

Unravelling the mystery of mechatronics

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Nicole

(PhysOrg.com) -- Futuristic projects such as a glamorous desktop personal assistant called Nicole, who can help with tasks around the office, will come under the spotlight at a conference at the Massey University this week.

Nicole is an animated, voice-activated virtual PA who responds to requests including playing soothing music, turning on the lights, telling the time, reading news headlines and searching for files on the computer.

She is the brainchild of Dr Tom Moir from the School of Engineering and Advanced Technology, and will be showcased at the 15th International Conference on Mechatronics and Machine Vision in

Practice from tomorrow to Thursday.

Dr Moir says her skills mean she can help disabled people and her "look", designed by Brazilian company Guile 3D Studio, is of "science fiction meeting reality".

Mechatronics is the blending of mechanics, electronics and computer control into an integrated design, which can result in simple products that make the technological marvels of yesterday fade in comparison.

The conference has attracted delegates from 23 countries, including China, South Africa, Taiwan, Japan and the United Kingdom.

Other projects featured include the use of robots in surgery and rehabilitation, a chewing machine that can check texture of food, how an MP3 player can be a stress-buster and a device to recognize lettuces that are ready to be harvested in a field full of hundreds.

"We are delighted to be hosting this conference which will provide a dynamic forum for international experts and researchers to present and review advances in man-made machine intelligence," says Dr Moir, who has helped to organise the event. "Many of these have culminated in practical applications that can change the way we live and work."

The conference will take place in the Sir Neil Waters Lecture Theatres Building. It follows a successful Robotics workshop hosted at Massey last week that attracted specialists from around the world, including Professor Matsumi Ishikawa, of the Kyushu Institute of Technology, in Japan.

Provided by Massey University

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