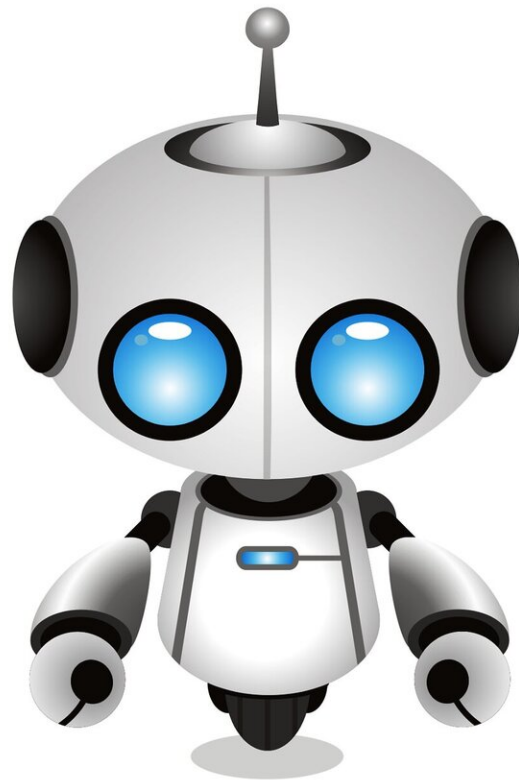


Brain Corp., maker of robot janitors for Walmart, moving into European market

July 3 2019, by Mike Freeman



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Brain Corp., which recently nearly tripled its orders from Walmart for self-driving, floor-scrubbing robots, is now making its first foray into Europe by opening a satellite office in the Netherlands.

The San Diego-based company makes an [artificial intelligence based operating system](#) to power robots. Last year, Walmart contracted to deploy 360 in-store autonomous floor cleaners—or robot janitors—using Brain Corp.'s operating system.

Then in April, the nation's largest retailer added an additional 1,500 stores—bringing the total deployment of BrainOS powered scrubbers to 1,860.

"We are still going through the deployment right now," said Phil Duffy, vice president of Innovation for Brain Corp. "Not all the units have been deployed. But it has been a great ride with Walmart."

Founded in 2009 by neural networks researcher Eugene Izhikevich, Brain Corp. aims to become the Microsoft of the robotics industry—not making the robots themselves but building the software that powers them.

For now, it partners with the makers of floor scrubbers including Tennant, Minuteman, ICE and Softbank Robotics to offer its self-driving sensor and artificial intelligence operating system primarily to retailers. It sells the operating system as a software as a service subscription.

The sensors and operating system allow the floor scrubber to detect objects in their paths and maneuver around them automatically.

"Retail is an area that we focused on because it is scalable, and it is also a really complex problem," said Duffy. "When you are in a [retail store](#) late at night, there is a lot of restocking going on. There are people operating fork lifts, plus a lot of these stores are open 24 hours to the public. So from an engineering perspective it is a really complex problem to solve, which is one of the reasons why we targeted that. "

In addition to Walmart, the company also has BrainOS powered floor cleaners running in airports, shopping malls and other locations. The company also has unveiled an operating system to power delivery robots—allowing them to move an object from one point to another.

Most of the company's current business is based in North America, though in 2017 it opened a satellite office in Japan.

In its new European location, Brain Corp. will primarily focus on providing support to regional partners.

But the facility also will have software development and research and development functions. The company recently announced a partnership with Nilfisk, a Copenhagen-based company in the floor cleaning industry.

"We chose Amsterdam as Brain Corp.'s European headquarters primarily because of its central location, open business environment, prevalence of academic labs and a proven commitment to the cultivation of a robust artificial intelligence and robotics ecosystem," said Christian Cornelius-Knudsen, a [senior vice president](#) at Brain Corp.

In 2017, Brain Corp. raised \$114 million led by Softbank's Vision Fund and with participation from Qualcomm Ventures—bringing its total funding to \$125 million. The company now employs 320 workers, primarily in San Diego.

ABI Research recently named the [company](#) the top autonomy solutions provider for mobile robotics, though just how big a market that is remains unclear.

"It is really hard to size the market, and the reason is not a lot of people understand the opportunity in robotics," said Duffy. "I can say it is a multi-billion dollar opportunity."

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