

Chatty Japan robot makes friends on first day at work

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Kaname Hayashi, a project leader of Humanoid Robots "Pepper," talks with the robot at SoftBank Mobile shop in Tokyo, Friday, June 6, 2014. The cooing, gesturing humanoid on wheels that can decipher emotions has been unveiled in Japan by billionaire Masayoshi Son who says robots should be tender and make people smile. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara)

A [chatty humanoid robot](#) whose makers claim it can understand people's emotions made its first friends Friday as it struck up conversations with shoppers in Tokyo.

And the device—named Pepper by its designers—proved an effective marketing tool for mobile carrier SoftBank, delighting managers who put it to work collecting customer opinions.

"So you came to meet me today?" asked Pepper of one shopper in the store in the upmarket Omotesando area of Tokyo. "I am so happy to see you. What are you doing this weekend?"

The 120-centimetre (four-foot) tall [robot](#) which moves on rollers and has what looks like a tablet computer strapped to its chest, was unveiled Thursday by SoftBank president Masayoshi Son, who billed it as an "emotional" robot that understands "70 to 80 percent of spontaneous conversations".

After a couple of dance and a few stories, visitors were smitten.

"He is so cute. He is like a real child," said Itsumi Yabe, 28, who was visiting one of the outlets with two of her friends.

Shintaro Hamada, 23, was impressed by Pepper's capability to carry on conversations.

"I thought he would just talk regardless of what I say, but he really interacted with me. That was great," he said.

The robot, one of at least three stationed in the store, can also conduct automatic market research, said Kaname Hayashi, deputy director of SoftBank's business development and management department, because it is able to accumulate data about what kind of products and content make people happy.

"We've learned that he can get people's attention and has a greater impact than images streaming on television or screens at outlets," he

said.

Terry Gou, chief executive of Taiwan's Foxconn which is to manufacture the robots when SoftBank starts selling them for about \$2,000 each in February, said the [robot industry](#) was embarking on a new chapter.

"We use a lot of robots in factories..., but this is for consumers and also for communication," he told AFP. "This can really become a revolution."

More robots will work the floor of SoftBank's flagship Ginza store, before a fleet of them are rolled out at locations across the country.

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