

Community Comment – March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016

By Jon Sapper

Robots are Coming

I was observing a receptionist named Nadine the other day. She was obviously very intelligent, handled questions well, had a pleasant personality and showed an appropriate and professional demeanor. The only thing that was a little different was that Nadine is a humanoid robot, not a person. She greets you, looks you in the eye when talking and shakes your hand. She displays happy or sad emotions depending on the conversation.

We are entering a new world where robots; yes, some looking extraordinarily like humans, will become more commonplace. Some robots we are already familiar and comfortable with do common chores like vacuuming the floor or mowing the lawn. These are little machine looking devices that scoop stuff up or cut grass and we, rightfully so, are enamored with the technology. But when robots start looking like real people, another dimension enters our psyche eliciting a more fearful or “this is creepy” response.

There are robots that replace stockroom workers. They move packages from shelves to a delivery location. Amazon uses this technology. This robot army allows human workers to process three times the number of packages otherwise possible. On a Royal Caribbean cruise ship, two machine looking robots know how to make over 300 cocktails and can make one in seconds. If they can program this thing with a towel on its shoulder, do some counseling and listen to patrons when they are crying, then I think they got something. UC San Francisco has a robot that is a pharmacist. During the testing, the robot received the prescription request from the doctor, packaged it and dispensed it to the patient following some built in controls to ensure proper identification. The first 350,000 filled prescriptions had zero errors. And there are robots being developed to deliver the news, business and weather reports. There is a joke in there, but I’m not going to say it. Then there are paralegal and document-review focused attorney robots. These robots can search words, phrases and concepts without the need for human intervention. Once they program these attorney robots to chase ambulances, I’ll bet you they’ll sell a million of ‘em.

I envision ATMs becoming more human like with Nadine's cousins finding work in most financial institutions. Flying drones and land robotic vehicles delivering pizzas and lots of other things is on the horizon.

What I want is a robot that responds when I say, "Hey, right here in the middle of my back, I got this itch. No. up....over. Oh yea, right there."

This has been Jon Sapper for Community Comment.