



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Japanese Company Develops Digital 'Clones' of Individuals

August 28, 2023

A Japanese company is developing digital “**clones**” of individuals designed to take over some of a person’s daily online duties.

The company is Tokyo-based Alt Incorporated. It is working on creating a digital double – an **animated** image that looks and talks just like its human owner.

The company’s chief executive, Kazutaka Yonekura, told The Associated Press he believes such a double could make people’s lives easier by helping them get more things done.

The digital clone, also called an avatar, could be used for things like carrying out early job interviews or communicating with a person’s doctor ahead of a medical visit.

Yonekura said the main purpose of a digital double would be to “**liberate**” humans from the many daily duties. He showed AP reporters his own digital clone on a computer. It included an image and digitized version of his voice.

When his digital clone was asked, “What kind of music do you like,” it waited several seconds before giving a long answer. The double explained that Yonekura favors lively music such as hip-hop or rock 'n' roll.

Yonekura argues that the technology he is developing is more personal than other digital assistants, such as Apple’s Siri, Amazon’s Alexa and Google Assistant. He said most importantly, the clone belongs to you and not the technology company that created it. Yonekura added that his developers had attempted to build tools into the system that are designed to prevent **awkward** social mistakes.

Currently, digital doubles are very costly. Each Alt clone costs about \$140,000, so it will likely take time before there is a mass market for the clones.

Digital doubles are created by taking an individual's data from social media websites as well as publicly available records. The data is continuously changed and stored in the system. The data is designed to keep up with the individual's changing **habits** and activities.

Yonekura said he believes a digital clone could open the door for a society in which people can center on being more creative and waste less time on necessary daily activities.

The idea of a digital clone reportedly enjoys widespread appeal in Japan – the country that gave the world Pokemon, karaoke, Hello Kitty and emojis.

But Yonekura admits that cultures are different, and Westerners may not like the idea as much. “I can't tell you how many times I've been asked: Why does it have to be a personal clone, and not just a digital agent?” he said.

I'm Bryan Lynn.

The Associated Press reported this story. Bryan Lynn adapted the report for Learning English.

Words in This Story

clone – *n.* to make an exact copy of a person, animal or plant

animate – *v.* to make (something, such as a drawing) appear to move by creating a series of drawings, pictures, etc., and showing them quickly one after another

liberate – *v.* to help someone or something to be free

awkward – *adj.* difficult or causing problems

habit – *n.* something a person does regularly, almost without thinking about it