

# Mitsuku chatbot has good answers for the Loebner Prize

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Credit: Steve Worswick

(Phys.org) —A chatbot named Mitsuku has won the Loebner Prize 2013, announced over the weekend, beating out three other contestants for the top prize of a bronze medal and \$4,000. Mitsuku's creator is

Steve Worswick, Mitsuku's botmaster. But wait a minute. What is a chatbot? A chatbot is a humanlike character with conversational skills which is simulated through artificial intelligence. Eliza, back in 1964 and 1966, was the first step into programmed chatterbots, designed to simulate a conversation with one or more human users. The [Eliza program](#) was based on a human mode of interaction typified by a Rogerian therapist trained not to make any creative input to a conversation, but instead only to keep it going so that patients could explore their own feelings. "Talking to Rogerian therapist is very like talking to a brick wall with a slightly clever echo," wrote Mike James in *iProgrammer*.

But wait another minute. What is the Loebner Prize? This is an annual competition created by businessman Hugh Loebner. The competition is an embodiment of the Turing-test affair; the chatbots try to fool the judges into assessing their answers are from humans. With reference to mathematician Alan Turing in the 1950s, the contest sets out to stage an event around Turing's suggestion that if a computer answered questions as convincing as a human could, then the machine could reasonably be said to be thinking.

The Turing Test emerged as a way to assess the intelligence of [computer programs](#). Loebner has offered a [prize](#) of \$100,000 for the computer program that meets Turing's standard for [artificial intelligence](#) but no chatbot creator has ever achieved that level and the top-tier cash has gone unclaimed.

The four finalists at the 2013 event in Northern Ireland had to undergo four rounds of questioning with the competition judges. The Mitsuku chatbot as conversationalist was declared the most convincing.

Worswick told the [BBC](#) that he started programming chatbots in order to attract eyeballs to his dance music website and he created a teddy bear to

do so. Visitors wanted to talk to the teddy bear more than they wanted to hear any of the music. In 2004 he was commissioned by a games company to write a chatbot and, after many conversations, the back and forths helped Worswick refine the chatbot and improve its capabilities.

Interestingly, Worswick, before the September competition, reported in early August on his Mitsuku site how he was very busy working on Mitsuku getting her ready for the Loebner Prize. "The main thing I am concentrating on is to try and get rid of as many of her robotic answers as possible. Things like 'Sorry, my eye is not attached at the moment' or 'I have no heart but I have a power supply' will give her away as a program straight away..." Nonetheless, he said, "just getting to the final four is a great result and so anything else is a bonus."

That bonus came over the weekend, and on Monday, Worswick said, "Well I've just returned from the Loebner Prize in Derry, Northern Ireland" with some "fantastic" news. "It was a great day and a very unexpected result for me, as I was just planning on using the day to get experience of being in the final before trying for a win in 2014."

He added that Monday was a strange day for him as well; he usually has at most 500 site visitors to mitsuku.com but, on Monday he had "9,532 visitors from all corners of the globe, as well as being mentioned on various sites around the net."

**More information:** [www.mitsuku.com/](http://www.mitsuku.com/)

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