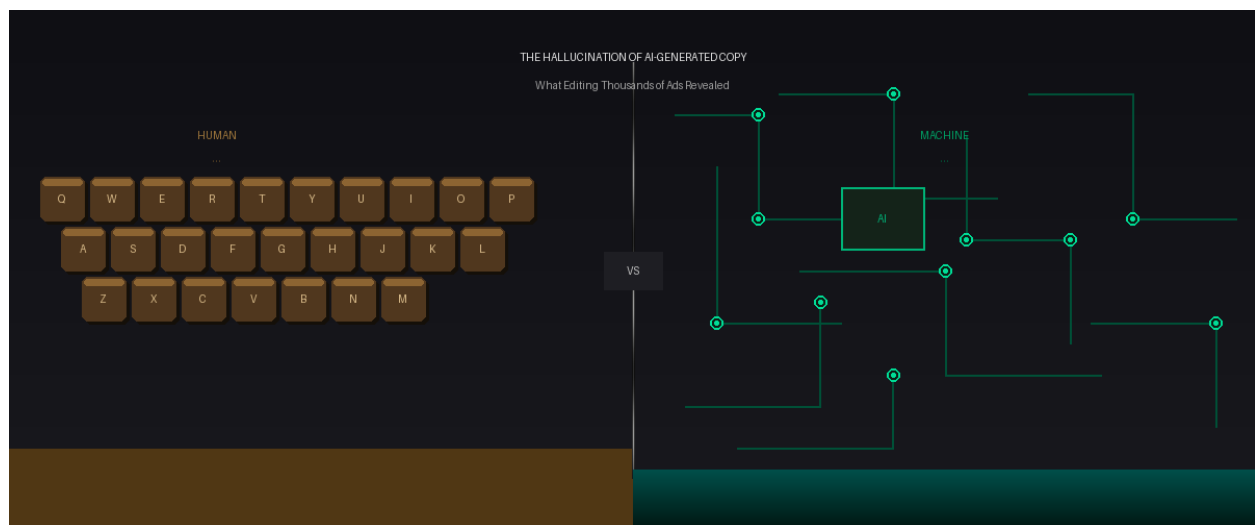


The Hallucination of AI-Generated Copy: What Editing Thousands of Ads Revealed

By Jon-Marc McDonald

December 2025



I've edited tens of thousands of radio and television scripts. Some were written by humans. Some were generated by AI. Clients ranged from small businesses in rural towns to Fortune 500 brands.

The client rarely mattered. What mattered was who, or what, was doing the writing.

In nearly every case, human-submitted copy outperformed its AI counterpart. From tone to clarity to factual accuracy, AI is no match for the creativity and humanity of human writers. At least not yet.

Each brief I edited included five submissions. Dozens of times I tested myself, trying to determine whether a script had been written by a human or generated by AI. All but twice, the distinction was clear. And in nearly every case, the human-written copy was the stronger option.

When clients insisted on AI-generated copy, I cringed. The motivation was usually cost savings, or hype around the idea that AI could outperform human judgment and creativity. As an editor, I wasn't

authorized to dissuade them. I was paid more for AI edits, given the volume and severity of its mistakes. Still, there were moments when I wanted to send an anonymous email urging them to reconsider.

The problems with AI go beyond hallucinations and prompt sensitivity. They're structural. They show up in tone, in sameness, and in the erosion of voice. Across five submissions for the same brief, human writers brought five distinct perspectives: different entry points, different rhythms, different instincts about what the listener needed to hear first. AI brought five variations of the same script. The numbers were wrong. The tone was competent in the way a form letter is competent: technically acceptable, immediately forgettable.

Nowhere was this more apparent than in automotive advertising. Car dealerships and car brands were where AI copy was at its worst. Automotive ads live or die on specificity: the right offer, the right urgency, the right local flavor. AI copy flattened all of it. Every dealership sounded like every other dealership. Every offer felt generic. The copy knew the format but missed the feeling. In radio and television advertising, feeling is the whole point.

When I work from coffee shops in San Francisco, the capital of the AI economy, I look around and see nearly every person on a laptop using some form of AI. Much of the city's advertising reflects the same fixation. At times, it feels as though a majority of the city's marketing exists to sell AI back to itself.

That's the disconnect. Many AI startups aren't designed to speak to everyday audiences. They're built to make sense to other techies. The language is inward-facing, abstract, and divorced from how real people actually speak or listen.

The cost of this supposed streamlining is higher than we're willing to admit. We're losing our distinct voice. We're trading intention for efficiency, and texture for speed.

Will AI eventually get there? Probably. It will reach a point where its output is indistinguishable from human-written copy, even for the trained eye and ear. But it still has a ways to go.

And that isn't a hallucination. That's an editorial fact.