

Old dog, new tricks: Sony unleashes 'intelligent' robot pet

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The Aibo dog comes with a hefty price tag of nearly \$3,000

As Japan celebrates the year of the dog, electronics giant Sony on Thursday unleashed its new robot canine companion, packed with artificial intelligence and internet connectivity.

The sleek ivory-white puppy-sized "aibo" [robot](#) shook its head and wagged its tail as if waking from a nap when it was taken out of a cocoon-shaped case at a "birthday ceremony" held in Tokyo.

Seven-year-old boy Naohiro Sugimoto from Tokyo was among the first to get his hands on the shiny new toy, which he described as "heavy but cute".

"The dog we had previously died... We bought this robot dog as we wanted a (new) family," he said.

The 30-centimetre (one-foot) long hound-like machine comes complete with flapping ears and its eyes, made of a cutting-edge light-emitting display, can show various emotions.

Aibo is also fitted with an array of sensors, cameras and microphones and boasts [internet connectivity](#).

The owner can play with the pet remotely via smartphone and even teach it tricks from the office for the faithful hound to perform when its "master" gets home.

It builds up a "character" by interacting with people and while not always submissive, it is friendly towards those who are kind to it.



The robot dog 'woke up' as if being roused from a slumber

What the machine "learns" is stored in the cloud so its "character" can be preserved even in the event of hardware damage.

Photos it takes can also be shared.

But such cutting-edge canine technology does not come cheap, with the aibo costing nearly \$3,000 for a three-year package, including software services such as data storage.

'Touches a chord'

Aibo is not the Japanese electronic giant's first foray into the animal robot entertainment world.

Its earlier robot dog was put to sleep more a decade ago—a victim of business restructuring—shocking fans.

Sony rolled out the first-generation dog in June 1999, with the initial batch of 3,000 selling out in just 20 minutes, despite a hefty price tag of 250,000 yen (\$2,200 at current rates).

Over the following years, more than 150,000 units were sold, with numerous models ranging from gleaming metallic-silver versions to round-faced cub-like models.

But by 2006, Sony was in trouble. Its business model was under pressure and it was facing fierce competition from rivals in all fields.

The robot dog, an expensive and somewhat frivolous luxury, had to go.

Yasuyuki Nakamura, another owner of the new generation Aibo—his third robot pet—said he was happy to see the dog back in Sony's catalogue.

"I had been waiting (for a new aibo). I ordered one as I was happy to see this kind of business was revived," the 46-year-old said.

A middle-aged couple said they bought the robot for their 25th anniversary this year.

Sony plans to release the new aibo overseas as well but no details are set yet.

The dog does not speak human languages or perform tasks such as

turning a light on.

But that is not the point of the product, according to Sony's Izumi Kawanishi who is in charge of the project.

"You don't think about what the dog can do when you want to get a dog, do you?," he asked reporters.

"The point is that it touches a chord (with people)," he said.

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