

# Robots invade consumer market for work and play

January 8 2014, by Rob Lever

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The Murata Girl and Boy robots are demonstrated at the Murata booth at the 2014 International CES at the Las Vegas Convention Center on January 7, 2014 in Las Vegas

The robots are coming, and they're here to help.

Help clean your windows, teach children, or even provide entertainment or companionship.

This week's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas highlights enormous growth in robotics in a range of fields.

Meet Bo and Yana, for example—they're cute robots that can fit in your hand and help teach youngsters about programming.

"It's all about programmable play," said Vikas Gupta, founder of California-based i-Play, which designed the toys.

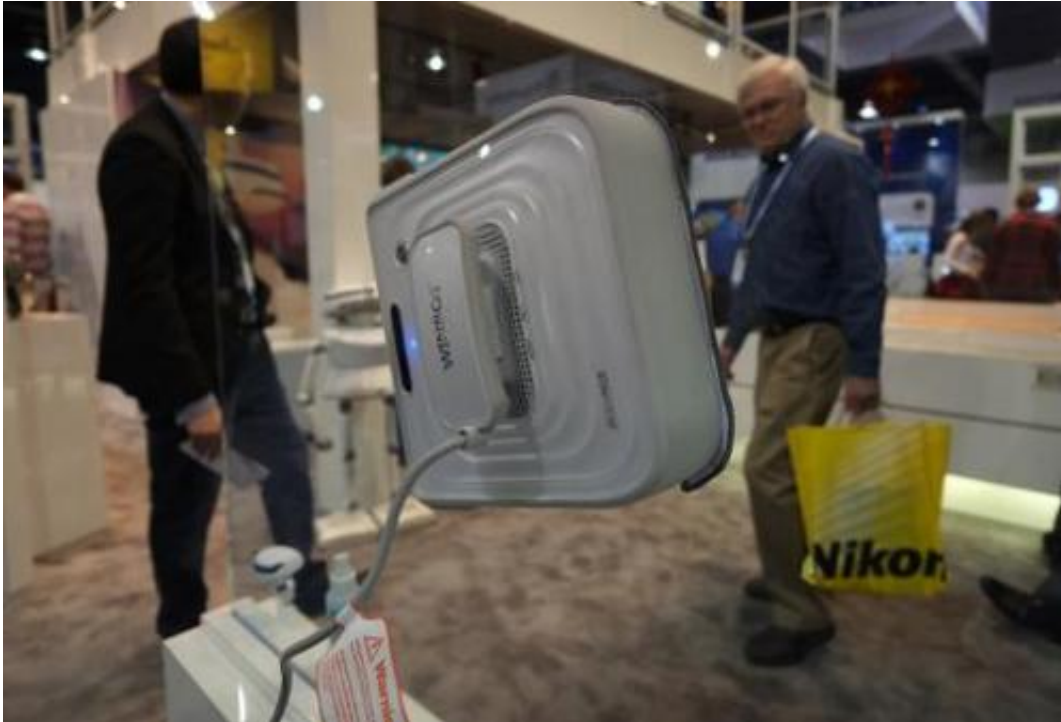
The duo can play with each other, fight, display expressions with their single eye, or even hit notes on the xylophone.

"Music becomes a way for kids to be engaged," Gupta told AFP.

"We want kids to learn programming and not be bothered with cognitive overload."

The robots are designed for children as young as five, and are being launched this year in a crowdfunding effort, the former Google and Amazon executive said.

But play is just one of the many areas of robotics on display at the show, from simple one-task robots to clean a roof gutter or barbecue grill and others that can be a kind of companion to the elderly.



Ecovacs presents Winbot, a window cleaning robot, during the 2014 International CES at the Las Vegas Convention Center on January 7, 2014 in Las Vegas, Nevada

There are also so-called telepresence robots, including the Double Robotics device seen on TV shows such as NCIS Los Angeles.

The Double Robotics gadget includes an iPad attached to a wheeled device that allows a telecommuter to show "face time" in the office even when working remotely. The results, at least on television, can often provide comic relief.

The global market for consumer robots was \$1.6 billion in 2012, dominated by the task and entertainment segments, according to ABI Research, but this is expected to grow to \$6.5 billion in 2017 with security and telepresence becoming more significant.

ABI analyst Philip Solis said robotics is moving slower than segments like tablets and smartphones, and is dominated by single-task robots.

But the big news in this field, he said, is Google's acquisition of several robotics firms, which could help boost the artificial intelligence needed for multi-tasking robots.



A boy plays with a robot presented by Future Robots during the 2014 International CES at the Las Vegas Convention Center on January 7, 2014 in Las Vegas

A number of new, innovative robots are also being shown in Las Vegas.

From the Japanese firm AIST is an interactive robot called Paro—designed to look like a baby harp seal—to simulate animal therapy for people in hospitals and extended care facilities where live

animals are banned.

Paro has five tactile, light, audition, temperature, and posture sensors, responds to being stroked and can respond to its name.

The French-based firm Keecker is displaying a robot that can project video or other content from a smartphone or tablet to a wall or ceiling.



Bluetooth Fighting Mini Robots by European company BeeWi are displayed at CES at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center on January 5, 2014 in Las Vegas, Nevada

This means "you can enjoy life without being tied to the television set," said Pierre Lebeau, Keecker's founder and chief executive.

The device runs on Android to allow users to draw from any of the

available apps.

"You can put your kids to bed with the Milky Way, and allow them to wake up to a beautiful sunny sky," he said. "It helps people dream."

One of the crowd-pleasers is the "humanoid" Robo-Thespian from the British-based group Engineered Arts.

Thespian can make hand-gestures, and can deliver speeches—with a British accent.

To make it life-like, the robot has pneumatic actuators "so its movements are more fluid," said engineer Morgan Roe. "We try to avoid having it look robotic."

The [robot](#) can be used at museums and exhibits, where Thespian can deliver a soliloquy and direct people. But, at this point, he can't interact in the manner of Apple's Siri or Google Now.

"We are working on it," Roe said.

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Citation: Robots invade consumer market for work and play (2014, January 8) retrieved 12 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-01-robots-invade-consumer.html>

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