

Robots walk, talk, pour beer and take over CES tech show

10 January 2019, by Matt O'brien And Joseph Pisani



AvatarMind has developed service robots like iPal which is based on artificial intelligence, motion control, sensors and power management, and created iPal to deliver on that vision with multiple applications for friendly, fun and functional robot assistants, shown at CES International Tuesday, Jan. 8, 2019, in Las Vegas. Designed for child education and elder care, iPal is a fully functional humanoid robot with a friendly, playful demeanor, as iPal runs on the Android operating system with extensions for motion, sensor and natural language conversation. (AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin)

Robots that walk, talk, pour beer and play pingpong have taken over the CES gadget show in Las Vegas again. Just don't expect to find one in your home any time soon.

Most home robot ventures have failed, in part because they're so difficult and expensive to design to a level of intelligence that consumers will find useful, says Bilal Zuberi, a robotics-oriented venture capitalist at Lux Capital. But that doesn't keep companies from trying.

"Roboticists, I guess, will never give up their dream to build Rosie," says Zuberi, referring to the humanoid maid from "The Jetsons."

But there's some hope for others. Frank Gillett, a tech analyst at Forrester, says robots with more focused missions such as mowing the lawn or delivering cheeseburgers stand a better shot at finding a useful niche.

ROBOTS THAT DELIVER

There are so many delivery robots at CES that it's easy to imagine that we'll all be stumbling over them on the sidewalk—or in the elevator—before long. Zuberi says it's among the new robot trends with the most promise because the field is drawing on some of the same advances that power self-driving cars.

But it's hard to tell which—if any—will still be around in a few years.



The Bot Air air filtering robot is on display in the Samsung booth at CES International, Tuesday, Jan. 8, 2019, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/John Locher)

Segway Robotics, part of the same company that makes electric rental scooters for Lime, Jump and Bird, is the latest to get into the delivery game with a new machine it calls Loomo Delivery. The

wheeled office robot can avoid obstacles, board elevators and deliver documents to another floor.

International Tuesday, Jan. 8, 2019, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin)

A similar office courier called the Holabot was unveiled by Chinese startup Shenzhen Pudu Technology. CEO Felix Zhang says his company already has a track record selling robots in China, where its Pudubot robot—which looks like shelves on wheels—navigates busy restaurants as a kind of robotic waiter.

Does man's best friend need a robotic pal of its own? Some startups think so.

"There's a big problem with separation anxiety, obesity and depression in pets," says Bee-oh Kim, a marketing manager for robotics firm Varram.

Nearly all of these robots use a technology called visual SLAM, short for simultaneous localization and mapping. Most are wheeled, though there are outliers—such as one from German automotive company Continental, which wants to deploy walking robotic dogs to carry packages from self-driving delivery vans to residential front doors.

The company's \$99 robot is essentially a moving treat dispenser that motivates pets to chase it around. A herd of the small, dumbbell-shaped robots zoomed around a pen at the show—though there were no canine or feline conference attendees to show how the machines really work.

A delivery robot will need both sophisticated autonomy and a focused mission to stand out from the pack, says Saumil Nanavati, head of business development for Robby Technology. His company's namesake robot travels down sidewalks as a "store on wheels." The company recently partnered with PepsiCo to deliver snacks around a California university campus.

Varram's robot takes two hours to charge and can run for 10 hours—just enough time to allow a pet's guilt-ridden human companion to get home from work.

ROBOTS ON GRANDPARENT WATCH

ROBOTS FOR DOGS



VARRAM has developed a robot to care for your pets while you are away with the VARRAM Pet Fitness Robot, as the company claims this smart device helps with pet anxiety and playtime, offering real-time rewards, like treats, and activities, using the Varram app, you can set a schedule for your pet via Bluetooth, shown at CES

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The Walker robot is on display at the Ubtech booth at CES International, Wednesday, Jan. 9, 2019, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/John Locher)



The Walker robot stands in a doorway during a demonstration at the Ubtech booth at CES International, Wednesday, Jan. 9, 2019, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/John Locher)

The Liku robot is on display at the Torooc booth at CES International, Wednesday, Jan. 9, 2019, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/John Locher)



The Walker robot grabs a soda can during a demonstration at the Ubtech booth at CES International, Wednesday, Jan. 9, 2019, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/John Locher)





The Holabot is on display at the Pudu booth at CES International, Wednesday, Jan. 9, 2019, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/John Locher)



Sony President and CEO Kenichiro Yoshida speaks at the Sony news conference at CES International with the Sony robotic dog Aibo projected behind him, Monday, Jan. 7, 2019, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin)

The Holabot is on display at the Pudu booth at CES International, Wednesday, Jan. 9, 2019, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/John Locher)



Lovot companion robots are on display at the Groove X booth during CES Unveiled at CES International, Sunday, Jan. 6, 2019, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/John Locher)





medicines seniors take, measure blood pressure and call 911 if it detects a fall.

Samsung didn't say when Samsung Bot Care would be available, but some startups are putting similar ideas in action. Israeli company Intuition Robotics used CES to announce the upcoming commercial launch of ElliQ, a robotic voice assistant that can sit on end tables and help older adults communicate with family members without having to fiddle with a computer.

ROBOT FRIENDS

Lovot is a simple robot with just one aim—to make its owner happy.

The Robby robot is on display at the Robby booth at CES International, Wednesday, Jan. 9, 2019, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/John Locher)



People touch Kiki robots at the Zoetic AI booth at CES International, Wednesday, Jan. 9, 2019, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/John Locher)

The Robby robot is on display at the Robby booth at CES International, Wednesday, Jan. 9, 2019, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/John Locher)

It can't carry on long conversations, but it's still social—approaching people so they can interact, moving around a space to create a digital map, responding to being embraced.

Samsung is coming out with a robot that can keep its eye on grandparents.

Lovot's horn-shaped antenna—featuring a 360-degree camera—recognizes its surroundings and detects the direction of sound and voices.

The rolling robot can talk and has two digital eyes on a black screen. It's designed to track the

Lovot is the brainchild of Groove X CEO Kaname Hayashi, who previously worked on SoftBank's Pepper, a humanoid robot that briefly appeared in a

few U.S. shopping malls two years ago. Hayashi wanted to create a real connection between people and robots.

"This is just supporting your heart, our motivation," he says.

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