

Mobile home robots may still get TLC from Amazon

July 14 2019, by Nancy Cohen



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Psst. The whispers flared up and then went away. In April last year Todd Bishop in *GeekWire* joined the ever-louder whisperfest coming from the halls at Bloomberg over stories that Amazon had a top secret Vesta

project for a line of robots that could roll around your home.

"Bloomberg points to an increase in [robotics](#) openings on the Lab126 jobs page as evidence that the work is ramping up. The [news service](#) says Amazon may begin testing the robots in employees' homes this year, with a possible public release in 2019."

So, were they correct? *TechRadar* and a slew of other tech-watching sites report that [work](#) continues on the home robots expected for launch, but are thus far reportedly "not ready for mass-production."

Actually, the much quoted article that fed the latest buzz over the weekend belonged once more to [Bloomberg](#), which reported on an [Alexa robot](#) ramp-up.

"Whether Vesta actually sees the light of day or not remains to be seen, but at the very least, the robot is something Amazon is pouring resources into," said Paul Lilly in *HotHardware*.

So, even if the buzz was that the robot was not ready for mass production, and if it was not clear if it will ever roll into any home ever, Bloomberg would still not rule it out.

"While Amazon could choose never to release the robot, in recent months it has pulled [engineers](#) from other projects to work on it—a signal the company plans to sell Vesta at some point," reported Mark Gurman on Friday.

Reports say Vesta activity resides at Amazon's R&D bastion in Sunnyvale, known as Lab126. The giant's LinkedIn description says it is a research and development team focused on "high-profile consumer electronic [devices](#)."

Details, details? "Vesta is described as possibly being a mobile Alexa gadget, in that it could follow people to corners of their homes where there may not already be an Echo device," Lilly said.

The robot, which has wheels, is being referred to as an Alexa robot, as it can be controlled by Alexa voice commands, Bloomberg said. Citing "People familiar with the project," Gurman wrote about waist-high heights and navigating via an array of computer-vision cameras. "In an internal demonstration, an engineer summoned the machine with his voice."

It's too tempting to resist passing along Gurman's quote, which was a reminder of what Jeff Bezos wrote on an Instagram photo last year; it showed an Echo speaker [taped](#) to a Roomba vacuum cleaner. "What?!!!!" he wrote. "Found this in the living room when I got home. I have no [idea](#). #LifeWithFourKids."

James Vincent in *The Verge* commented that "A mobile home robot is a particularly difficult sell. Over the [past](#) year, a number of companies offering home robots have collapsed."

On that note, Matt Simon in *Wired* had an interesting insight back in December 2018. He called out a failed delivery on the home robot front. "It seemed like 2018 was going to be the year when robots made a big leap in that direction," he wrote, but the fanfare came and went and some companies shut their doors. The Year of the Home Robot That Never Happened.

"Which is not to say home robots won't one day find their calling." He quoted MIT roboticist Kate Darling. "I think that these devices are just slightly before their time," said Darling. "I think it's going to happen—someone just needs to develop a killer application for these devices."

Simon added, that "someone" will likely be a massive company like Amazon, Apple, or Google. "Indeed, Amazon is rumored to be developing a home robot. Theoretically, it wouldn't be an eyeless device sitting on a countertop, but a robot that can watch and listen around the house...it will be the first step toward that kind of [advanced](#) robot."

© 2019 Science X Network

Citation: Mobile home robots may still get TLC from Amazon (2019, July 14) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2019-07-mobile-home-robots-tlc-amazon.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.