For remote employees, on-site robot serves as physical ‘avatar’

Most people would agree that a certain amount of “face time” is critical to the smooth functioning of any group or team, but making it happen can be a challenge, particularly for telecommuters. Enter Anybots, a Californian company that now sells what it calls a “personal avatar” that enables people to participate in meetings and other events from afar.

Telecommuters and other remote workers need just a web browser to operate an Anybot on-site and interact with the whole office, lab, factory or warehouse. Equipped with a speaker, microphone, camera and video screen, the wifi-enabled device can show live video of the person operating it, or it can simply display a still picture. Either way, the robot's eyes glow as long as the user is logged in, so human colleagues know the person is “there” and available for conversation. The Anybot glides around quietly and smoothly, giving the human operating it complete visibility and access to the events going on. When in-person attendees take breaks at conferences or meetings, for example, remote participants are no longer stuck waiting on conference call — rather, they can manipulate the Anybot to mingle in the lobby, taking full advantage of any conversations or happenings going on there. Similarly, an Anybot can give a telecommuter an ongoing in-house presence, making casual conversations around the watercooler a possibility once again.

Weighing 35 pounds and moving at roughly walking speed, Anybots are priced at USD 15,000 and currently available only for shipping within the U.S. One to partner with for distribution to other parts of the world? (Related: Robot mower runs on solar power.)

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