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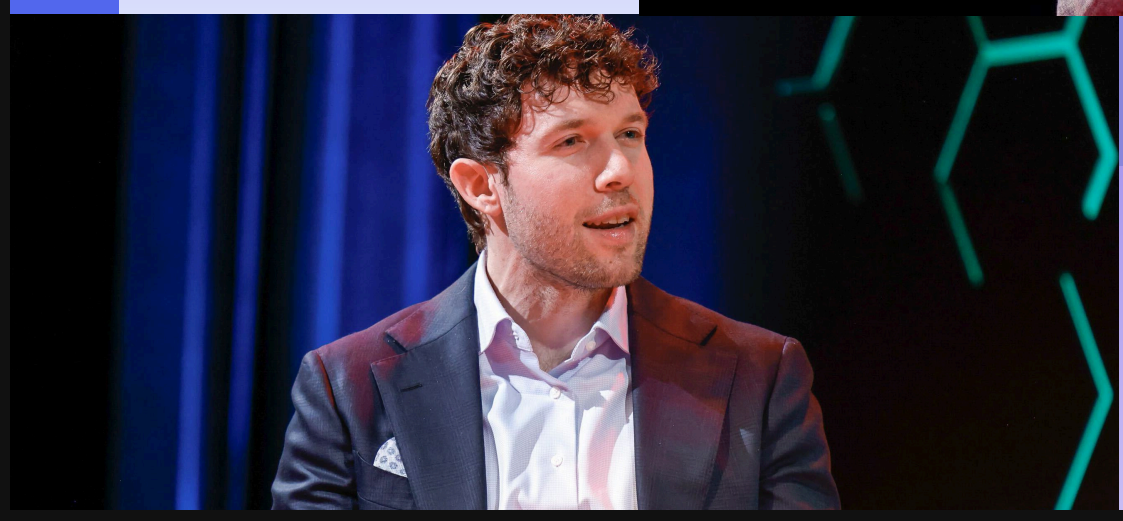
# AI Predictions for 2026

## Insights from You.com Co-Founders



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As the pace of innovation accelerates, the need for trustworthy, actionable insights has never been greater. This collection of 2026 AI predictions synthesizes the expert forecasts of You.com's founders, Richard Socher and Bryan McCann, whose pioneering work continues to shape the AI landscape.

Our mission is to help leaders like you navigate the rapidly evolving world of AI with confidence and foresight. Whether you're a CTO architecting next-generation platforms, a CIO driving digital transformation, a CPO envisioning new products, or a Head of AI strategizing your company's future, these predictions should inform and inspire your decision-making heading into this year.

What sets this compilation apart is its foundation in both cutting-edge research and hands-on experience. Together, Richard and Bryan have made fundamental contributions to deep learning and natural language processing, laying the foundations for the advanced AI systems we use today. Their predictions for 2026—while they may be different — are grounded in real-world deployments, deep technical expertise, and a keen understanding of the broader business context.

> Inside, you'll find a thoughtful synthesis of trends, challenges, and opportunities that will define the AI landscape over the next year and beyond.

Our approach is grounded in practical optimism: we see immense opportunity in AI, but also recognize the importance of responsible stewardship and thoughtful implementation.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. We hope these insights help you lead with vision and agility in 2026—and beyond.



# Bryan’s Predictions

Bryan McCann, CTO and Co-Founder of You.com, offers a broad perspective on the evolving landscape of technology. is predictions touch on three key themes: the shifting dynamics of the AI industry (AI Wars and Winters), the ongoing advancements in product development and engineering, and a range of miscellaneous changes shaping our world. Together, these insights paint a picture of a future defined by rapid innovation, competitive shifts, and the ever-deepening role of technology in society.

## AI Wars and Winters

As artificial intelligence accelerates into 2026, the landscape is entering a period defined by fierce competition, consolidation, and renewed skepticism—what many are calling the next “AI winter.” Industries are rapidly reconfiguring around powerful AI agents, while surging investment is shifting back toward fundamental research in search of the next breakthrough. At the same time, debates over superintelligence and the future of open versus closed systems are shaping the field’s direction. This era will be marked by both unprecedented opportunity and heightened uncertainty, as the AI ecosystem adapts to its most transformative—and turbulent—phase yet.

## 1. More Industries Will Go the Way of Algorithmic Trading

As agents become more capable of making high-stakes decisions, they will operate at frequencies and scales that would be unfathomable by today's standards. Legal work, medical work, science itself— everything will look more and more like the kind of high-frequency algorithmic industry that is trading.

## 2. Search Becomes Even More Critical for AI Systems

Large foundation models need as much public web data as possible to become capable, but search remains essential for staying up to date. That's not changing. Big data collection companies are going to be followed by a wave of even larger search opportunities. The search layer on top of that data is going to be even more valuable than the training data itself.

## 3. Massive Capital Acceleration to Fund the “Return to Fundamental AI” Research

We've mined the last five years of breakthroughs from the large language modeling revolution. Now it's time to discover what comes next. We're going to see massive investments in research again as companies try to reach the next level. The current approaches are well known at this point—it's mostly an execution game now. But the next level of truly new innovations isn't figured out yet, so there will be a return to research. This is also partly the research community gathering resources to ride out the next AI winter.

## 4. War Over the Definition of “Superintelligence”

The top researchers are going into hibernation for the next AI winter, and they are using superintelligence to motivate resource allocation. There will be a war over what superintelligence really means. Is it AI that codes itself? Is it AI that automates research? Is it AI that is truly human-level in some different way? There will be competing definitions and debate over what superintelligence actually constitutes as a proxy for who should get fed now for the coming winter / return to research.

## 5. Industry Consolidation is Coming

There will be consolidation in the space. Those left out of the return to research and losing the war over the next set of terms, which is really about the war over the prevailing capital driving narrative, will need to consolidate. Right now there are chains of high concentration and unsustainable revenue cycles. Either we'll see these companies consolidate, or we'll see some fail. They can't continually coexist with one being the biggest customer of the other while they try to compete. The field would be much better off consolidating rather than letting the bubble pop. Either the bubble pops and a bunch of companies fail with a couple winners emerging, or companies consolidate to strengthen the whole ecosystem and keep it growing.

## 6. Closed Source Will Continue to Lead Open Source but the Margin Between Them Will Likely Narrow

We'll likely see closed source and open source continue to jockey for position, with large incumbents like Google trying to dominate both—with their open source lagging slightly behind their own closed source versions.

# Product and Engineering

Just as high-level programming languages once simplified software creation, AI now promises to abstract away much of the remaining complexity. Soon, most coding will focus on improving AI itself, while application development is delegated to intelligent systems. The boundaries between apps will blur as software adapts to our needs in real time. In this new paradigm, even solo innovators could build billion-dollar companies, redefining what it means to engineer and create in the digital era.

### 7. The Next Generation of Engineers Will Have an Enormous Advantage

They'll grow up with AI, working with it as a natural abstraction layer over what most prior engineers have learned to be the core of engineering itself. Just like python and other modern programming languages have abstracted enormous amounts of complexity, AI will do the same to those programming languages.

### 8. The Developers of the Future Will Be Mostly AI Engineers

The only real coding we'll need to do is for the sake of making the AI better. A good enough AI can build everything else. You'll still need AI engineers who make the AI better, but everyone else who wants to build an application or software will use AI rather than develop it themselves.

### 9. Coding as We Knew it in 2016 Will be Gone by the End of 2026

Much of the coding in the form we have known will be gone, except for learning purposes. Software development will be entirely AI-assisted—it only makes sense to develop software with AI writing most, if not all, of the code. Most situations where you're writing code will probably be because you need to make the AI better. Coding will be much more about improving AI than developing applications directly.

### 10. The “App” Framework Will Start to Show Cracks

As it becomes increasingly easy to speak an app into existence from scratch, we’ll start to see the entire idea of separation between apps break down. We’ll see a glimpse of a much more fluid way for software to respond to our real-time needs by adapting itself on the fly.

### 11. Close to Single-Person Unicorn Company

We'll see someone come very close to being the first unicorn company built by a single person.
This could be in consumer entertainment, consumer shopping, or automated development.
The first person to crack the next wave of making it so developers don't have to develop anymore could theoretically be a single-person company, and it could be huge.

# Miscellaneous

As robots and passive data collection become more commonplace, our environments are increasingly shaped by intelligent systems that learn, adapt, and operate alongside us. At the same time, advances in computing and robotics are pushing the boundaries of where and how technology can function, even extending into space. These shifts signal a future where the integration of smart machines and pervasive data is not just possible, but expected—reshaping our daily experiences and the world around us.

### 12. Robots and Passive Data Collection Become Increasingly Normal in all Contexts

We'll see more adoption of robots as they continue to progress. Having robots in your house will become increasingly normal by the end of the year if you can afford it. It could be like buying a car, maybe even available on a monthly payment plan. I'm surprised by how much people are accepting things like Meta glasses, devices that sit in a room just to record everything, etc. It will leak into the personal world too—and it's already happening.

### 13. The GPU Space Race

We may see real progress toward running GPU clusters in space – the earliest versions are already starting to show signs of life. If SpaceX's reusable rockets work reliably enough, getting GPU clusters into space becomes feasible, which is pretty cool. That would begin the path toward running most of our compute in space and fundamentally change the dynamic from a land grab on Earth to a space grab in orbit.



# Richard’s Predictions

With a deep academic background—including a PhD from Stanford, where his work on neural networks became foundational to modern NLP—Richard Socher, Co-Founder and CEO of You.com, brings a unique blend of technical rigor, industry experience, and visionary thinking to the evolving AI landscape.

Richard offers his predictions on the foundational themes and disruptive trends that will define the next era of artificial intelligence. Drawing on his extensive expertise, he identifies the technical, social, and economic forces poised to reshape industries, transform work, and accelerate scientific discovery.

## Foundational Themes

Several foundational themes are emerging that will shape the trajectory and societal impact of AI. The rise of new technical roles, the uneven success of AI companies, and shifting public perceptions all signal a rapidly evolving ecosystem. Simultaneously, resistance from existing systems and the persistence of high-profile AI errors highlight the complexity of integrating AI into daily life. Together, these themes offer a broad perspective on the forces at play as AI becomes increasingly woven into the fabric of modern society.

## 1. We'll see the first Reward Engineering jobs

As AI agents gain capabilities to accomplish longer-term goals, prompts become inadequate. Reward engineers will precisely define what success and failure look like across extended time horizons, anticipating all the ways an agent might accomplish goals in unintended ways. They'll need to describe and manage AI with zero ambiguity for complex goals while avoiding suboptimal reward hacking by people and AI.

## 2. The AI Wave is Undeniable, but Not Every AI Company Succeeds

AI is as foundationally important as electricity. But that doesn't mean every startup, data center, or valuation is correct. It's a big, large, messy wave. AI will eventually enable the largest companies in the next decade. Just as in previous technology waves like electricity—some companies went bankrupt because they were set up incorrectly or had bad leadership, but we're going to use more electricity and more energy. You can measure the sophistication of a country by how much electricity it is able to produce and make use of. The same thing is true for AI and intelligence.

## 3. AI Backlash and Benefits Both Under- and Overestimated Simultaneously

Some underestimate the backlash, others overestimate negatives and underestimate that productivity raises all boats. Countries will use it for surveillance; others will use it for good. AI is only as good as the people and systems that build it. As part of this we will see larger parts of even modern countries off-ramp from innovation. Multiple Luddite waves and a new type of "we're doing well enough" stagnation vibes will take hold in many people.

## 4. Continued Pushback Against Agents on the Web Slows Adoption

Murky human incentive structures create friction. Advertisements' economics do not like web agents doing work for users. Hourly-paid jobs (lawyers, etc.) don't have incentives for massive productivity increases until major disruption (like full stack AI legal firms) happens.

## 5. AI Missteps Stay Constant in Absolute Numbers

AI is getting better (lower error rate) but usage frequency is much higher. These cancel out, maintaining steady public misstep counts.

# Transformation of Work

As AI capabilities expand, the expectations placed on workers are shifting rapidly, requiring adaptation and new ways of thinking about productivity, collaboration, and value creation. This era is about the redefinition of roles, the evolution of expertise, and the emergence of entirely new forms of work. The following predictions highlight key trends in how AI is driving workforce change, from the displacement of those unwilling to adapt, to the persistent growth in employment opportunities, and the elevation of every knowledge worker into a manager of intelligent agents.

### 6. At Least Three Jobs Will Start Seeing Displacement of People Unwilling or Unable to Use AI, Starting with Software Developers

How many people do you still know that say "I'm not good with this computer thing" in the workplace? How many people can still say "I'm not good with this whole internet thing?" None, right? The same thing will happen with "I'm not good with this whole agent delegation thing." That will be an impossible thing to say five to ten years from now, just like it's impossible now to say "I'm not good with computers" in high-paying knowledge work jobs.

There are going to be two-to-three jobs where that is already going to happen this year, starting with software engineering, and eventually it'll be any job.

### 7. The Lump of Labor Fallacy Gets Proven Again

Work isn't zero-sum. When tractors automated farming, new industries emerged. 150 years ago, 90% worked in agriculture. Today, 5% feed the world. AI is driving a similar transformation for knowledge work. Every wave of automation has created more jobs than it eliminated—not instantly, not without disruption, but the overall pie grows. New opportunities create new desires because humans get used to their baseline and then want more above it.

### 8. Every Knowledge Worker Becomes a Manager of AI Agents

The majority of people are individual contributors now, but AI requires everyone to learn management skills: delegating with clear language, building trust, understanding when AI hallucinates. This is a transition to working at higher levels of abstraction, similar to how programmers moved from Assembly to C++ to Python to now working directly in English. With similarly messy and lossy abstraction issues. The ultimate such abstraction level will be agency.

# Investment Dynamics

As automation amplifies the capabilities of small teams, the definition of what's possible for a lean company is being rewritten. High-output, low-headcount startups are poised to achieve heights once reserved for sprawling enterprises, reshaping benchmarks for efficiency and value creation. At the same time, the venture capital landscape is evolving, with unprecedented capital flows and new milestones for early-stage companies.

### 9. 10-person Unicorn Companies Become Possible

While one-person unicorns are unrealistic, 10-person unicorns will emerge due to incredibly high revenue per employee efficiency. You need people with domain expertise who know how to manage agents effectively.

### 10. At Least a Dozen Companies Will Raise Billion-Dollar Seed Rounds in 2026

Not companies being valued at a billion, but companies raising a billion at seed stage. Maybe instead of a unicorn, we can call them a pegasus?

# The Path to Superintelligence

As artificial intelligence continues its rapid ascent, we stand on the threshold of a new era—one where the concept of superintelligence shifts from science fiction to scientific possibility. This is more than just faster or smarter AI, it's about systems that can innovate, experiment, and recursively improve themselves in ways that far exceed current capabilities.

### 11. By the End of the Year, We're Going to See the First Glimpse of Where Super Intelligence Might Go

It will require open-endedness and recursively self-improving AI. AI that innovates throughout the research process (think discovery, implementation, experimentation, etc). Self improvement is a term being thrown around a lot but nobody has actually figured it out yet in its fullest form. It'll be the most exciting research area moving forward.

# AI Infrastructure and Architecture

As AI becomes increasingly integrated into various industries, robust systems for managing data, processing queries, and delivering insights are more important than ever. The evolution of browsers, search technologies, and open-source tools reflects a broader trend of innovation and accessibility across the digital landscape. With these ongoing developments, the underlying frameworks that support AI continue to play a crucial role in enabling progress and unlocking new possibilities across diverse sectors.

### 12. Search Infrastructure Remains Essential No Matter How Good Models Get

Every single call to an LLM calls out to search—even if it was already trained on that data. Even as models get more specialized data, they're still going to need a search layer over it. Any advanced models trained on specialized data for specific industries will need search infrastructure.

### 13. Industry-Specific Agents Unlock Significant Revenue Through Vertical Search

Companies will go deep into vertical domains—legal, healthcare, news, hospitality—with specialized agents enabled by search over niche datasets not easily accessible on the public web.

### 14. Browsers Evolve but Remain Relevant

AI will first use existing consumer technologies like browsers as infrastructure, then eventually build custom versions made for AI. We're already seeing this with search.

### 15. Open Source Will Lead Closed Source on Many Benchmarks

This already happened with DeepSeek and will continue, surprising many people and putting pressure on pure LLM API companies.

# Consumer Trends

Shifts in consumer behavior and expectations are prompting industries to adapt, from reimagining creative production to addressing the impact of intelligent agents on purchasing decisions. These ongoing changes highlight the dynamic relationship between technology and everyday life, setting the stage for new experiences and opportunities in the years ahead.

### 16. Music Changes Forever if Copyright Issues Are Resolved

Suno is taking off. If someone cracks the copyright problem, music transforms completely.

### 17. Short-Form AI Video Content Explodes

Marketing budgets increase while production costs for small ads decrease dramatically.

### 18. First Humanoid Robots Roll Out as Household Novelty

Initial deployments will be gimmicky, creating some disillusionment, but useful rollouts are still two-to-three years away. If humanoids truly had AGI-like capabilities, they could also transform any car into a self-driving car by driving in the driver's seat.

### 19. New Marketing Motion: Market Directly to LLMs

As agents make purchasing decisions, companies will need to optimize for AI consumption not just human eyes.

# Biotech

## 20. Drugs Will Get to Market More Quickly

We'll see more drugs reaching the market faster through AI-accelerated development and approval processes. The FDA continues to support this with approvals of new methods like organoids which will allow AI to experiment faster and with less animal suffering.

## 21. AI Will Be to Biology What Calculus Was to Physics

AI is a new kind of language that can deal with complexity. Physics has beautiful short equations, but there's no beautiful short equation for your microbiome or the human brain—it's a messy system that evolved over millions of years with all these bugs and viruses in it. We use a lot of metaphors and verbiage from biology for computers too.

But now with AI, we can handle that complexity. We're entering an era of new programmable biology where we can engineer biological processes to be much better than how they occur in nature, making biology exciting as an engineering science rather than just memorization.

## 22. AI Achieves Superhuman Capability in More Verifiable/Simulatable Domains

Chess and Go were obvious—you can simulate infinitely and verify outcomes. Once we improve simulations for domains like biology, AI will dominate those too, potentially curing cancer and extending healthy lifespans. Not next year but we'll see progress on various dimensions (e.g., virtual cells).

# Let’s See Where 2026 Takes Us

As made clear by their predictions, Richard and Bryan emphasize that while artificial intelligence continues to transform industries, redefine work, and spark investment booms, it also faces periods of skepticism, competition, and necessary recalibration.

As AI becomes more deeply embedded in our daily lives—streamlining coding, accelerating drug discovery, and even introducing robots into homes—leaders must balance optimism with responsibility, harnessing AI’s potential while remaining vigilant about its pitfalls.

These predictions underscore that the future will belong to those who can adapt—knowledge workers who learn to manage intelligent agents, companies that pivot through disruption, and innovators who push the boundaries of both technology and ethics. The next phase will not be defined by AI alone, but by the visionaries and stewards guiding its development.

As we move forward, the ability to synthesize technical progress with real-world impact will be crucial. Ultimately, these insights should equip you and your team to lead with agility and foresight in 2026 and to shape a future where AI serves as both a powerful tool and a force for good.



# About the Authors



Richard Socher is a founder, investor, and researcher in artificial intelligence. He is currently the co-founder and CEO of You.com, the #1 AI search infrastructure for enterprises. He's also the co-founder and managing partner of AIX Ventures, where he's backed multiple AI unicorns from an early stage. Richard is one of the world's leading AI researchers and the 5th most-cited in all of natural language processing, with over 230,000 citations.

He previously served as the Chief Scientist and EVP at Salesforce after the company acquired his first AI company, MetaMind, in 2016. Richard holds a PhD from Stanford and also served as an adjunct professor in the computer science department.



Bryan McCann is a founder, AI researcher, and philosopher.
He is currently the co-founder and CTO of You.com, the #1 AI Search Infrastructure for enterprises. Previously, he was a Lead Research Scientist at Salesforce Research working on Deep Learning and its applications to Natural Language Processing (NLP). He authored the first paper and holds the patent on contextualized word vectors, early unified models for NLP, training the largest public and open source language model in the world in 2019, and applying language models to biology.

His work has been cited over 10,000 times and he has spoken about the cutting edge of NLP and AI at research labs around the world. He holds an MS and BS in Computer Science as well as a BA in Philosophy from Stanford University.

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