



The Terminator vs. Star Trek Models: Two AI Futures, One Decision for Hollywood

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Executive summary

For decades, Hollywood has told a bone-chilling AI story — one where artificial intelligence arrives as *The Terminator*: a synthetic labor force sent from the future to displace writers, actors, directors, editors, and crew. That fear persists today, and not without reason. It reflects legitimate concerns about authorship, likeness rights, consent, credit and compensation.

But a different portrayal of AI is gradually taking shape across Hollywood production floors — one that looks far less like *The Terminator*'s Skynet and more like Zora on *Star Trek*. In this model, AI does not replace the crew; it helps them complete the mission.

That shift is already taking shape across the industry. In 2024, Lionsgate and Runway announced a first-of-its-kind partnership centered on AI tools designed to help filmmakers and creative teams augment their work. The partnership expanded in 2026 with joint IP development initiatives, AI-powered short-form content and an equity investment by Lionsgate in Runway.¹

The implication is becoming increasingly clear: The most forward-leaning studios are not using AI to shrink the workforce — they are using it to expand what that workforce can achieve. AI agents, working alongside creative and business teams, are increasingly being deployed to enhance creative potential and accelerate development, production, localization, marketing, content protection and monetization of human-authored stories.

For studios to succeed with AI, however, the shift must be intentional. It requires reframing the role of human talent, aligning AI with labor protections, moving beyond cost-cutting narratives and designing workflows that augment — not displace — creative teams.

This paper examines the tension between AI and labor in Hollywood — and outlines a path forward where AI enhances human creativity, preserves authorship and ensures that the value it generates flows back to the people who create it.

91% of respondents to Protiviti's latest AI Pulse Survey expect organizational structures to include both human and digital workers by 2030.

— AI Pulse Survey Vol 5: The AI-People Conundrum: Learning to Lead, Not Lag

¹ Runway, *Runway and Lionsgate Expand Partnership*, June 2026.

Table 1: Studios can pursue a model where AI substitutes for labor and triggers ongoing conflict or they can build systems where AI expands the scope, speed and scale of human creativity. The latter, or *Star Trek* model offers the strongest path forward for leading studios.

	<i>The Terminator Model</i>	<i>Star Trek Model</i>
Core premise	AI replaces human labor	AI augments human capability
Primary use	Synthetic content, labor substitution	Research, planning, coordination and optimization support
Governance	AI positioned as a worker	AI deployed as a tool under human and guild control
Economic result	Fewer jobs, lower-cost output	More projects, expanded monetization, scaled output
Labor outcome	Displacement, resistance, conflict	New roles, skill expansion and shared value creation

Confronting its own storyline: AI's tense affair with unions

Hollywood labor unions have had a complex and often contentious relationship with AI since it emerged as a significant force in the industry. It collided with an industry that had already spent decades imagining its worst-case scenarios. Writers feared synthetic scripts trained on their work. Actors raised alarms about unauthorized digital replicas. Directors questioned whether creative decisions could be delegated to machines. Crew members worried that entire categories of production work could be automated away.

In 2023, the Writers Guild of America (WGA) implemented significant, pioneering rules to safeguard writers against generative AI in Hollywood. The deal stipulated that AI is not a writer, AI-generated written material is not literary material, and companies cannot use AI-generated material to undermine writer credit. Additionally, the agreement requires companies to disclose when material provided to writers has been generated by AI or incorporates AI-generated material.²

SAG-AFTRA, the union representing actors and other media professionals, has also introduced AI protections focused on consent, disclosure, compensation and permitted uses of digital replicas.³ And the Directors Guild of America (DGA), which represents directors and production management professionals, has established protections intended to ensure that generative AI does not replace guild-covered duties.⁴

² Writers Guild of America West: *Know Your Rights: Artificial Intelligence*, December 2025.

³ SAG-AFTRA: *What You Need to Know About the 2023 TV/Theatrical Contracts*

⁴ Directors Guild of America, *DGA Tentative Agreement Achieves Historic Breakthroughs on Key Global, Economic, Creative Rights, and Safety Issues*, June 2023



AI goes to Hollywood

Protiviti's recent [AI Pulse Survey research](#) shows that AI adoption has moved from experimentation to execution as organizations seek to improve performance, accelerate decision-making and drive value creation. In Hollywood, the core AI use cases emerging are centered around four major domains, each reflecting a shift from experimental adoption to practical deployment across the content lifecycle.

1. Production

AI's role in production remains assistive rather than authoritative. Across early-stage development, AI tools are being used to support ideation, script iteration and storyboarding, enabling writers and producers to explore more concepts in less time. In postproduction, AI is streamlining editing workflows, visual effects generation, and localization tasks such as dubbing and subtitling.

2. Back office

As in many other industries, where process optimization remains the primary AI use case, studios are increasingly using AI to support core business operations. Common applications span finance, legal, HR and administrative functions, helping reduce manual effort while improving speed, accuracy and efficiency. Contract analysis, rights management, scheduling, budgeting, and compliance processes are all augmented with AI-driven tools that can process large volumes of data quickly and consistently. These use cases are less visible than production innovations, but they represent a critical foundation for scaling AI adoption across the enterprise.

3. Customer interaction

In customer-facing functions such as contact centers, AI-powered assistants are improving response times, personalizing interactions and handling routine inquiries at scale. AI also helps studios analyze audience behavior across digital platforms, studying viewer behavior, preferences and engagement patterns to better tailor content recommendations and marketing approaches.

4. Revenue expansion

By allowing faster localization, adaptive formats and novel distribution channels, AI makes it easier to prolong the life and reach of content. Studios are looking for methods to expand content across languages, regions and platforms without proportionally raising costs. AI-generated variations, short-form adaptations and fan-driven content ecosystems are all part of this emerging model.

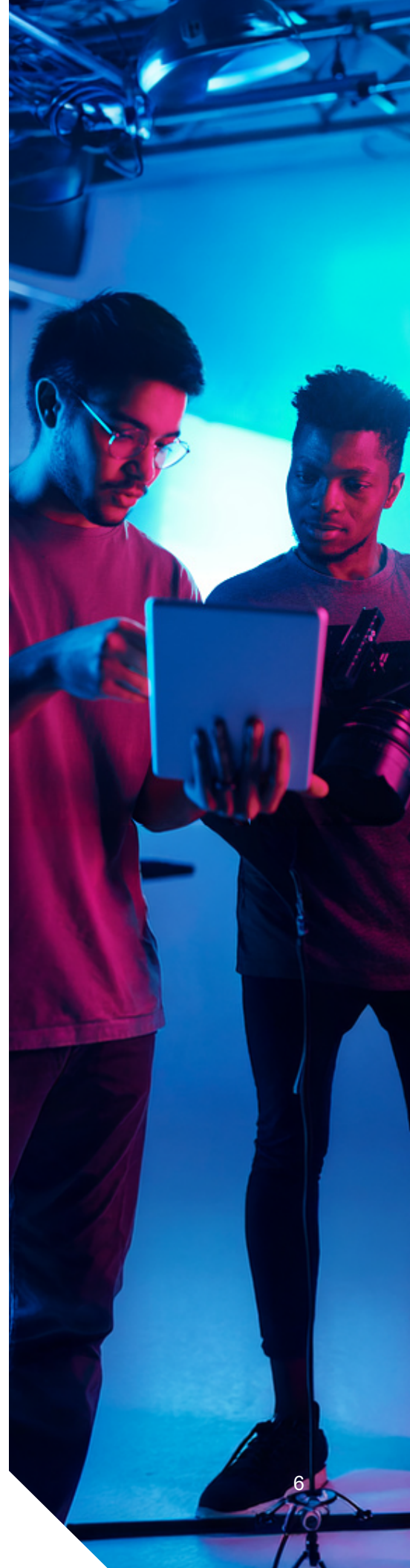


Rewriting the script: How Hollywood can live with AI

Hollywood has reached an inflection point. The question is no longer whether AI will be used. It already is. The real questions are how AI will be **governed** and **who will capture the value it creates**.

Today, the industry faces a set of persistent inefficiencies. Too many projects stall before they create jobs. Scripts go unread. Valuable library content remains undermonetized. Marketing lacks precision. Localization is costly and slow. Rights data is fragmented. Development teams are stretched thin, and producers spend disproportionate amounts of time developing research, budgets, schedules and pitch materials. At the same time, studios face mounting pressure to produce more content, generate faster audience insight and expand global monetization.

AI can help address these bottlenecks without crossing the creative boundaries established by the guilds, but that requires a fundamental shift in mindset. Rather than positioning AI as a substitute for labor, studios must design guild-aligned AI agents that expand what human teams can accomplish. Done right, AI can support employment growth by making more projects economically viable, unlocking dormant assets and creating new opportunities for union-covered work.



How AI can increase employment and solve real studio problems

AI creates more opportunities when it addresses bottlenecks rather than replacing jobs. Here are ways it can solve real studio problems.

- **More projects reach greenlight decisions**

Development is slow, expensive and often inconclusive. AI agents can accelerate noncreative tasks — coverage, research, market analysis, budgeting comparisons, rights review and pitch packaging — so more projects reach decision points.

Employment impact: More scripts advance into rewrites, writers' rooms, attachments, preproduction, and production.

- **Dormant content libraries become active assets**

Studios hold vast underutilized catalogs that are poorly tagged and underexploited. AI can help identify, package and extend these assets across formats and channels.

Employment impact: Increased demand for writers, editors, producers, marketers, clearance teams and performers to support remakes, adaptations and extensions.

- **Localization scales global reach**

AI-assisted dubbing, subtitling and localization can expand global distribution while keeping human translators, voice actors and cultural experts in control.

Employment impact: More localization work, broader distribution and expanded residual opportunities.

- **Marketing becomes more precise and scalable**

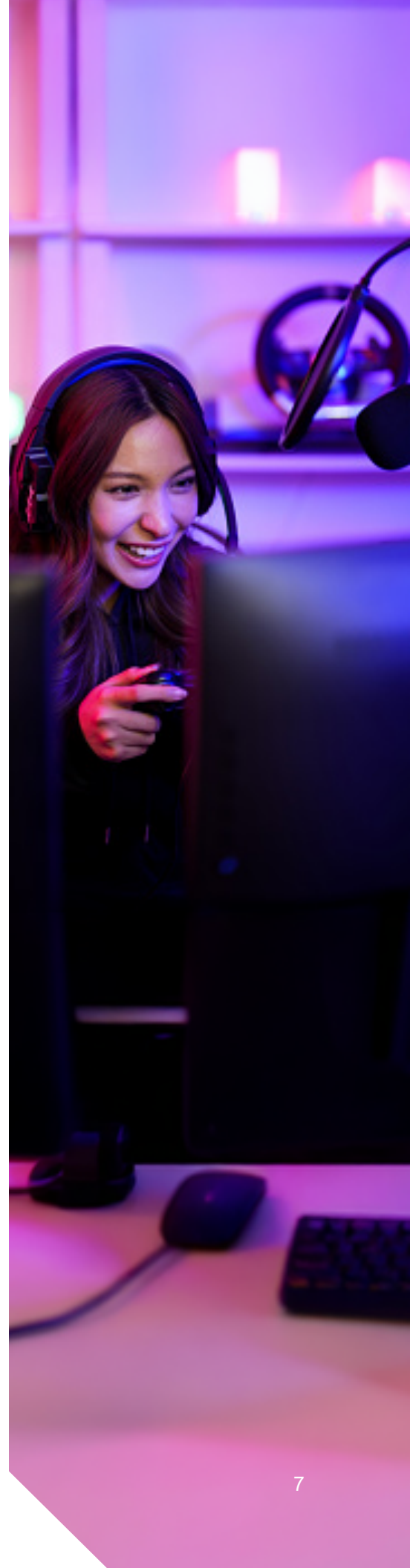
AI can analyze audience data, test concepts and generate insights. Creative teams still own campaign strategy, brand voice and execution.

Employment impact: Better-performing releases, more campaign variants and greater demand for creative services.

- **Production inefficiencies are reduced**

AI can streamline scheduling, budgeting, coordination and tracking — reducing delays and cost overruns.

Employment impact: Fewer cancellations, more predictable pipelines and better utilization of crews and resources.



Final casting call: Potential roles for AI agents

AI agents are positioned for new roles in Hollywood, expanding capacity without crossing union lines. The following are a few examples:

- 1. The Guild-safe development agent:** By organizing submissions, surfacing comparable titles, assembling market context and tracking rights, this agent allows producers and executives to evaluate more projects in less time. The result is greater development throughput — benefiting studios, producers and writers alike by ensuring more scripts receive meaningful consideration.
- 2. The writer's room research agent:** Within the writers' room, a research agent can remove much of the mechanical burden that slows creative work. By gathering background information, tracking continuity, organizing source materials and maintaining franchise canon, it allows writers to focus on storytelling rather than research. This strengthens the room rather than replacing it, enabling better output with fewer errors.
- 3. The rights and clearance agent:** This agent unlocks the full value of studio libraries by surfacing contract terms, licensing restrictions and chain-of-title information at scale. This reduces friction in reuse and adaptation decisions, making it easier to monetize existing content while ensuring that creators are properly credited and compensated.
- 4. The residuals and compensation transparency agent:** This agent improves how value flows back to talent. By tracking distribution, performance, and reuse events across platforms, it enables more accurate reporting and payment. In doing so, it reduces disputes and strengthens trust between studios, unions and creative professionals.

Most AI agents already or soon-to-be deployed are operating within clearly defined areas of responsibility, where organizations balance autonomy with oversight.

— AI Pulse Survey Vol. 3:
From Automation to
Autonomy

5. **The digital replica consent agent:** For performers, a digital replica consent agent ensures that likeness rights are respected in practice — not just in contract language. By monitoring consent, usage parameters and compensation agreements, it enables the responsible use of digital replicas while safeguarding performers' rights and control over their likeness.
6. **The production optimization agent:** An optimization agent helps reduce inefficiencies that often derail projects. By analyzing schedules, locations, availability and budget risks, it supports better coordination and planning. More predictable productions lead to fewer cancellations and more greenlit projects — benefiting both studios and crews.
7. **The localization expansion agent:** This agent helps studios scale globally by supporting subtitling, dubbing workflows and cultural adaptation. By accelerating early-stage work while leaving final decisions to human experts, it increases the volume of content that can reach international audiences — creating more opportunities for translators, voice actors and regional teams.
8. **The library monetization agent:** At the portfolio level, a library monetization agent can transform static catalogs into active assets. By identifying opportunities for remakes, sequels, adaptations and new distribution channels, it helps studios turn dormant IP into new projects — driving demand for writers, producers, performers and marketing teams.
9. **The audience intelligence agent:** This agent improves how content is positioned and released by analyzing audience behavior, trends and performance data. It informs strategy without dictating creative choices, enabling studios to make better commercial decisions while preserving creative autonomy.
10. **The AI governance and audit agent:** This agent provides the transparency needed to make all this sustainable. By tracking how AI is used across workflows — what tools are involved, where consent is required and how guild agreements apply — it ensures accountability. This visibility reduces legal risk, supports compliance and builds confidence among workers that AI is being deployed responsibly.



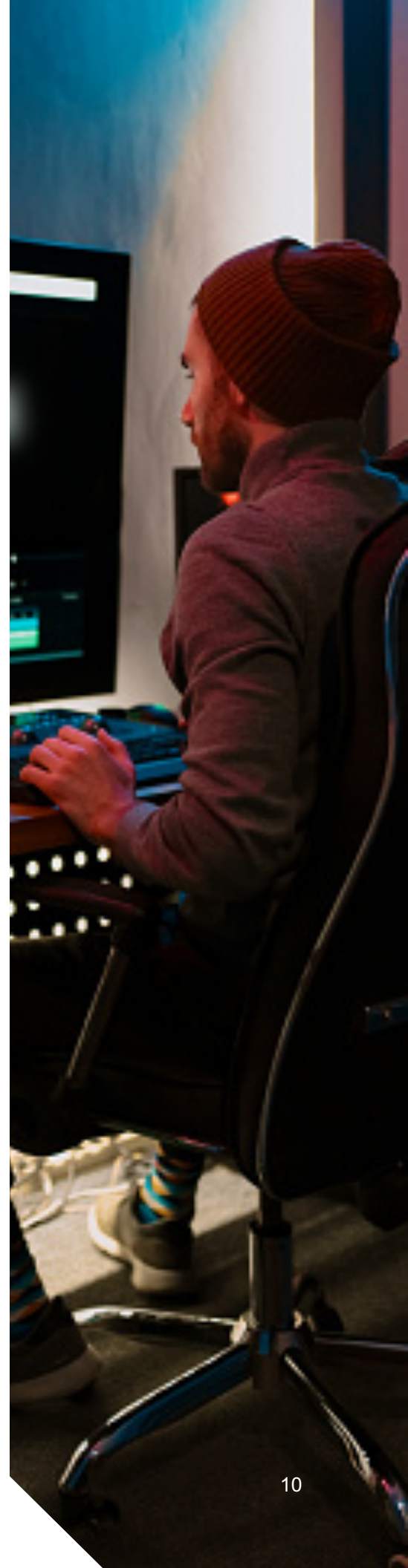
Hollywood must choose its ending

Hollywood has spent decades imagining how AI could go wrong. Now it must decide how AI will go right.

AI can be deployed as a cost-cutting tool that risks displacing labor and eroding trust. Or it can be built as an augmentation system that expands creative capacity, increases employment and unlocks new economic value.

The difference lies in execution. Protiviti's [2026 Global Transformation Survey](#) found that organizations with stronger executive alignment and a deliberate, enterprisewide approach to transformation are better positioned to realize value from their investments.

Ultimately, studios will thrive by using AI to enhance human creativity, improve productivity, unlock new opportunities and ensure that the value AI creates flows back to the people who make storytelling possible.



About Protiviti

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About the author



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Beth is a senior executive and trusted leader in the Media & Entertainment, Technology, and Consulting sectors, with a distinguished career driving revenue growth, building high-performing organizations and delivering transformational outcomes for global enterprises. She has deep expertise across consultative sales leadership, deal development and execution, with a strong track record of aligning business strategy with emerging technologies to create sustainable value. Previously, Beth built and scaled consulting and systems integration practices from the ground up, launched new media products and services, and drove innovation across cloud-based content production and distribution, AdTech, OTT platforms, immersive experiences (VR/AR), localization and fan engagement platforms for sports teams.

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