

Startup "Play-i" using friendly robots to teach kids computer programming

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(Phys.org) —Startup Play-i has created a crowd-sourcing campaign to gather funds for building and selling its pair of robots called Bo and Yana—both are part of an overall toy design to teach children as young as five years old, to program a computer. The idea, the team says, is to get children interested in programming by making it a part of storytelling.

The two robots look and behave differently. Yana has three wheels and can roll around, it can also play its little xylophone if programmed to do so. Yana, which the creative team behind the robots calls the storyteller, is able to make different recognizable sounds on demand.

The team behind Play-i is a collection of people who used to work for big tech companies such as Google, Apple and Frog Design. They started their company with the idea that children are capable of learning sophisticated concepts if they are presented in the right way. Bo and Yana are programmed using kid-friendly icons on a smartphone or tablet (since the operating system is iOS, that means iPhone and iPad, at least for now). To get either of the robots to do something, children develop a story around what it is they want done, then use the icons to develop the story, which results in the robots carrying out actions that follow what they've described. One example would be having Bo retrieve a flower from another [robot](#), or a person, then carry it to someone else for presentation. Yana on the other hand can be taught to emit a sound like a helicopter if someone touches it. The concept is simple, by breaking down something that seems complex into something that is actually small parts of a story, [children](#) can develop more complex programs.

The Play-i team is also looking to the future with their robots—code that is created from the icons is displayed on the tablet screen so that the child can see what they have wrought—as they grow older they can progress to writing code directly, giving them even more control over their toys.

The crowd-funding campaign has a goal of collecting \$250,000, if that number is reached, Play-i says the robots will be available for purchase by this summer, likely priced at \$199 and \$69 for Bo and Yana respectively.

More information: www.play-i.com/

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