New ‘social robot’ has an actual personality

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NTU Singapore’s Professor Nadia Thalmann, right, shakes hands with her humanoid lookalike Nadine. NTU SINGAPORE

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Engineers at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore have just unveiled an emotionally intelligent robot.

The machine is named Nadine and has been employed as a receptionist at the university to test her skills. She is powered by software technology that is very similar to Apple’s interactive interface Siri. This allows her to talk and act like a human.

In addition, she also has her own personality and can express emotions or change moods in accordance with the topic and tone of conversation. She even has a memory that enables her to recognize people she’s met before and recall things that were said during previous conversations, UPI reports.

The future plan for social robots like Nadine is to become office assistants or serve as caretakers for the children or the elderly. They could even serve as a platform for future healthcare services. However, for the time being Nadine will just interact with students and faculty at the university.

“Robotics technologies have advanced significantly over the past few decades and are already being used in manufacturing and logistics. As countries worldwide face challenges of an aging population, social robots can be one solution to address the shrinking workforce, become personal companions for children and the elderly at home, and even serve as a platform for healthcare services in future,” said Professor Thalmann, an expert in virtual humans and a faculty from NTU’s School of Computer Engineering, in a statement.

In addition to Nadine, the researchers also are developing EDGAR—a tele-presence robot capable of replicating the movements of its human user in real time. It is controlled using a webcam and can be manned from anywhere in the world. Like Nadine, it can interact with humans by greeting them and reading off of a programmed script.

Robots like EDGAR could be useful for things such as education or business. It could also enable users to project their physical presence in multiple places at one. This means that professors could give lectures to different people in different locations at the same time, or you could attend lectures all over the world using robot proxies.