

Aussie firm develops online chat clone

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AAP

An Australian company has found a way for bloggers to chat with their friends online without having to be anywhere near a computer or communications device.

Sydney-based outfit MyCyberTwin.com has developed an application that uses artificial intelligence (AI) technology to simulate intelligent conversations.

While such applications, known as chatterbots, have been around for a couple of decades now, MyCyberTwin is one of the first programs to allow users to actively educate their online personas to best suit their own.

The online clone can chat on a user's behalf through social networks such as MySpace, blogs, dating sites and MSN instant messaging.

For some, it's the online equivalent of the sort of autopilot conversations people have when they've been asked the same question a million times over.

But for others, it could potentially be an effective solution to managing information gathering and dissemination for visitors to websites.

MyCyberTwin co-founder Liesl Capper says while the software has potential to be a big hit with generation Y users of sites such as MySpace, it could also serve as a real-time personal assistant for online businesses.

"Up until now, anything related to AI has been an incredibly long process - months or years - and it's usually something that can only be done by computer scientists," Ms Capper said.

"And at the end of it they have a single personality.

"What we wanted to do was give people a really quick set of tools so they can actually express themselves."

In an online chat with Tracy, a 31-year-old surfer from the Gold Coast, her CyberTwin is able to openly tell you that her owner is a lesbian who's been in a stable relationship with her partner for about 10 years.

She also has a cute dog and likes to spend her weekends playing computer games.

Ms Capper says the tool allows users to develop their online personalities and keep their answers as generic or specific as they like.

Through the chatterbots, a MySpacer can get feedback from her visitors in a far more interactive and interesting way than she can through a message board.

Or she could feed answers to questions such as "are you and Tim really an item?"

She can also go back and view all the conversations visitors may have had with her CyberTwin.

While the program is some way off recreating the depth and coherence of a conversation with a real human, Ms Capper says it opens up AI technology to the ordinary internet users.

"Our CyberTwins don't always say everything absolutely perfectly but given where the state of AI technology is at the moment, we're actually quite happy with the result," she said.

"And obviously it's an ongoing work.

"There's a saying - you never finish building AI, you just stop working at some point."

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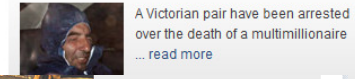
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