Do We Really Need Those Upgraded Humanoids in Future?

by Mark D

Article published on December 29th 2011 | Technology

Is the robot friend or foe? Will a humanoid robot steal your job, or perform dangerous tasks (like bomb disassembly) that no sane person would want? Can we have robots living in our homes to help us with the menial tasks, or will they keep breaking down, causing more aggravation? Are robotic toys overpriced novelties or the future of toy making? Can human tissue bind with machinery to restore full functionality and enable us to live longer? There is no doubt that robots are being put to some fascinating use in the 21st Century, although there is much speculation about which direction the field will go and when the price will drop to make them more commonplace.

Robots are one of the most popular visions of the future, evident in many science fiction novels, from Isaac Asimov's "I Robot" to Douglas Adam's "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy." Often humankind fears that robotics technology could get so advanced that these cybernetic organisms will begin thinking and acting for themselves, with little regard for human hierarchy. However, the robots we use today are quite harmless and perform a number of useful functions. Even a computer connected to hi-speed direct internet via cable using the services like Verizon FiOS Internet can be considered as a robot since it updates by itself and delivers the best.

Scientists are looking at how robots may function medically to help people live longer, more productive lives. For instance, researchers found that test monkeys can move a robotic hand simply by using their minds. That hand can wave, peel a banana and pick up items, just by reading the brain's electrical output. Doctors say medical robots can help stroke victims or paraplegics accomplish everyday tasks. Currently, electronic wheelchairs can maneuver and computers can type based on one's thoughts. Dr. Bruce Volpe of the Burke Medical Research Institute is developing a "robotic therapist," which will help stroke patients perform arm exercises. "By improving movement in the shoulder and upper arm, patients can do simple things like push objects across a table, use a computer mouse or even write," he explains.

Can a robot care for the elderly? Researchers are experimenting with new technology that would give new robotic companions with the ability to pour wine, deliver meals, bathe a person, read books and detect a person's health condition based on breathing patterns. A study by St. Louis University found that robots reduce loneliness and foster attachments in nursing home residents. Andrew Ng is currently leading a team of Stanford University researchers in building home assistance robots. "If humans can feel an emotional bond with robots, even fairly simple ones, someday they could not just be our assistants, but also our companions," he explained.

Who could forget the ever-so-endearing "Rosie," the house-cleaning robot from The Jetsons? While she seemed like every homeowner's dream come true back in 1962, her doppelgangers are now becoming a reality in 2009. Engineers at MIT Humanoid Robot Group say "Domo" can place objects on a shelf, put away dishes, turn lights on or off, fetch items, put away groceries, set the table, carry boxes and follow basic commands. While the technology is far too expensive to be commonplace in every household right now, the future for intelligent robots is bright.

Robotics technology is rapidly advancing. The robot can follow commands as well as it can follow its master. It can perform tasks that are already programmed but can also adapt to new situations. Humanoid robots can display emotions and teach us more about how our own brains work. While many people fear that humans and robots cannot peacefully coexist, it seems this breakthrough technology can make life much easier and more enjoyable, if we can afford it.

Article Source:
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Mark D - About Author:
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Article Keywords:
robots,verizon fios internet, fios internet

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