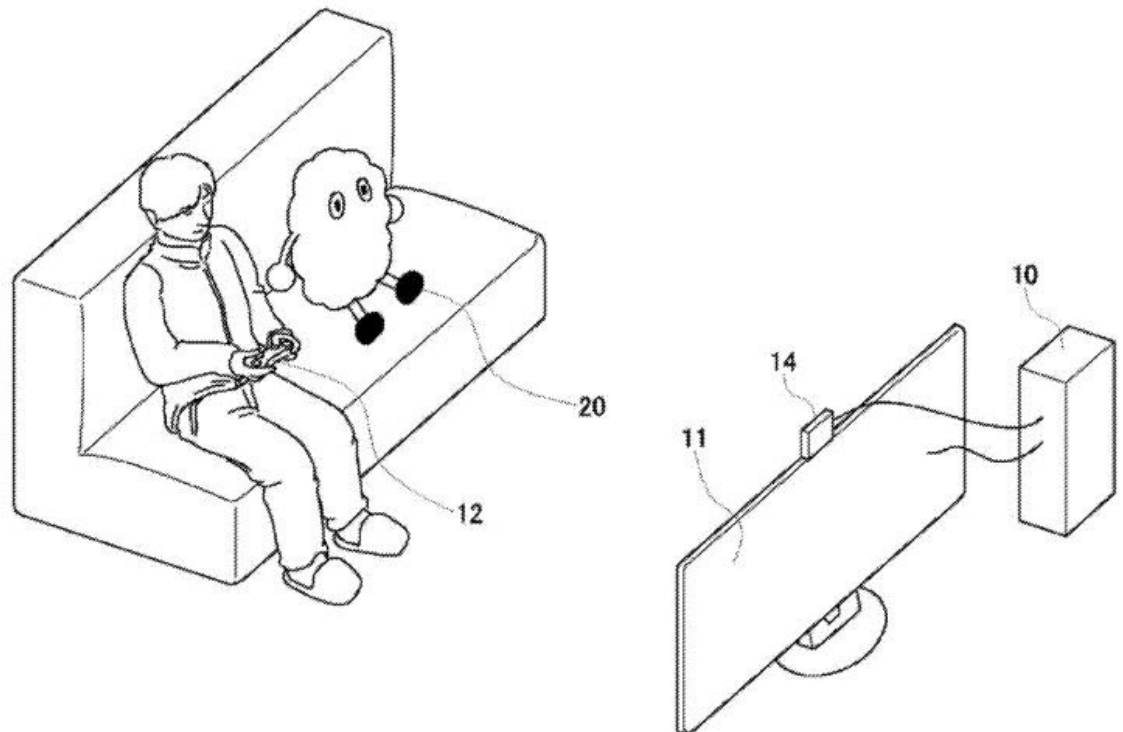


# Sony eyeing robot friend for game players

April 20 2020, by Peter Grad

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Computer games are often more fun when friends are there to share the experience. A Sony PlayStation team wants to make sure that at times when players don't have their buddies around in person, they can turn to a robot friend for companionship.

Sony Interactive Entertainment has filed a [patent](#) for a "joint viewing

player" that will rejoice in a player's victories and commiserate when things go poorly. The patent does not specify if the companion will be a physical object or digital [avatar](#). But the specs reveal impressive efforts to make the bond a realistic one.

The [robot](#), or avatar, will utilize a number of sensors to determine the player's mood and respond accordingly. It might even play games with its human counterparts and make friendly suggestions when a player expresses frustration or appears to be tired.

According to the patent, filed with U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, "The inventor has focused on the possibility of utilizing a robot as a joint viewing player who experiences sympathy with a user. It is expected that the user's affinity with the robot is increased and motivation for playing a game is enhanced by the robot viewing the [game play](#) next to the user and being pleased or sad together with the user."

The arsenal of devices monitoring players include microphones, cameras, and biometric and motion sensors. Feedback would be processed to determine emotions such as pleasure, anger and surprise.

The patent refers to a "love index" that will measure a user's behavior towards the robot. Metrics such as heart rate and perspiration, along with speech recognition, will be assessed to determine a user's mood. When the robot—also referred to in the patent as a "feeling deduction unit"—receives positive responses, it will more actively support the player, perhaps with helpful tips, advice and words of encouragement. But if the player expresses frustration or rebuffs the robot's feedback, it will withdraw and restrict further commentary.

The robot will be more than just a game companion. It could provide comforting words when sadness is detected or advise the player when it's time to go to bed. It can also be a movie companion.

"Further, regarding not only the game but also a movie, a [television program](#), or the like," the [patent](#) states, "it is expected that the user may enjoy content merely by viewing the content with the robot as compared to the case of viewing it alone."

Technology has a long line of increasingly intelligent assistants that help humans in everyday tasks: Siri, Alexa and Cortana, to name a few.

But there have been infamous flops.

In 1996, Microsoft introduced the world to Clippy, an avatar intended to help newbies navigate its Word processing software. Users were amused the first time they saw Clippy pop up as they typed the word "Dear" to begin a letter and received advice on how to proceed. But the intrusive avatar quickly became tiresome, so much so that users en masse took to forums excoriating it. Women in particular were offended by what they described as "leering eyes" of the Clippy avatar. Microsoft eventually abandoned Clippy, even devising a [game](#) that allowed disgruntled users to zap the despised utility with a staple gun.

Another avatar described by a reviewer as "Clippy on acid" also had few defenders. Electric Love Potato was designed, according to its creator, as "a virtual potato desktop assistant that offers positive reinforcement, serenades you as you work, and creates random potato recipes." Its creator, Nathalie Lawhead, said she designed the program to help cheer her up. But for most users, the off-putting robotic voice and creepy random suggestions—"Please eat me. I wish to be digested by you."—did anything but cheer them up.

No release date has been set for the Sony robot.

**More information:** US Patent Application:  
[appft1.uspto.gov/netacgi/nph-P ... &s1=20200114520.PGNR](http://appft1.uspto.gov/netacgi/nph-P...&s1=20200114520.PGNR).

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