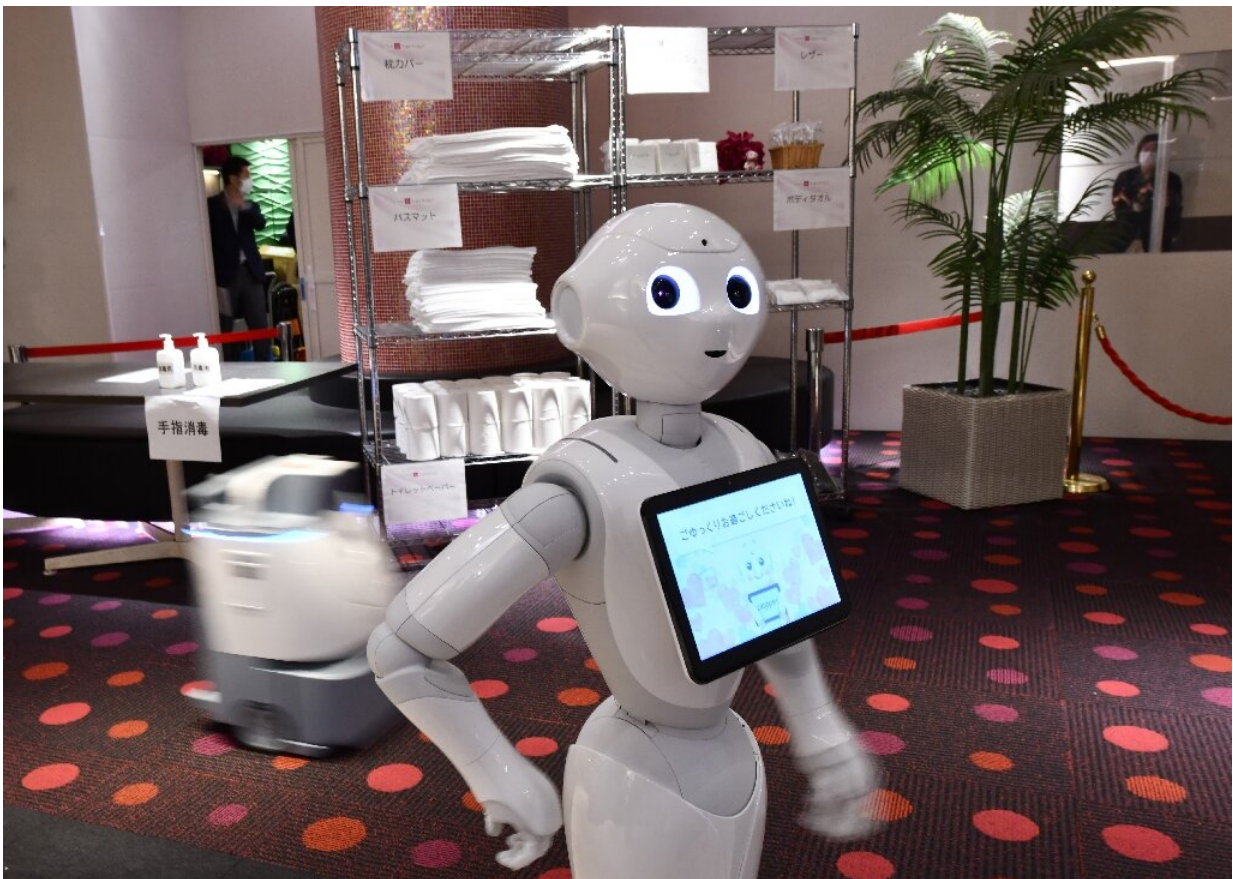


# Japan's SoftBank suspends production of chatty robot Pepper

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When Pepper was released in 2014, it was billed as a 'new species' of robot capable of recognising basic emotions.

Japan's SoftBank has suspended production of its humanoid robot

Pepper, a company spokeswoman said Tuesday, seven years after the conglomerate unveiled the signature chatty white android to much fanfare.

Pepper robots, used to greet people in stores and hotels in Japan and around the world, have become a symbol of SoftBank's strategy of pouring resources into new technology including artificial intelligence.

The pint-sized robot, which costs 198,000 yen (\$1,790) plus rental fees, has also recently been used to ease the loneliness of coronavirus quarantine in Japanese hotels for patients with mild symptoms.

But on Tuesday, a spokeswoman for the firm's robotics unit told AFP it was halting output owing to an inventory pile-up.

"We are temporarily suspending production of Pepper but are ready to restart anytime depending on inventory situations," she said. "Pepper has chiefly been a rental service and you don't need a lot of new units."

The company does not disclose the number of gadgets it has sold or rented, the spokeswoman said.

When Pepper was released in 2014, it was billed as a "new species" of [robot](#) capable of recognising [basic emotions](#) such as happiness and sadness by looking at people's faces, while Softbank founder Masayoshi Son hailed it as a symbol of the firm's determination to lead in artificial intelligence.

The company was in discussions on potential job reductions with its European robotics unit, which is headquartered in Paris and employs about 330 people, the spokeswoman said.

"We are negotiating about the cuts but it will take time to reach a deal in

France," she said, adding that the planned reduction was "part of our regular efforts to optimise our businesses" and was not directly linked to suspension of Pepper production.

SoftBank Group, which has poured money into some of Silicon Valley's biggest names and hottest new ventures, in May reported the best ever annual net profit for a Japanese [company](#), reaping the rewards of a tech rally over the past year.

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