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Tewkesbury staff say goodbye to Bob the robot

By RobinJenkins (<http://www.gloucestershireecho.co.uk/people/RobinJenkins/profile.html>) | Posted: June 16, 2014



Bob the robot has been on trial as a security guard at Tewkesbury-based G4S Technology.



Bob the robot

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Staff at a Tewkesbury security firm said goodbye today to a very different kind of colleague.

Bob the robot had been at G4S Technology for three weeks before being taken back to the University of Birmingham. It was its scientists who had asked the company if they could see how their creation responded to being in a working environment.

It was the first time in Europe that an autonomous robot had been deployed in a working office environment to do a real job.

As an automated security guard, Bob patrolled the offices to carry out tasks such as checking doors were closed and that desks were clear.

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When the Echo went to have a look at Bob today, he seemed a little bit like an early version of a Dalek, from TV's Doctor Who, and did not look particularly cutting edge.

But we were assured that he was a very sophisticated robot because the research team had developed the software that enabled him to process the information he needed to map and navigate his environment.

Using cameras and scanners he was able to create a map of his surrounding area, identifying desks, chairs and other objects that he had to negotiate when he was moving around, as well as detecting people's movement through activity recognition.

While Bob carried out his duties at the International Drive site, he gathered information about his surroundings and learned about how the environment changed over time. He also knew when to report to his docking station to re-charge his batteries.

Bob is part of a five-year £7.2 million European universities' project. Robots will learn how to act intelligently and independently in real-world environments, supporting security officers or care home assistants, while understanding 3D space and how this changes over time.

Emma Benham, G4S Technology's marketing communications manager, said: "We're sorry to see him go. It was an exciting opportunity to be involved in such a project."

Staff got so used to Bob, who was bought for £35,000 from a German company, that they found themselves talking to him each day and some brought family members in to take pictures of him.

Workers stressed that the 5ft 10ins metal minder posed no threat to their jobs because he merely did duties that helped them.

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