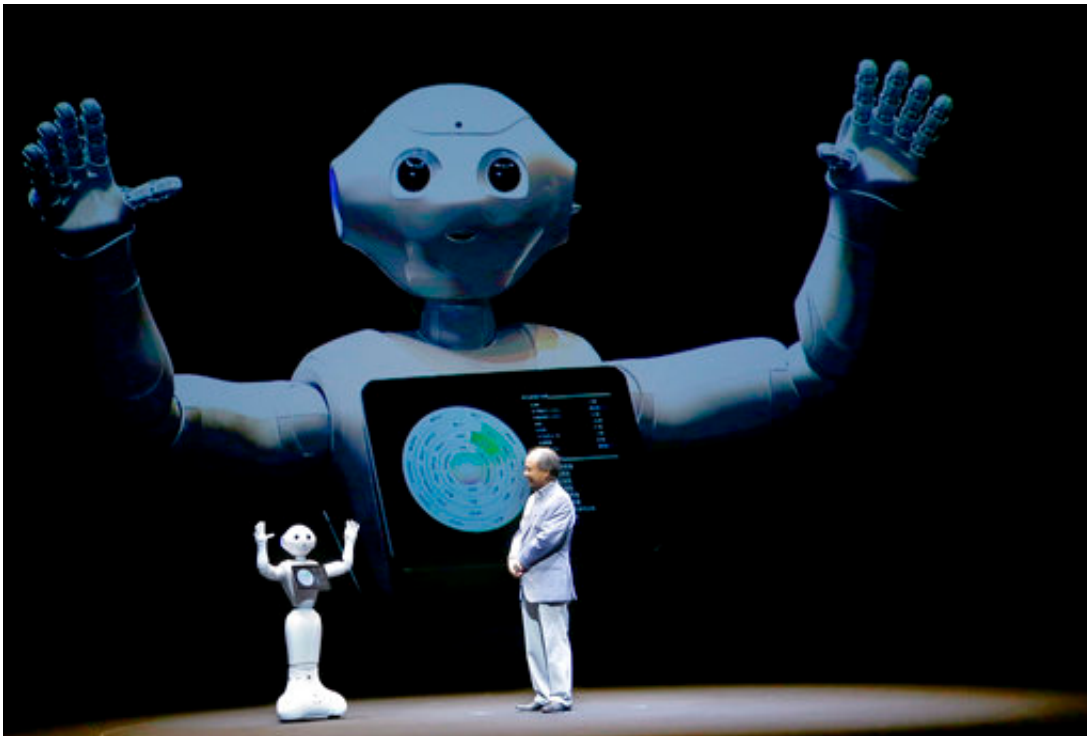


SoftBank buys robotics leader Boston Dynamics from Alphabet

June 9 2017, by Yuri Kageyama



In this June 18, 2015, file photo, SoftBank Corp. CEO Masayoshi Son speaks with the company's companion robot Pepper during a press conference in Maihama, near Tokyo. The Japanese internet, solar and technology company is buying robotics pioneer Boston Dynamics from Alphabet Inc., Google's parent, announced Friday, June 9, 2017. SoftBank said the purchase underlines how robotics is a key part of its business. (AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi, File)

Japanese internet, solar and technology company SoftBank Group Corp.

is buying robotics pioneer Boston Dynamics from Alphabet Inc., Google's parent.

Terms of the deal, announced Friday, including when it might close, were not disclosed.

Tokyo-based SoftBank, which offers the chatty childlike Pepper companion robot, said the purchase underlines how robotics is a key part of its business.

Boston Dynamics makes various robots, including Big Dog and Spot, which are complex machines that walk and trot on four legs. Another is Atlas, which walks on two legs like a human. Atlas has arms and can open doors and lift items. Some were designed for military purposes.

Under Friday's deal, SoftBank is also buying from Alphabet a company called Schaft that develops biped robots. Schaft's roots are in a research lab at the University of Tokyo.

Pepper has expressive arms but wheels for legs and does little more than sing songs and answer basic questions, and can't do any heavy lifting. Often it fails to understand even simple speech and will keep asking you to repeat sentences.

Speculation had been growing recently that Google might want to sell Boston Dynamics. Alphabet said it remains committed to robotics, such as connecting human-like motor skills, including hand-eye coordination, to machines so they can process images, speech, text and draw pictures.



In this June 18, 2015, file photo, Softbank Group Corp. Chief Executive and founder Masayoshi Son attends a press conference on the sales launch of its humanoid robot Pepper in Maihama, near Tokyo. The Japanese internet, solar and technology company is buying robotics pioneer Boston Dynamics from Alphabet Inc., Google's parent, announced Friday, June 9, 2017. SoftBank, which offers the Pepper companion robot, said the purchase underlines how robotics is a key part of its business. (AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi, File)

It is also interested in research on helping robots learn from what they "experience," Alphabet said in a statement.

"Robotics as a field has great potential, and we're happy to see Boston Dynamics and Schaft join the SoftBank team to continue contributing to the next generation of robotics," it said.

SoftBank Chief Executive Masayoshi Son said robots will help solve problems that have been beyond human capabilities.

"Smart robotics are going to be a key driver of the next stage of the Information Revolution," he said.

"I am thrilled to welcome them to the SoftBank family and look forward to supporting them as they continue to advance the field of robotics and explore applications that can help make life easier, safer and more fulfilling," Son said of Boston Dynamics and Schaft.

Japan, with its longtime culture of cartoons like "Astro Boy," has a soft spot for cute robots. Various companies, including automakers Toyota Motor Corp. and Honda Motor Co., have developed entertainment robots, designed to do nothing more than keep people company.



In this Sept. 24, 2014, file photo, 3M employees Julie Davidson and Jim Long look at a Boston Dynamics legged squad support system robot at the 34th Modern Day Marine Expo at Marine Corps Base Quantico, in Quantico, Va. Japanese internet, solar and technology company SoftBank Group Corp. is buying robotics pioneer Boston Dynamics from Alphabet Inc., Google's parent, announced Friday, June 9, 2017. SoftBank, which offers the Pepper companion

robot, said the purchase underlines how robotics is a key part of its business.
(The Free Lance-Star via AP, File)

But interest around the world is growing in the potential of robotics and artificial intelligence for everyday products like safer cars and connected home appliances.

SoftBank bought British semiconductor company ARM Holdings, an innovator in the "internet of things," last year. The first carrier to offer the Apple iPhone in Japan, SoftBank includes U.S. carrier Sprint and Yahoo Japan in its group business.

Son drew attention for hobnobbing with U.S. President Donald Trump late last year and promising to create jobs and invest in the U.S.

Marc Raibert, CEO of Boston Dynamics, said he looked forward to working with SoftBank on creating technology for "a smarter and more connected world."

"We share SoftBank's belief that advances in technology should be for the benefit of humanity," he said.

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