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Shiseido pilots robot, human collaboration program

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Shiseido's humanoid robot

By STAFF REPORTS

Japanese cosmetics brand Shiseido is taking the artificial intelligence trend one step further by employing humanoid robots on its assembly lines.

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In a cosmetics industry first, Shiseido is working toward establishing a new form of manufacturing through a collaboration between humans and robots. While commonplace on mass automotive assembly lines, the high-end and luxury space has yet to trust humanoid robots to undertake the tasks typically taken on by its skilled workforce.

Team work

Shiseido introduced its humanoid robots pilot program at its Kakegawa, Japan factory earlier this month. The robots placed at the Kakegawa factory are on the assembly line for makeup products created by Shiseido and its stable of licensed brands.

In the pilot program, every human Shiseido employee works with two humanoid robots. Together the trio assemble different parts of varied shapes and materials to create the finished product.

The robot is tasked with procedures that are difficult to automate with conventional machines and existing industrial robots. Shiseido's human workers will be responsible for inspections to ensure quality and that products are free from minor defects such as scratches.



A Shiseido assembly line worker with two humanoid robot helpers

Shiseido believes that the pilot program will safeguard the future of its business in the face of challenges such as a declining workforce. Also, the collaboration of humans and robots is in response to market changes and consumer expectation of brands to be more swift and flexible.

"In the cosmetics industry, companies are increasingly required to promote a new manufacturing system that effectively manages high-mix low-volume production to address the ever-diversifying needs of consumers," Shiseido said in a brand statement.

"For makeup products in particular, their manufacturing process involves numerous materials and components, and complex procedures such as packaging and labeling," the brand said.

"At the same time, companies are heavily counting on on-site workers for in-process inspection, which relies on human's sensibilities and cannot be replaced with machines."

Shiseido applied for a Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry project called "FY2016 Demonstration Project for the Introduction of Robots" to develop the pilot. Shiseido partnered with Glory Ltd., robot system developer on the program.

Robots are finding jobs in other industries. In the hospitality sector, for example, smart companies are already experimenting with uses of AI to gather intelligence about their guests, manage their revenue and predictive maintenance, automate their data entry and analysis and deliver effortless, one-step-ahead-of-you personal service to their customers ([see story](#)).