

Robot arms are replacing shelf stockers in Japan's stores

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Telexistence Inc. and FamilyMart Co. are rolling out a fleet of AI-driven robots to restock shelves in 300 convenience stores across Japan.

The [robot arms](#) are designed to replenish drinks in refrigerators and are now in [mass production](#), Tokyo-based Telexistence said in a statement Wednesday. They'll be installed in FamilyMart locations across major metropolitan areas later this month and help relieve store workers while also filling the void left by a shrinking workforce in the country.

Dubbed TX SCARA—standing for Selective Compliance Assembly Robot Arm—the machines are largely autonomous, with remote piloting as a fallback option should the artificial intelligence fail or encounter out-of-place items. Each unit can replace one to three hours of human work per day per store, Telexistence said.

"The decline in Japan's labor population is one of the key management issues for FamilyMart to continue stable store operations," said Tomohiro Kano, general manager at FamilyMart. "The newly created time can be reallocated to [customer service](#) and shop floor enhancement."

FamilyMart will pay Telexistence a monthly fee for the robot's labor, its maintenance and the support of remote workers who can pilot the arm using a [virtual reality headset](#) when needed. The bots can work without human assistance 98% of the time, Telexistence said.

U.S. tech giants Microsoft Corp. and Nvidia Corp. collaborated with Telexistence on the development and technology of the bots. The SCARA arms use Nvidia's Jetson AI platform to process information and Microsoft's Azure cloud infrastructure to record and reference sales data to optimize restocking tasks.

FamilyMart has 16,000 [convenience stores](#), known as combini in Japan, across its [domestic market](#), but Telexistence and Microsoft both say they want to deliver the technology on a global scale. Telexistence will next target the more than 150,000 convenience stores across the U.S. to



expand abroad.

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