronous remote
AUDIENCE	Undergraduate or graduate; comms, media, journalism, marketing
FITS	Single class session, speaker series, or program-wide event

PART OF THE CURRICULUM

This talk is one of three pieces built on a single six-module spine: a graduate course, *AI-Driven Communication Strategy & Leadership*; an undergraduate course, *AI and the Communicator's Craft*; and this lecture. Both courses were developed for a graduate program in digital communication leadership and deliver online and synchronously. Syllabi on request.