

# Can a Hotel Robot Read a ‘Do Not Disturb’ Sign?

AUG. 13, 2015



The new Henn-na Hotel in Nagasaki, Japan, has made an extensive use of robots. Huis Ten Bosch/Handout/European Pressphoto Agency

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By ELAINE GLUSAC

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Giving a new meaning to “robotic service,” several hotels and at least one cruise ship have been experimenting with machines that can handle guest check-in, store bags, deliver extra towels or mix a drink at the bar.

Relay, a three-foot-tall rolling robot, can make room service deliveries and drop off small

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items like toothbrushes and phone chargers. The robot requests elevators via Wi-Fi, calls the room ahead of its deliveries and (when it senses the room door has opened) pops open a two-cubic-foot cargo container before departing with R2D2-like electronic happy noises.

This robot is manufactured by [Savioke](#), a company in Silicon Valley, and made its first appearance in August 2014 at the [Aloft Cupertino](#), where it is known as Botlr. The hotel chain added a second robot-served location in the Aloft Silicon Valley earlier this year.

This month the nearby Crowne Plaza San Jose-Silicon Valley introduced its version of the system, which it calls Dash, to handle room deliveries.

The new [Henn-na Hotel](#) (whose slogan is “a commitment for evolution”), which opened last month in Nagasaki, Japan, makes much more extensive use of robots. There, visitors can find one modeled on a velociraptor at the check-in counter. The hotel also has a robotic luggage cart, a concierge robot that can provide simple information like the breakfast buffet hours, and room doors that open via facial scanning.

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VIDEO By Aloft Hotels 2:04

# Aloft's Demo of the Botlr Bellhop Robot

entertainment as well as bartenders at the [Bionic Bar](#), where two robotic arms, made by the firm Makr Shkr, mix cocktails that guests order via tablets.

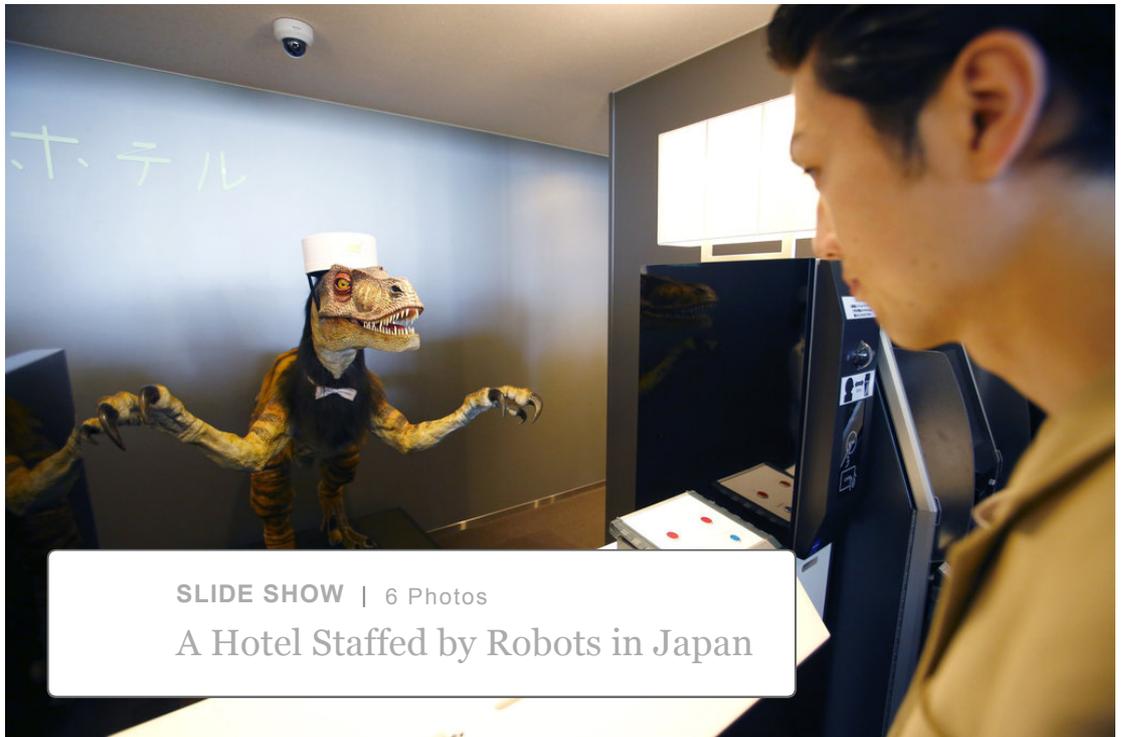
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Robots' present applications in the hospitality industry remain largely gimmicky, but their presence is likely to grow as they streamline repetitive tasks.

"Hotels are evolving from a purely 'high touch' business to a hybrid 'high touch, high tech' business," Chekitan Dev, professor of marketing and branding at Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration, wrote in an email.

Robots, he said, will become better at remembering guest preferences and performing easily automated tasks like check-in, while complex, valuable tasks like special food orders or event booking will remain the domain of flesh-and-blood employees.