

Social robots such as Pepper can help with household chores

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1

Pepper is the world's first humanoid robot designed to live with humans [...]

They don't have arms or legs and are supposed to read stories to your children or snap photographs of the family. And they aren't much more intelligent than the apps on your smartphone or smartwatch, so you don't have to worry about the perils of superintelligence.

The main selling point of these robots is that they can perform many of the tasks that people typically outsource to their different digital devices. Think of the social robot as one part iPhone, one part Dropcam, and one part Nest, all connected by a tablet device that recognises faces and voices. In the case of Buddy, the tablet is actually the "face" of the robot.

What's really genius about these bots is not the technology inside them – it's the idea that these social robots are destined to become part of the "connected home". Just a few years ago, the idea of the "Internet of Things" for the home still sounded fantastic and futuristic – now it doesn't strike people as so absurd that smoke alarms and thermostats are hooked up to the internet. So, if we're busy hooking up our home to the internet, why not a robot as well?

Plus, there's the price point to consider. For £300 you can buy a tablet or smartphone. For a few hundred pounds more you can get a social robot for the home. For example, the Buddy will retail for £415 (but comes with a special price of £350 if you buy it on Indiegogo). The JIBO Home Edition retails for £479 on pre-order.

However, the one suggestion that social robots might have a future comes from Japan, which saw the radically successful launch of Pepper – the world's first humanoid robot designed to live with humans – earlier this summer. In less than one minute, Aldebaran Robotics and SoftBank sold out all 1,000 Pepper humanoid bots. And now both companies are partnering with Alibaba and Foxconn to bring these humanoid-looking robots to other locations, such as shops and hotels.



