

These Friendly Robots Would Like to Mix You a Cocktail

By Megan Garber



At this point there are few fields that haven't been transformed, somehow, by digital technologies. Whether it's [dairy production](#) or [ramen-making](#), innovations in production and analysis have shaken, and then stirred, almost every business imaginable.

One of the exceptions to this, however, has been bartending. Despite all the productive chaos that's going on in the world at large, walk into a bar, and you'll likely have an experience that is fairly similar to the one you might have had in 1989. Or 1889. Glass, ice, booze; drink, rinse, repeat.

That's changing, though -- or it could be, if a collaboration among engineers and marketers gets its way. Researchers at MIT's Senseable City Lab have teamed up with the Coca-Cola Company and Bacardi Rums to design a robotic bartending system called, yep, the Makr Shakr. Connected to customers' smartphones, and complete with three different robotic arms, the bar is capable, Mark Shakr says, of preparing approximately [one googol](#) (10 to the power of 100) of crowd-sourced drink combinations. The device is "new mixology system" that allows users to create personalized cocktail recipes in real time through a smartphone app.

Here's how it works:

Users download an app on their handheld devices and mix ingredients as virtual barmen. They can gain inspiration by viewing other users' recipes and comments before sending in their drink of choice. The cocktail is then crafted by three robotic arms, whose movements reproduce every action of a barman - from the shaking of a Martini to the muddling of a

| Mojito, and even the thin slicing of a lemon garnish.

Before you start feeling sorry for [Sam Malone](#) or [Colin Field](#), though, you should know that Makr Shkr says it has no plans to replace human bartenders with its robotic versions. As the creators see it, the robo-Malones aren't so much supplanting traditional bartenders as supplementing them.

"Instead of trying to replace a bartender with a robot, Makr Shkr aims to be a social experiment that looks at how people might embrace the new possibilities offered by digital manufacturing," the company puts it. "In Makr Shkr, social connections are woven throughout the co-creation and mixing of ingredients, which are then fed back to the user through the app. With this new technology, consumers can learn from each other, sharing connections, recipes, and photos on social networks."

Makr Shkr will be introduced, formally, at the Google I/O developer conference in San Francisco this Wednesday. At which point our robot overlords will officially be serving us drinks. So ... yeah. Remember to tip your ~~bartender~~ robot.

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