

Grubhub testing delivery robots

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Jeffrey McKee made a peculiar sighting on his way to work at Ohio State a few weeks ago. Rolling around campus was what appeared to be a food cooler with wheels and a camera perched on its roof.

"One of these things was running right along side of me," said McKee, a professor in Ohio State's Department of Anthropology. "It was amusing but also bemusing, because I didn't know what they were."

The OSU instructor had several theories.

"Is this the engineering department doing an experiment?" he said. "Is it a mapping device? That was my main thought, because we have these Google cars mapping everything."

Trying out food delivery 'rovers' on OSU campus

The roughly two-foot-high automated carrier turned out to be a [food delivery robot](#) making one of several trial runs in recent weeks.

GrubHub and Ohio State's Student Life dining services officially unveiled the robots - which they call "rovers" - in a demonstration on Aug. 19.

The delivery company wants to use the rovers—which can make deliveries on campus—to reach new customers who may have been discouraged by long wait times. The automated carts can quickly deliver to campus residence halls, which are not accessible by car and therefore difficult for delivery drivers to reach in a timely fashion.

GrubHub hopes to launch the service on campuses across the country in the coming months. The company is also testing the rovers on other campuses, but will not say which ones.

European vehicle developer Yandex designed and owns the robots, which operate using GrubHub's delivery app. The rovers will initially deliver from a campus café and food market to every campus residence hall, plus the the main library for \$2.50 per delivery.

GrubHub will use 50 robots at first, and add another 50 in the coming months.

Second-year Ohio State student Abby Silone showed a group of reporters how to use the automated carriers at the Aug. 19 demonstration. She stood in the shadow of Davis Tower Thursday morning opposite a row of rovers adorned with the Grubhub logo and keyed an order into her phone.

The demonstration was temporarily halted over a slight snag - requiring Silone to change the settings on her app - but after the quick adjustment, one of the robots wheeled itself to nearby Drackett Tower to deliver the orange juice Silone ordered.

Chicago-based Grubhub, which uses drivers in most cases, wants to expand into neighborhoods and communities with few roads.

College campuses "pose certain unique challenges to the delivery businesses," said Sean Ir, director of strategy for Grubhub, who attended the demonstration. "Most college campuses are not designed to be navigated by car, which means that drivers need to park off campus and then complete the delivery on foot. And some schools also have restrictions on visitors."

The company sees the rovers as a workaround. It said the robots can go anywhere a pedestrian can easily walk.

Ohio State, with its ubiquitous sidewalks and pedestrian-friendly roads, seemed the perfect place to launch the technology, he said.

"We'll be rolling out to other college campuses this year," It said, although he declined to say which ones.

"We're always looking for innovative ways to deliver food or serve our students," said Zia Ahmed, senior director of Student Life Dining Services at Ohio State. "We know the delivery market for food service is growing tremendously, and this is potentially a very efficient way to deliver food to students."

And the fledgling delivery service can be adapted to the needs of the [campus](#), he said.

Fifty to 100 delivery robots seems like a small number for a college with more than 50,000 students, but Ahmed said dining services can add more if necessary.

"The good news is, we can always scale up," he said. "Our goal is to start with 50, and see how well it's operating and then slowly start scaling up to 100."

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