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Rikki Landini Of Landini Associates On The Future of Robotics Over the Next Few Years

An Interview With David Leichner



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With the shortage of labor, companies are now looking at how robots can replace some of the lost labor force. See [here](#) for example. The truth is that this is not really a novel idea, as companies like Amazon have been using robots for a while now. What can we expect to see in the robotics industry over the next few years? How will robots be used? What kinds of robots are being produced? To what extent can robots help address the shortage of labor? Which jobs can robots replace, and which jobs need humans? In our series called “The Future Of Robotics Over The Next Few Years” we are talking to leaders of Robotics companies, AI companies, and Hi-Tech Manufacturing companies who can address these questions and share insights from their experience. As a part of this series, I had the pleasure of interviewing Rikki Landini.

Rikki Landini is managing director of Landini Associates, a multidisciplinary design and brand consultancy working globally from its Sydney base. Since 1993, Landini Associates has created and evolved retail brands, including McDonalds, T2, ALDI, Glassons, Sass & Bide, Jurlique and Coles. The firm’s new ALDI Corner Store, designed by Landini Associates, debuted in September 2021.

www.landiniassociates.com

Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! Before we dive in, our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you tell us a bit about your ‘backstory’ and how you got started in robotics?

In our 28 years as a multi-disciplined design consultancy focused on retail and hospitality work around the world, we continually question established norms’ effectiveness in reaching their goals, for instance, the ability to drive sales. When needed, we look at how something’s been done in new ways to improve outcomes, creating solutions based on what we call “Reinventing Normal.”

We’ve found that robotics, automation, and other technologies can help advance new, previously unconsidered ways of generating sales, for instance, enhancing customer service and stepping ahead of competition.

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you began your career?

Our first Australian client was a new retailing business established from scratch in 1993 and working with this client still is one of our most memorable experiences. We didn’t have a company yet, infrastructure, local track record or support beyond the client’s, but we dove into the project, designing every component of it as a singular vision. We called the business Vintage Cellars and created its full brand: strategy, identity, interiors, packaging, communications, and workwear. It was and is an outstanding project. The client still trades with the format that we invented 28 years ago.

That experience stands apart from others because it showed us the power of support for our convictions and the great successes that come from it.

- Esselunga grocery store in Italy, where we incorporated screens above checkout counters that delight customers during the purchasing experience and time spent in queues.

How do you think this might change the world?

Often established processes, procedures and practices endure only because they're how things have been done. By taking a step back and looking at a venture's goal and how to best reach it — top customer service and higher business returns, for instance — companies allow for new and better ways of conducting business and living. Robotics, automations, and technologies can provide meaningful and often unconventional ways to do things differently, such as:

- Minimizing tiresome redundancies.
- Creating more joy in everyday living by reducing time spent on menial tasks that can be better spent on genuine human connection.
- Reducing travel time for the procurement of goods.
- Streamlining warehousing.
- Benefitting health and safety at work: Smart warehouses can be far safer. Robots are capable of lifting far heavier loads alleviating the possibility of human injury.

Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

Rumi, the 13th century Persian philosopher, said that “Life is a balance between holding on and letting go,” which is a philosophy that spans all aspects of life, be it personal or professional. All too often we hold on to outdated notions of how things “should” be and don’t question why. But as a species we have always evolved and so should our values.

Ok wonderful. Let’s now shift to the main focus of our interview. Can you tell our readers about the most interesting projects you are working on now?

Really, they’re all fascinating. A few standouts include:

- A revolutionary, technologically advanced indoor grocery market concept akin to outdoor markets’ meet-and-mingle culture.
- A modern twist on the classic ambiance for Slim’s Quality Burger, including drive-in, drive-through, and eat-in options.
- A new “Super” “Market” design for Felna Supermarkets in Japan that emphasizes a joyful shopping experience, including easier in-store navigation, greater access to popular items, and tactile, warm materials along with uplifting, colourful new graphics.
- Sydney Airport’s McDonald’s Kitchen, where we created a yellow glass-encased overhead kitchen that utilizes a mechanized “transporter” delivery system for meals ordered via kiosks. Effective, dramatic.
- Treasury Wine Estates’ Notes store in Australia, where our work included naming, identity, packaging, and the store design for this establishment that sells wines online around the world.

Keeping “Black Mirror” in mind, can you see any potential drawbacks about this technology that people should think more deeply about?

It's important to focus on how the technology benefits customers and the business, what its purpose is and how it strengthens customer service. There's little or no value for robotics used solely for 'entertainment'. In the rush to digitize everything, many retailers have made the mistake of using technology in a thematic and gimmicky way without truly considering if it is adding benefit to customers' lives. At Landini Associates we strongly avoid “technology for technology's sake”. It's best to avoid robotics' use as artificial stimulation. Use them to support and showcase the best of the business upfront.

What are the three things that most excite you about the robotics industry? Why?

- Its ability to adapt to changing lifestyle and business needs and drive beneficial ways of doing things.
- Its wide-ranging applications, from enhanced customer engagements, streamlined business practices, more efficient supply chains to the health and safety benefits of provenance and accountability in vulnerable markets.
- The potential for less transactional practices more and experiential encounters that delight customers and benefit businesses.

My expertise is in product security, so I'm particularly interested in this question. In today's environment, hackers break into the software running the robotics, for ransomware, to damage brands or for other malicious purposes. Based on your experience, what should manufacturing companies do to uncover vulnerabilities in the development process to safeguard their robotics?

- Work with reputable robotics development agencies/companies.
- Invest in modern and appropriate protocols and systems.
- Keep current with robotics' changing technologies, and software and maintenance updates.

Given the cost and resources that it takes to develop robotics, how do you safeguard your intellectual property during development and also once the robot is deployed in industry?

Seek the counsel of a qualified patent attorney, potentially including design and utility patents plus copyrights.

Fantastic. Here is the main question of our interview. What are your "5 Things You Need To Create A Highly Successful Career In The Robotics Industry?"

- Focus on forward thinking. Many of our pre-pandemic designs provided solutions that worked well during the pandemic, but flexibility is key. Push your boundaries and ideas to stay relevant.

- As consumer needs change, consider restructuring your organization to better service clients and improve outcomes. Robotics will most likely play an even bigger role in the grocery sector with automated, contactless fulfilment, delivery, and click-and-collect systems and will, no doubt, provide the answer to the costly last-mile fulfilment problem that besieges most grocers.
- Use robotics appropriately. Incorporate systems that benefit sales, services, and customer experiences in physical spaces and through virtual platforms. Incorporate robotics to move your business in front of its competitors. For example, our design of McDonald's Sky Kitchen in Sydney was initially conceived to maximise the space, which was too small for both customer service and a kitchen. To solve the problem, we looked skyward and incorporated conveyor belts that provide customer entertainment and delight as people watch their Big Macs magically appear from a glowing yellow glass box in the sky.
- Give attention to how robotics are used to meet local preferences and conveniences. Ensure their functions strengthen people's connection to your brand.
- Keep current on changing technologies and protocols.

As you know, there are not that many women in this industry. Can you advise what is needed to engage more women in the robotics industry?

- Exceptional innovations rise to the surface, from both men and women.
- Talk about, promote, and engage women in the conversation. Normalize the industry for women.
- Reach out to female students at all levels about the growing opportunities in robotic design.
- Recruit female robotics designers.

You are a person of great influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger. :-)

To find a solution to the problem of packaging: Across all industries and especially grocery, solutions need to be found that are affordable and sustainable as well as appealing to the customer. Again, often people stick with what they know but unfortunately that is only creating more waste and more landfill. Great strides are being made in more technologies to crack this problem, but manufacturers and consumers have to learn to embrace them.

How can our readers further follow your work online?

www.landiniassociates.com

Thank you so much for the time you spent doing this interview. This was very inspirational, and we wish you continued success.