

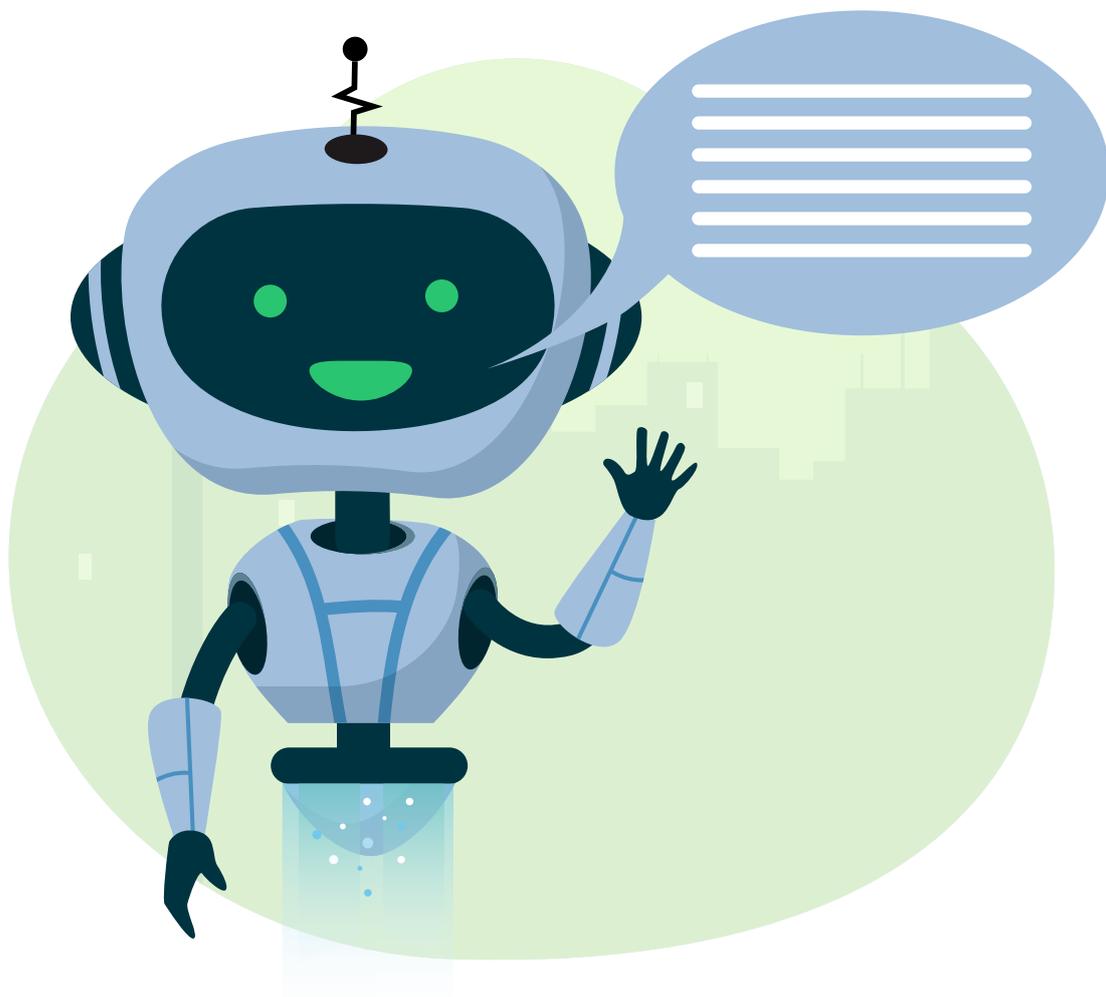
# Lost and found

A green story by IVM

I had some problems with the face recognition system this morning when I came to the office. There was a mismatch in the database and the message “Good morning Doctor Laura Avogadri” appeared, which by the way, is my nice colleague, but my surname is Colombo and my first name is Alberto.

These things happen. Technology is now **everywhere** in the office and this kind of mishap is part of the game. Nevertheless, it earned me a freshly baked pastry, given to me by a colleague who was standing behind me. He had bought an extra one for his morning break. I gladly accepted it to sweeten the wait.

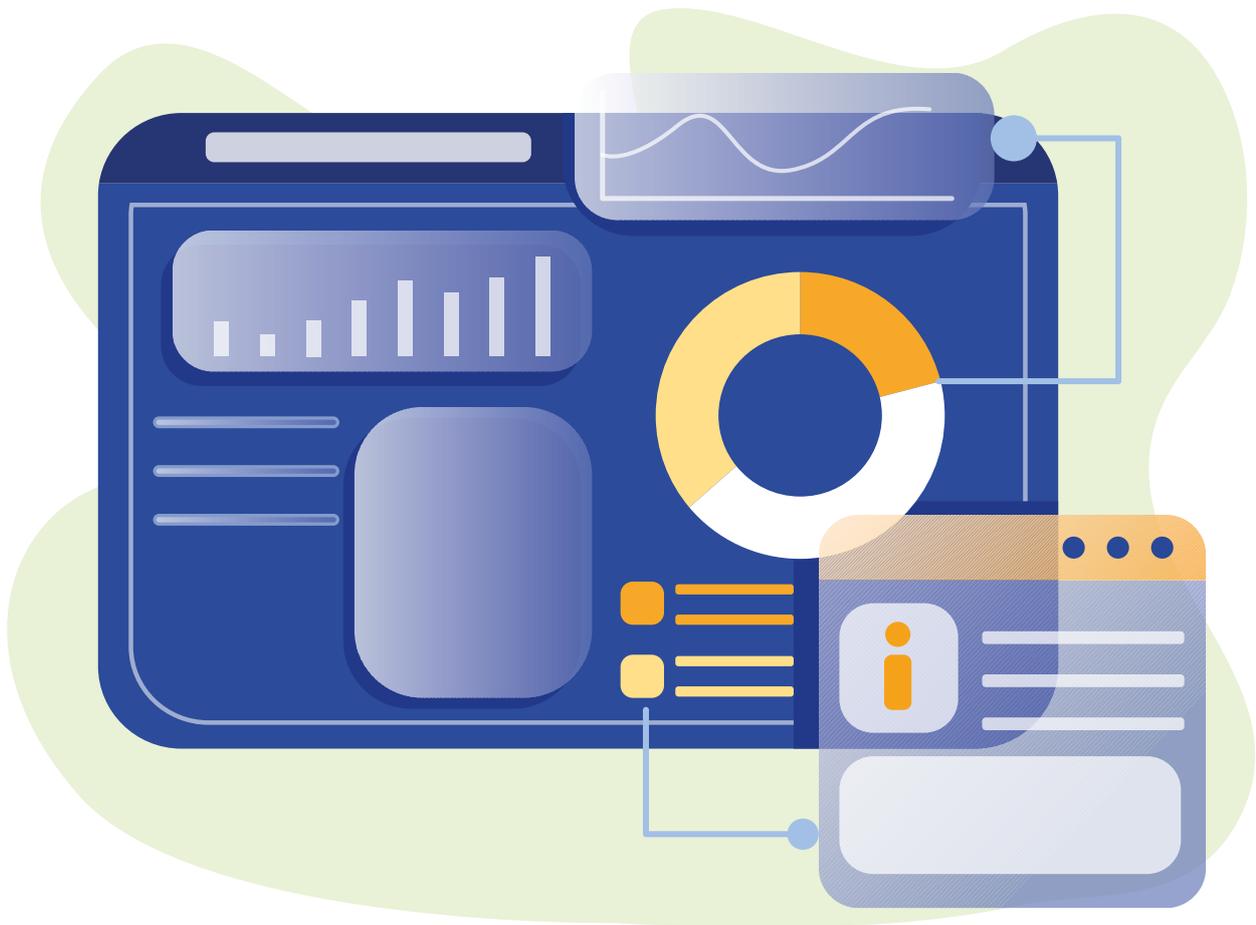
I also had time for my digital assistant to read me the headlines of the day. My dear “Anselmo”, who with his slightly unnatural and extremely polite voice in my earpiece reminded me once again that it was Monday, now 8.41 a.m. and that **early June 2029** promised to be the hottest ever here in **Milan**.



I entered my office and realised that the cleaning robot had completely fixed the disaster of the night before, when my glass of juice had accidentally fallen on the floor. Unfortunately, it wasn't empty. Now there was no trace of that mess. I felt relieved and even my sense of guilt had been replaced by the satisfaction of all that efficiency.

I take a quick look at the **digital wall** where I have been working these last few days to create the notes for the presentation to support **today's meeting**. I am a bit chaotic in this respect. I mix voice notes with touch drawings and sometimes I even add videos and photos to help me focus on the concepts. But then it has to be put together and my **Digital Asset Management (DAM)** had worked on it during the night.

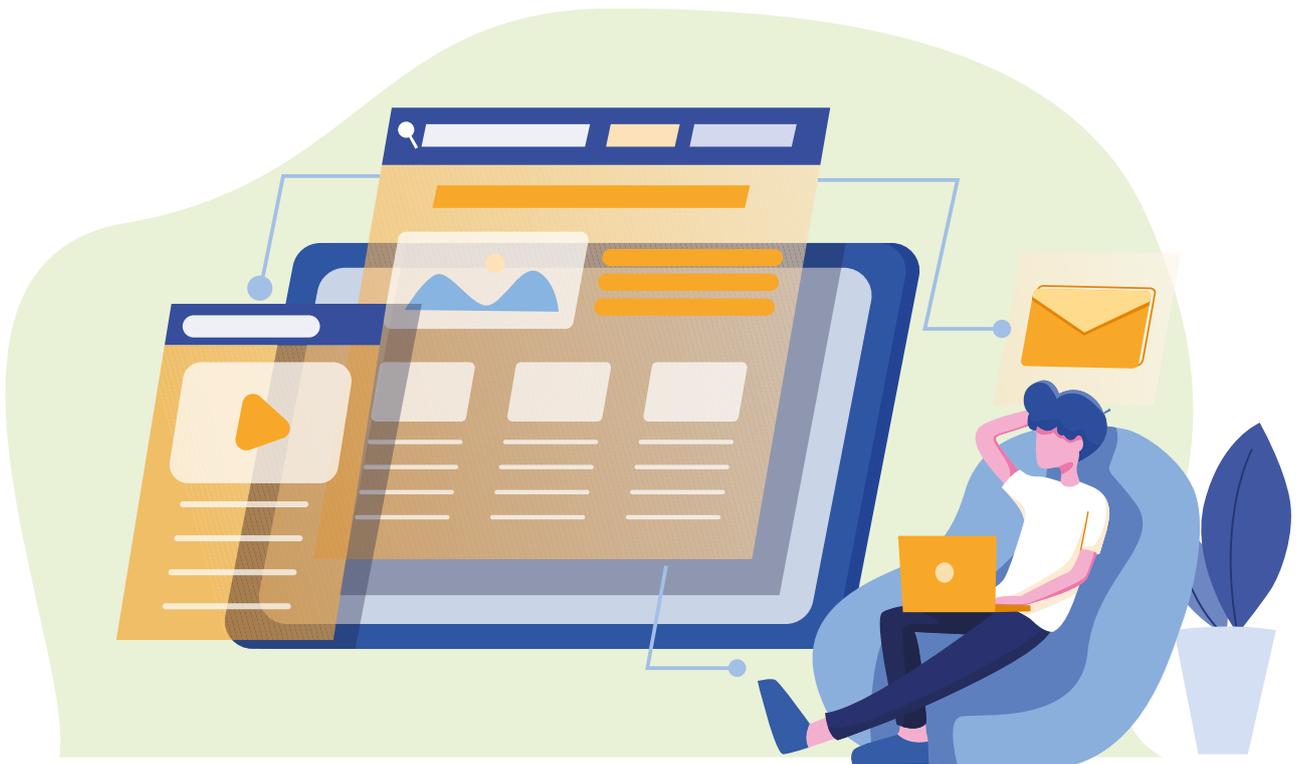
By now, the algorithm knows me like the back of its hand. I'm always amazed at how its self-learning mechanism has developed according to my way of thinking. Anyway, it would have taken me two hours to complete the work before the meeting in the afternoon.



But first I had to do one thing, or rather two. I distractedly launch a short voice command to activate my “**relax mode**”. The glass walls of the room darken, my chair automatically configures itself in a reclined position and the armrests rise, the desktop tilts 30° and activates the touch surface. I ask Anselmo to choose the background music. It was my way of preparing myself for a day that would be very long. I had to clear my mind for 10 minutes. Then I would be ready.

And I had to be, because it was the **last day** for the board of directors to agree on **the merger plan** with our historic competitors. The text was ready, except for a few details still to be discussed. The presentation needed some finishing touches. I still had to decide on the animations to use, but Anselmo and DAM would certainly have finished the work in time for the meeting.

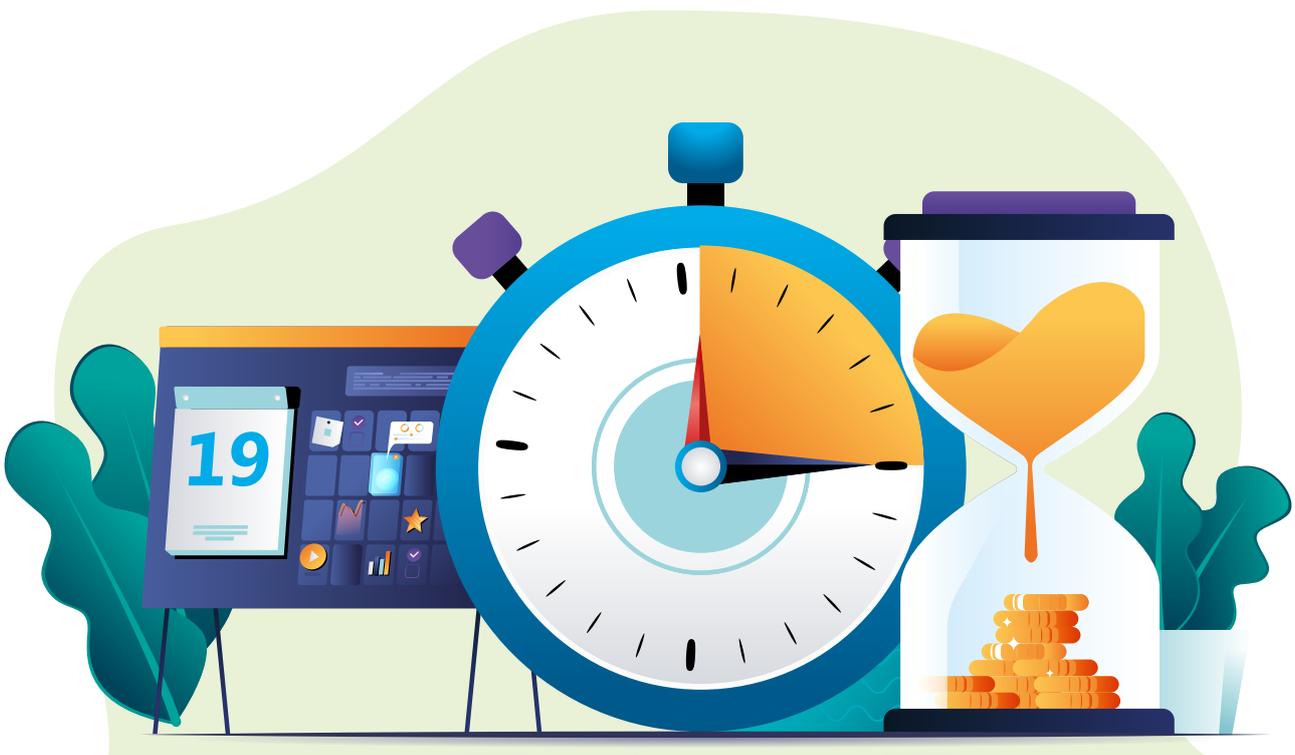
The **virtual meeting** was scheduled for 5 p.m. All the meetings in recent years have been done like this. From a distance. Each partner had their own commitments, other business and other tasks, so it was practical to hold our **meetings remotely**. It simplified everything for us, starting of course with logistics. Although, to tell the truth, we weren’t actually on two opposite sides of the planet. In order to fulfil my role as CEO, I have to work in the office, here in the centre of Milan. Mario the president, lived in Treviso, even though he was often travelling around the world. Enrico and Rita were both in Lissone, Giulio worked in Bologna, while Andrea had recently moved to the hills of Upper Bergamo. And then there was Lucrezia, she lived in Sanremo.



The last time I saw her in person was at the Christmas convention **four years ago**. I always thought she was the most extraordinary woman that I had ever met. There had been at least a couple of occasions when I thought maybe something might have happened between us. But in the end, **it never did**. Not even that time in London when after a dinner with clients we were left alone. I always thought that, on that occasion, it was more what we did not say, rather than what we did actually say to each other. There had been glances, but they weren't followed through with gestures and everything slowly fizzled away, maybe out of modesty, maybe out of fear, maybe simply because it was the right thing to do. At work, Lucrezia and I spoke to each other at least a couple of times a month, but we never returned to the topic and we never went beyond the usual discussions about work. Apart from a few jokes here and there. And anyway, she was still officially married, even if she hadn't lived with her husband in a long time. But that is another story.

Anyway, enough small talk. Let's get back to the project. This time we were running on a very tight schedule and the agreement document had to be defined and signed digitally by midnight today. **The deadline could not be changed**, it was "written in black and white", which is now just a figure of speech. This deadline honestly didn't worry me. Everything was under control. Or at least that's what I thought. It was 9.35 in the morning, and soon that day would take a completely different turn. And not just for us.

The first sign that something was not right arrived within a few minutes. Anselmo was notifying me of some mistakes in the calculations, when a double beep preceded the system announcement, "**no connection, please wait**".



I look around, bewildered. **Connection problems were a thing of the past**, the last one occurred about ten years ago. The entire city of Milan was one of the largest digital hubs in Europe, where the internet travels on hybrid nanotechnology devices and uses the most advanced systems to ensure the amount of data and interconnections that now control everything, even the flushing of the toilet. I think it's a joke, but this feeling doesn't last long, because the entire office here on the 43rd floor is in turmoil. **No connection**, for anyone, anywhere.

I see cars on the streets pulling over and people tinkering with their devices a little lost. The problem isn't only here. It only takes a few minutes for the problem to turn into a **catastrophe** when the electricity suddenly goes out. The backup generators don't start because their system is connected to the internet. Which no longer exists.

I wonder what the hell is going on, but my head is racing to the presentation, to the meeting and the deadline that looms. Unfortunately, rather than stopping, time kept passing. Anselmo was out of use, but I had to find a way to **communicate with the partners** and especially with someone who could tell me what was going on.



Ilaria, our HR manager, enters the room with a helpless look on her face. She tells me that she used an old smartphone connected to the cellular network to check: the problem is on a national scale. A total mystery. Incredible. I have an idea. I go to my drawer and retrieve the smartphone I use when I go to the mountains. I call the partners and ask them what we should do. There was only one thing to do. They would have to come here, and we would have to hold the **meeting in person**. We would have to work out how to complete the document and especially how to get it to the other company as we went along.

The last to arrive was Andrea, who paradoxically was the closest, but that day he had lent his car to someone. Seeing each other in person was incredibly strange to me. Enrico is in much better shape than he appears on video. I can't say the same about Giulio who has never hidden his passion for tortellini and fried dumplings. And then, there she is.

We sit at the **table** awkwardly, not really knowing what to do. Mario asks me to briefly summarise the key concepts of the merger, to explain from the heart what I thought was the right thing to do. There are a few questions, but much less than there would have normally been. We were focused, we were straightforward, and we were there. OK, its decided. **Let's go ahead with the merger**. But the agreement? Mario cuts it short and suggests using pen and paper, asking Rita to write in her beautiful handwriting. Together we find a way and make adjustments to the various points. Andrea uses his expertise to fine-tune the more technical aspects, while I concentrate on the numbers. Giulio and Enrico concentrate on the legal aspects, and Lucrezia, as usual, pulls the strings and Mario simply



Time flies. We finish writing the last draft of the document at 11:05 p.m. We sign it. The meeting with the CEO of the other company is at 11:45 and their office is less than a kilometre away. We all go together. On foot. Lucrezia holds the envelope in her hand and as we walk no one says a word. Our future would change forever in a few minutes. It changed on the day when “the future” that we live in every day taught us that people have extraordinary resources, and that we could count on the greatness of new technologies, but that we also need our hands, arms and legs to lead us along our path. We had felt **lost**. And yet somehow, **we found ourselves**.



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