

Electricity Beggar at GeekCon 2008

Yaroslav Tenzer¹ and Oren Tirosh² (ytencer@ic.ac.uk)

This era is dominated by the developments in computers, machines and artificial intelligence. These developments have helped to create smart machines and (interestingly enough) some of them have almost passed the Turing test, which measures whether a machine can be smart enough to fool a person that it is a human. Robots are fueled by electricity and maybe one day the old-fashioned and outdated ones will realize that the only way to survive is by begging for electricity. That is what this project is about.

“Shnorbot” is an electricity beggar robot created at the *GeekCon* this year. (*GeekCon* is a two days event organized once a year in Israel; it brings together creative, talented and technically oriented people and allows them to think up, create and deploy ideas in an unordinary environment.) The robot has a head with small voltmeters to represent eyes and a mouth presented with an array of LEDs. Its body was created from a big square voltmeter. Its hands, constructed simply from an old shower cable, have usb endings which can be connected to a computer. Shnorbot’s brain is based on a microcontroller and controls the movement of the “eyes”, “mouth” and the speech. All of it is connected to a small battery.

Shnorbot voices its need for electricity by begging and his pleas become more and more desperate as the remaining charge in his batteries is depleted. A person can contribute electricity by connecting the robots hand to a computer through the usb connector, which will allow the robot to recharge its battery. Shnorbot is very polite and will reward people for electricity donation by saying sappy happy quotes but if the “donation” was less than a minute long, then it may ask rudely: “Is that all ?”.

The begging robots concept is not a novel idea, for example the robot character TinnyTim from the *Futurama* cartoon television series (which is based, in turn, on a Dickens character) was programmed to beg, sell oil-ade, and write in cute backwards letters on signs. Shnorbot is the first physically implemented robot which is programmed to beg for electricity for its survival. Unfortunately due to the time limitations of the event the robot had no opportunity to beg but hopefully it will get its chance next year.



Fig: Shnorbot the beggar.

¹ Yaroslav Tenzer is a PhD Student in Medical Robotics at Imperial College London, UK.

² Oren Tirosh is an information security expert and a famous geek.