The Moscow Times
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Grishin Invests in Mass Produced Personal Robot

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September 22, 2012



A Double robot, made up of an iPad and a Segway scooter, could be used by students to remotely attend class.

Mail.ru co-founder Dimitry Grishin is investing 7.7 million rubles ($250,000) in a personal-robot manufacturer, his firm Grishin Robotics announced.

The robot, called the Double, is made up of an iPad on a Segway scooter and is designed to provide "telepresence," allowing its operator to remotely see, hear and command the robot using another iPad.

According to the website of the manufacturer, California-based Double Robotics, the machine can be used for many purposes, which include leading tours at museums and universities and even managing remote employees.

"Over the last several decades, global investment in innovation has been mostly focused

on computing and Internet technologies," said Grishin, who earned a degree in robotics and complex automation at Moscow State Technical University and has been labeled Russia's Mark Zuckerberg, a reference to the founder of Facebook.

"To date, the main area of investment in robotics has been manufacturing," Grishin said. "Despite the potential of robotics to dramatically impact our everyday lives, investment in this area has been limited."

Double Robotics will allocate the investment toward increasing its manufacturing capacity and hiring engineers to improve product development.

The robots can be preordered for $1,999 but will cost $2,499 when they start shipping next year. Double Robotics currently has preorders for 600 robots — including 6 from Russia — worth a total of $1.2 million.

Customers, including 17 Fortune 500 companies, plan to use the product for teleconferencing, security and health care surveillance, real estate and museum tours, and presentations, according to Double Robotics.

Some industry experts are skeptical about exactly how "personal" the Double is.

"It would have been interesting 10 years ago," said Igor Belousov, who has a doctoral degree in robotics and is responsible for university relations at Hewlett-Packard Russia. "The Double doesn't seem like a personal robotics tool, as advertised, but can be useful for scientific or business organizations to demonstrate that they're using something cool."

Double Robotics said on its website that the product is the simplest and most elegant way to be somewhere else in the world without flying there.

"You can stay at eye level, whether sitting or standing, by adjusting your height remotely," the company said.

The Double weighs approximately 7 kilograms and lasts up to eight hours on one charge.

Grishin launched Grishin Robotics in June with $25 million of his own money to develop start-ups and provide capital to entrepreneurs and inventions.

According to its website, Grishin Robotics is dedicated to supporting personal robotics around the world by raising the profile of the robotics industry and helping robotics entrepreneurs advance their products and ideas. The firm is based in New York.

"The most advanced robotics research is based in the U.S., Japan, South Korea, France and Germany, but not Russia," Belousov said.

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