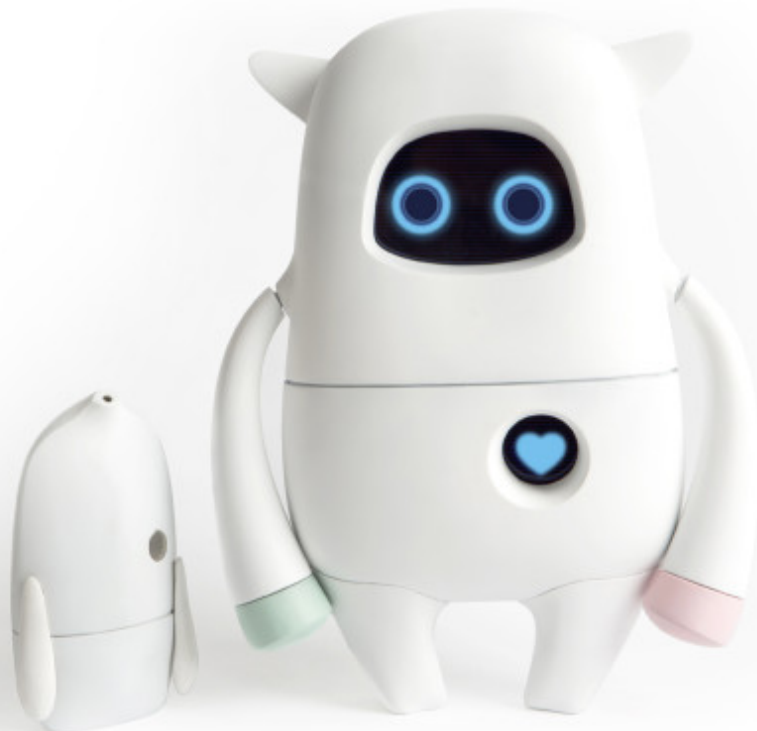


Musio: Your AI friend in back-and-forth exchange

June 2 2015, by Nancy Owano



Many people have hardly reached saturation point in being drawn to

videos of cute robots that avoid the uncanny-valley risk of looking uncomfortably human; instead they cross the lines between cute animal pets and cartoonish tots in spacesuit. Say hello to Musio.

If it does win a special place in your heart, it is thanks to its designers, who set out to have Musio learn, adapt and grow with you—yes, a learning machine with language capabilities. The more Musio learns about you, the smarter it becomes. Musio can not only hear you; it can not only understand you; it can get to know you.

The group behind Musio is AKA, a company with a focus on developing AI engines for communication. Their promotional video wants to get one thing straight: Musio is not to be compared with a [voice assistant](#); Musio was modeled to be not merely an answer-finder but a friend, a "thinking" machine that can strike a bond with its human user. A video contrasts Musio with a voice assistant.

The digital device tells the user it is a virtual assistant.

Human: "Tell me more."

At this point, the device responds, "Here is what I found," and displays a Wikipedia page for "Tell Me More."

Musio does not indicate stiff, vague responses when asked to talk about itself; it can pick up on what was earlier said, and can engage in a back and forth exchange. Musio is described as "curious," in that the [robot](#) tech can build on a human's answer to a question, to generate another question. "Musio only knows English right now. But we are considering making Musio capable of learning other languages," they said.

AKA has turned to Indiegogo to push their robot into the real world. The team hopes to raise \$50,000. Pricing starts at \$99 for a "simple brain"

version of the robot, which is able to remember five prior conversations. The package includes one Android-based Musio, one Sophy (intelligent pointing device) and one house for Musio. What do they mean by house? "The House is the place where Musio can rest when you are not using it," the company said. In that house one can recharge Musio and let it "go to bed."

The project page said Sophy is rechargeable like Musio. *Engadget* described Sophy as a peripheral that allows Musio to interact with objects in your home.

The estimated delivery is June next year. Prices go from low end to high end, as Musio has three types of brain—simple smart, genius.

Talking about next steps, the team said the biggest focus as Musio evolves is improving its intelligence. They said that another focus for AKA will be integrating movement into Musio; dynamics experts are helping them to incorporate motion into Musio.

What about battery life? The number of hours will depend on the Musio edition. Simple and Smart editions will last 11 hours; the Genius edition will last 13 hours.

Anthony Ha of *TechCrunch* recently was given a demo of the robot; the AKA team showed him an Android-based prototype.

Adam Swimmer, writing in the *Toronto Sun*, reported on what Jacob Bradsher, a linguist with AKA said at a briefing: Musio was designed as a "natural conversation partner." It remembers details and can make generalizations based on context. Swimmer also said that, in a follow-up email, AKA business development director Celina Lee explained how "'We let (the) deep neural network...select the most appropriate sentence or utterance to [respond](#) to user's previous conversations.'" As more

conversational data are accumulated, the robot's responses will get richer and more accurate, she said. "In particular, the ability to continue conversations based on the whole previous context, i.e., considering the whole history of conversation, will distinguish AKA's technology from others."

Ha in *TechCrunch* posed the question, "Why would you want that? Well, besides the novelty and fun of having a talking robot, it could be useful for practicing English and other [learning](#) activities, and for controlling smart home devices," he wrote.

Devindra Hardawar of *Engadget* said that while the robot is in the early stages, it's still [engaging](#), with the sort of casual conversation that "could help to separate Musio from other bots and AI-like assistants."

The team said a "Developer Community" will open as soon as possible.

More information: www.indiegogo.com/projects/musio-ai-friend-us-new-friend#/story

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