

Is Your Best Future Employee a Robot?

Digital manufacturing makes machines that can do anything you can, possibly better, cheaper and faster

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Robot bartender MaKr Shkr can mix any drink you want. Image: MaKrShkr/MyBossWas

Fast-food workers across the U.S. are may **go on strike** this week as a negotiation tactic to earn themselves higher wages. But the real story here, according to *Canadian Business* columnist Peter Nowak, is their impending unemployment. As Nowak says, "the robots are coming."

These workers may get the raises they're after; they may not. In the end, it may all be irrelevant. Robotic vending machines that can make **hot dogs** and **pizza** automatically, cheaply and quickly already exist. Now, Belgium-based BreakTime Solutions is making is selling a new machine that **cooks fries**, then dispenses them along with a dipping sauce of choice in minutes at a cost of only a few dollars.

"Combined with some of the more roboticized dining experiments happening around the world—**Nuremburg, Germany**, and **Harbin, China**, are just two examples—it's clear what direction low-paid, low-skilled restaurant jobs are heading," writes Nowak.

And it's not just fast food jobs. At this year's **Google I/O conference**, **MIT Senseable City Lab** demonstrated its **Makr Shkr**. Developed with funding from in the Coca-Cola Company and Bacardi Rum, the robotic barmen mixed drinks selected by attendees who had downloaded the Makr Shkr app on their phones.

While Makr Shkr's robots are not actually meant to replace bartenders, the experiment does show the possibilities presented by digital manufacturing. Some of these advanced robots will certainly be used in manufacturing processes, replacing traditional jobs with more high-tech jobs. But, it's also possible that certain machines will be used to actually replace servers, either in hospitality or retail jobs.

