SoftBank has reportedly halted production of its Pepper robot

SoftBank is reportedly restructuring its robotics business and has already halted production of its Pepper robot, according to *Reuters*. Robotics is just one of many businesses the large Japanese firm has invested in, but potentially permanently ending production of Pepper is notable because of the robot's role as a sort of unofficial mascot for the company.

SoftBank plans to lay off 330 staff members based in France, the original home of SoftBank's robotics efforts, and apparently half of the division's sales team in the UK and the US, *Reuters* writes. Production of Pepper robots was reportedly halted last year and would be costly to restart, *Reuters'* sources claim. We've reached out to SoftBank to confirm the details of the report.

The *Reuters* report follows closely after SoftBank's sale of a controlling stake in Boston Dynamics to Hyundai. It certainly seems like the company is reconsidering what exactly it wants to do in the robot business. For now, that means less futuristic moonshot promises and more practical business-type offerings, like a carpet-cleaning robot called Whiz.

Pepper was initially pitched as a robot that could understand human emotion, which wasn't possible when it was announced and hasn't become any more true, despite an assist from IBM's Watson. SoftBank then pushed its friendly bot into all sorts of odd, if charming scenarios, like working as a Buddhist priest, playing docent at the Smithsonian, and staffing the company's stores.

[embedded content]

Pepper might not have ever lived up to the ads used to sell it in Japan, but it could be charming. My interactions with the waist-high android are limited, but after hearing about Pepper a lot online, seeing the real deal was kind of a capital-E experience. I had wandered into a crowded SoftBank store in Tokyo and was greeted by Pepper in Japanese with a friendly smile and a little wave. On paper, traditional robot stuff. But in the moment? I would have at least considered whatever prepaid phone plan Pepper was pushing.

https://www.theverge.com/2021/6/28/22554566/softbank-pepper-robot-production-layoffs-robotics