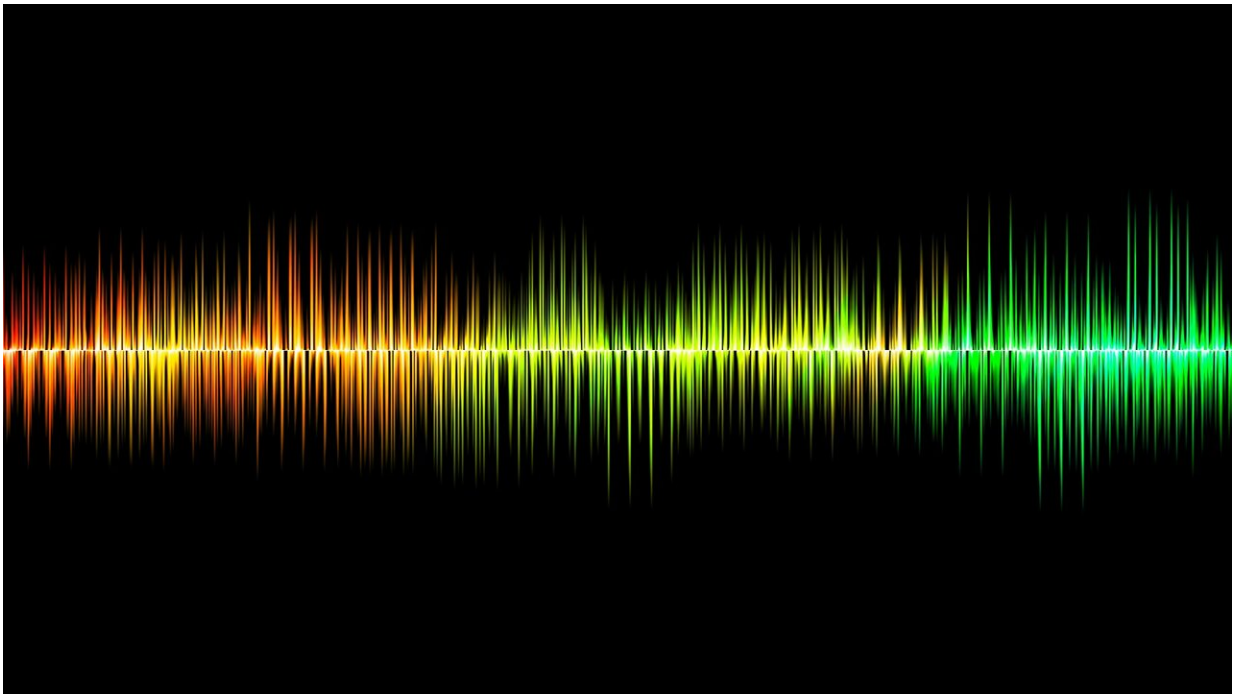


# Robots run the show as Swiss radio tests AI voices for a day

April 27 2023, by Jamey Keaten

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

The voices sound like well-known personalities, the music features trendy dance beats and hip-hop syncopations, and the jokes and laughter are contagious. But listeners of an offbeat Swiss public radio station repeatedly got the message on Thursday: Today's programming is brought to you by Artificial Intelligence.

Three months in the making, the French-language station Couleur 3 (Color 3) [is touting a one-day experiment](#) using cloned [voices](#) of five real, human presenters—in what managers claim is a world first—and never-aired-before music composed almost entirely by computers, not people. From 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., the station said, AI controlled its airwaves. Every 20 minutes, listeners got a reminder.

With an eerie, Sci-Fi movie-like track whirring in the background, a soothing, raspy female [voice](#) said, "AI is taking your favorite radio by storm."

"For 13 hours, our digital alter egos have taken the reins, broadcasting their voices and their messages across the airwaves, without mercy or respite," the voice said, at times almost taunting listeners. "The boundaries between human and machine have been blurred, and it's up to you to unravel what's real and what's fake."

"Our voice clones and AI are here to unsettle, surprise and shake you. And for that matter, this text was also written by a robot."

The explosive emergence of ChatGPT last autumn and other "Generative AI" tools have caused a stir—and often fear, confusion, fascination, laughter, or worry—about the long-term economic, cultural, social and even political consequences. Some musicians have complained that AI has ripped off their styles.

In the face of such recalcitrance, the Swiss station, which falls under the umbrella of public broadcaster Radio Television Switzerland, notes the concerns about AI—and embraces and seeks to de-mystify it.

Antoine Multone, the station's chief, said Couleur 3 could get away with the experiment because it's already known as "provocative."

While some might fear the project could be a first step toward the obsolescence of people on the air—and firings of personnel too—or could weaken journalism, he defended the project as a lesson on how to live with AI.

"I think if we become ostriches ... we put our heads in the sand and say, 'Mon Dieu, there's a new technology! We're all going to die!' then yeah, we're going to die because it (AI) is coming, whether we like it or not," Multone said by phone. "We want to master the technology so we can then put limits on it."

Some have gone even further, like Seven Hills, Ohio-based media company Futuri, which has rolled out RadioGPT that relies on AI.

At Couleur 3, the voices of the presenters were cloned with the help of software company Respeecher, which has worked with Hollywood studios and whose website says its team is mostly based in Ukraine.

Station managers say it took three months to train the AI to understand the needs of the station and adopt its quirky, offbeat vibe. The tracks aired during the day were at least partially composed by AI and some were entirely, "and that's also a first," Multone said. AI was behind the voices that sang songs broadcast in the morning, and it played DJ in the afternoon—selecting copyrighted music.

To avoid any possible confusion with today's real news, the synthetic voices—indistinguishable from a real person's—served up top-of-the-hour news flashes that were way too futuristic to be believable: A temporary ban on spaceship flights over Geneva airspace due to noise complaints; the opening of the first underwater restaurant in Lake Zurich; extraterrestrial tourists who mistook swans on Swiss lake for inflatable toys.

The AI had been instructed to come up with news that might be read in the year 2070.

Multone acknowledged a lot of discussion among staffers about whether to go through with it, and "I was ready to pull the plug on the project if I had seen that my team wasn't 100% motivated to try it."

Hundreds of messages poured into the station in the morning shortly after the programming began, Swiss public radio said in a statement. One complained of boring jokes. Another listener, stupefied, admitted to being stumped. One critic called the project a waste of time for a [station](#) that gets public funding.

"The main feedback we get, in 90% of the messages, is: 'It's cool, but there's a human element missing. You can sense these are robots, and there are fewer surprises, less personality,'" Multone said, noting an on-air discussion of the experiment was planned Friday—by real people.

"Many messages just said, 'Give us back our humans!'" he said. "I think that's great."

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