

Robots may soon make your FedEx delivery from Walmart, Target and Pizza Hut

March 1 2019, by Edward C. Baig, Usa Today



Credit: FedEx

The robotic contraption rolling down the street just might be delivering a FedEx package to your home or office.

That's the vision, anyway, behind the FedEx SameDay Bot that the shipping giant unveiled Wednesday. This sub-200-pound autonomous delivery robot was developed by DEKA Development & Research Corp, whose founder is Segway inventor Dean Kamen.

The SameDay Bot is so-named because its mission is to help retailers

make same-day, "last mile" deliveries to local customers. FedEx is collaborating with AutoZone, Lowe's, Pizza Hut, Target, Walgreens and Walmart.

FedEx plans to test the bot this summer in select markets and FedEx Office locations, starting in the company's own Memphis hometown, pending final approval by the city. That approval would appear to be likely since it has the backing of Mayor Jim Strickland.

According to FedEx, on average, more than 60 percent of merchants' customers live within three miles of a store location, demonstrating the opportunity for on-demand, hyper-local delivery.

Prior to making its formal announcement, FedEx teased the news on Twitter.

FedEx currently offers same-day delivery service in 32 markets and 1,900 cities, using branded FedEx vehicles and uniformed human FedEx employees.

Long term question: Does just such a bot eventually put any of these employees' jobs in jeopardy?

"The FedEx SameDay Bot represents the next chapter in our long legacy of delivering innovation and outstanding service, supported by an already existing FedEx logistics ecosystem," Brian Philips, president and CEO of FedEx Office, said in a statement. "We are excited to bring this technology to address new markets and better support our customers. The companies who have provided feedback on its potential use have been instrumental in ensuring we are looking towards the future of e-commerce."

In his own statement, Target chief operating officer John Mulligan said,

"We're excited to be collaborating with FedEx to explore how autonomous robots could enhance delivery services and more, ensuring we continue to exceed our guests' expectations for ease and convenience."

The environmentally-friendly, battery-powered bot is designed to travel on sidewalks and along roadsides. It has two smallish wheels on the front that can be lifted up almost like a canine's paws; it has four other larger wheels, two on each side. On the outside of compartment where the packages being delivered are housed, you'll see the requisite FedEx branding.

The robot makes use of multiple cameras, laser light technology and machine learning algorithms to help it avoid pedestrians and other obstacles, and to comply with road safety rules. It can also navigate curbs, uneven surfaces and even steps.

Along those lines, the FedEx bot is modeled after DEKA's iBot, an FDA-approved stair-climbing motorized wheelchair, which Kamen says has more than 10 million hours of reliable, real world operation.

FedEx, of course, is not the only company experimenting with such bots. Amazon is field testing a delivery system called Amazon Scout in Snohomish County, Washington, kind of a medium-sized cooler on six wheels.

It appears quite similar to bots developed by Starship Technologies out of Estonia, a startup that launched in 2014 by the co-founders of Skype.

Absent a human [delivery](#) person, the FedEx bot presumably is not at a stage where it can deliver a package that requires a customer signature.

More information: thefuturefedex.com/

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Citation: Robots may soon make your FedEx delivery from Walmart, Target and Pizza Hut (2019, March 1) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2019-03-robots-fedex-delivery-walmart-pizza.html>

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