

The intern, nicknamed Fabio, was part of an experiment conducted by the Heriot-Watt University, which explores the integration of men and machines. Manufactured in Japan, it was a member of the Pepper family of humanoid robots that are “employed” by companies worldwide. Elena Margiotta, co-owner of the supermarket chain where the robot lost its job, says, “We thought a robot was a great addition to show the customers that we are always wanting to do something new and exciting.”

Fabio’s job was to make customers feel welcomed and assist them in locating grocery items if asked. Things seemed to start off well. The almost 4-foot-tall humanoid robot greeted customers with a cheery “hello gorgeous,” conversed intelligently about the weather, and even gave hugs and slapped high-fives. However, its friendly demeanor appeared to wane when a shopper needed help. For example, a customer inquiring about the location of cheese would receive a vague answer like “in the dairy section.” Not surprisingly, store visitors began to avoid the robot and started seeking out human employees for help.

Believing it may do better at a job that entailed more socialising, Fabio was assigned to hand out sausage samples. Unfortunately, that did not go too well. While a human employee managed to entice 12 customers to try the food in 15 minutes, the robot attracted just two. It turned out that customers were a little scared of the knife-yielding android and decided to stay as far away as possible.

Since Fabio was not trained for any other job, the grocery store management decided to “fire” the robot a week after it had first reported for duty. While the customers were probably thrilled, the

store’s employees were a little upset with the decision, a reaction that surprised Dr. Oliver Lemon. The Director of the Interaction Lab at Heriot-Watt says, “One of the things we didn’t expect was that the people working in the shop became quite attached to it. When we had to pack it up and put it back in the box one of them started crying because they had become emotionally attached to it. It was good in a way because we thought the opposite would happen and they would feel threatened by it because it was competing for their jobs. As he later discovered, the tears were not out of fondness for Fabio, but because the robot freed the human employees from the tedious task of responding to regular customer questions.

However, before you start thinking that robots are incompetent, Fabio appeared to be an **anomaly** within its family. Thousands of other Pepper humanoid robots gainfully employed at various Japanese retail stores, including Pizza Hut, seem to be thriving and extremely popular with customers. This could represent a large cultural difference between the Scots and Japanese, but it is more likely that the testing environment and the robot’s ‘Training’ wasn’t ideal for the circumstances. Fabio is perhaps the first wave of useable hospitality robots but with refinement it could make a return to shops in the near future.

36. Choose the best title or heading for the passage.
- A. Robot Can’t Cut the Mustard
 - B. No Replacing Great Scottish Hospitality
 - C. Fabio Falls Out of Favour Global
 - D. Robots Don’t Work in Europe
37. Where is this family of robots successful?
- A. In Scotland
 - B. In Japan
 - C. In London
 - D. In Asia