

Japan robot receptionist welcomes shoppers

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Humanoid ChihiraAico, clad in a Japanese kimono, greets a customer at an entrance of a department store in Tokyo, on April 20, 2015

She can smile, she can sing and this robot receptionist who started work in Tokyo on Monday never gets bored of welcoming customers to her upmarket shop.

"My name is ChihiraAico. How do you do?" she says in Japanese,

blinking and nodding to customers in the foyer of Mitsukoshi, Japan's oldest department store chain.

Clad in an elegant traditional kimono, ChihiraAico—a name that sounds similar to a regular Japanese woman's name—breaks into a rosy-lipped smile as would-be shoppers approach.

Unlike her real-life counterparts—almost always young women—who welcome customers to shops like this, ChihiraAico cannot answer questions, but simply runs through her pre-recorded spiel.

The android, with lifelike skin and almost (but not quite) natural-looking movements, was developed by microwaves-to-power stations conglomerate Toshiba, and unveiled at a tech fair in Japan last year.

"We are aiming to develop a robot that can gradually do what a human does," said Hitoshi Tokuda, chief specialist at Toshiba.

"The standard of [customer service](#) in this Mitsukoshi flagship store is top quality and this is a great opportunity to see what role our humanoid can play in this kind of environment."

ChihiraAico will receive customers at the [store](#) until Tuesday, before taking part in a series of promotional events over the upcoming Golden Week holidays.



A department store employee poses with humanoid ChihiraAico (L), clad in a traditional Japanese kimono, in Tokyo, on April 20, 2015

The humanoid is not the first [robot](#) to begin customer service in Japan—the wisecracking Pepper, a four-foot (120 centimetre) machine with a plastic body perched on rollers, flogs coffee machines and mobile phones.

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