

# Chatty robots, flying alarm clocks at top high-tech fair

March 3 2010, by Richard Carter

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Visitors look at the football-playing robots at the world's biggest high-tech fair, the CeBIT, in the northern German city of Hanover. Robots that teach Chinese, computers controlled by moving the eyes and flying alarm clocks were among the weird and wonderful gadgets wowing crowds at the world's top high-tech fair.

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As the IT sector seeks to bounce back after a disastrous 2009, firms sought to woo punters at this year's CeBIT fair in northern Germany with fun and futuristic inventions ranging from the mind-boggling to the downright silly.

Learning Chinese but finding it tough to find people to practice with?

Meet Amy, the beautiful and uber-smart talking robot with 400,000 sentences at her command and a brain that is programmed with the entire knowledge of the Encyclopedia Britannica.

Using [artificial intelligence](#) and [voice recognition](#), Amy can chat for hours with her owner, without ever getting bored or tired and never running out of conversation.

About 35 centimetres (14 inches) tall, with a screen for a face and a laser arm to project her image onto a wall, Amy is due to hit the market towards the end of 2010, said Bruce Han from viewmotion, the South Korean firm that created her.

"At the moment, she can only speak Chinese and English, but we hope in a few years to have French, German, Italian and Japanese," he said.

Big crowds also gathered around the "[eye tracking](#)" stand run by Tobii Technology, a Swedish company.

Its system allows users to control computers using just the motion of their eyes, from scrolling through a selection of music tracks to enabling market researchers to monitor what consumers look at first from a shelf of products.

A similar technology was unveiled by the Fraunhofer Institute, whereby users can point at a screen from up to 20 metres (65 feet) away and "touch" icons or control a cursor just as they would with a touch-screen.

With music devices like the iPod and [MP3 players](#) now so common, several firms used the CeBIT to showcase new ways of enjoying music on the move.

The "Tunebug Vibe" is a small device that music-lovers can plug into their iPod, place on any surface -- a pizza box, a table, a wall, a ceiling -- and it instantly becomes a speaker, converting the vibrations of the music into sound.

There was plenty of offer for the practical joker, too. Getdigital.de, whose company slogan is "gadgets and more for geeks", offered a tiny remote control device that can surreptitiously turn on or off almost any European television.

And from British gadget firm Satzuma, a must for any serious office joker: a small missile launcher controlled by computer that can fire foam rockets at unsuspecting colleagues.

Getdigital.de also proudly unveiled a flying alarm clock for those who all too often hit the snooze button in the early morning.

When this alarm goes off, the whole clock takes off and flies off around the room, forcing its sleepy owner to chase it, catch it and put it back in its stand, by which time he or she is wide awake.

But the real show-stoppers this year were four pint-sized robot footballers that had huge cheering crowds marvelling at their silky skills and long-distance goal-scoring ability.

Named Rajesh, Penny, Leonard and Sheldon, the agile white robots, a mere 60cm (23 inches) high, were part of the team that won the 2009 Robot Football World Cup in Austria and hope to defend their title this year in Singapore.

They use colour and line recognition to "see" the ball (orange), pitch (green) and goals (yellow and blue). When they sense they are near the ball, they kick out towards the goal, with stunning results.

But beware, as any football manager knows, talent like this doesn't come cheap. To snap up one of these players will set you back a cool 10,000 euros (13,500 dollars).

The [CeBIT](#) runs until March 6.

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