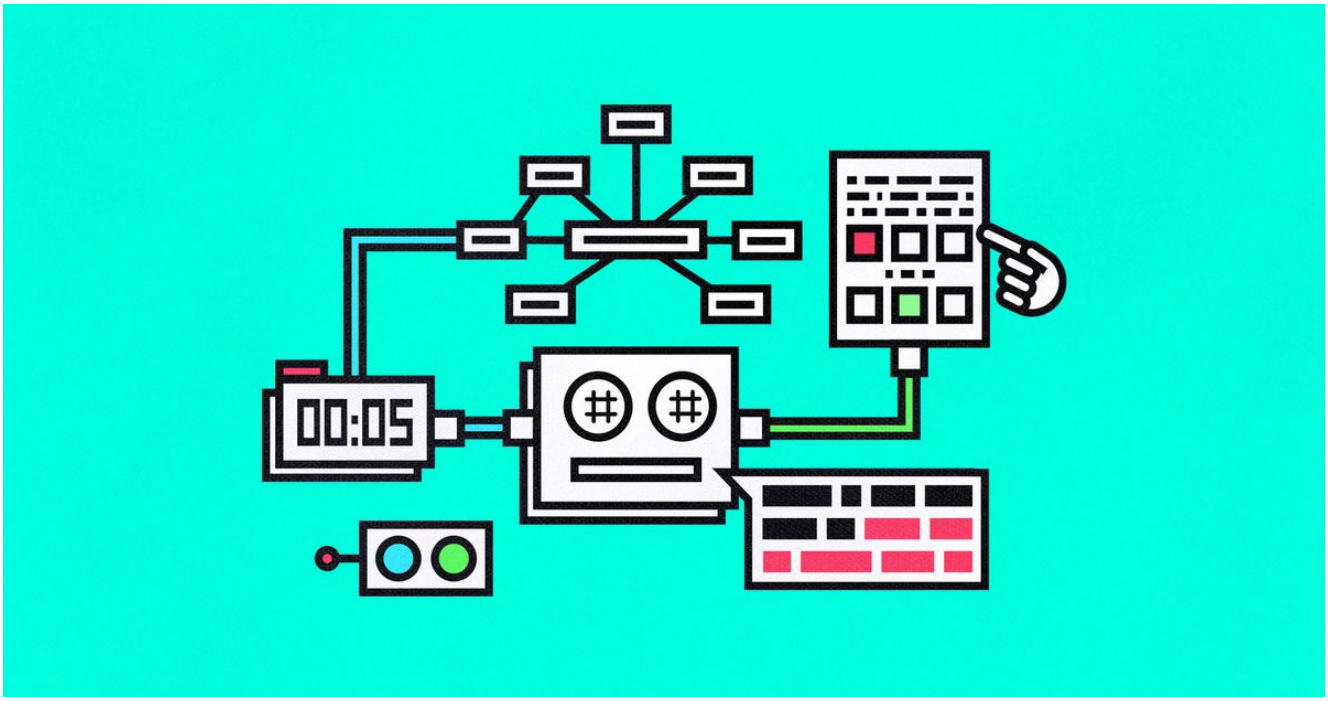
Wendy’s tests an AI chatbot that takes your drive-thru order



The chatbot will be able to take verbal orders from customers who line up at Wendy’s drive-thru kiosks, all with the hope that it will help reduce long wait times. Wendy’s worked with Google to build a tailored chatbot on top of the company’s existing large language model (LLM), which it’s bound to reveal updates about at its Google I/O event on Wednesday. This all goes along with Google’s push into AI, as its Cloud unit sells the idea of companies commissioning their own models for different purposes, built on their own data.

Part of Google’s work with Wendy’s means ensuring the AI is brushed up on some of Wendy’s lingo, such as knowing that a “milkshake” translates to a “Frosty” and that a “JBC” is short for a “junior bacon cheeseburger.” As soon as a chatbot takes a customer’s order, it will appear on a screen for line cooks. A worker will then hand the completed meals to customers at the pickup window, just like any other order.

People can barely handle the cashier-less kiosks at Mcdonald’s

In a statement to the *WSJ*, Google Cloud CEO Thomas Kurian acknowledged some of the challenges associated with using an AI chatbot at the drive-thru. The bot will have to ignore any noises it hears from kids in the backseat of a vehicle, for example, and will also have to deal with customers who change their minds in the middle of an order. “You may think driving by and speaking into a drive-through is an easy problem for AI, but it’s actually one of the hardest,” Kurian tells the *WSJ*.

A Wendy’s employee will monitor the AI-powered drive-thru when it starts testing it in June, likely to ensure customers don’t have a meltdown. Customers will also have the option to speak with a human if the AI can’t get their order right. While the AI chatbot should be able to do everything a human can, including upselling Wendy’s products, Wendy’s tells the *WSJ* that it doesn’t plan to replace existing workers with the technology.

“The new automated ordering experience is designed to enhance the customer and crew experience by taking the complexity out of the ordering process so employees can focus on serving up fast, fresh, quality food and building relationships with fans that keep them coming back,” Kevin Vasconi, the chief information officer at Wendy’s, says in an emailed statement to *The Verge*. “The restaurant team will continue to monitor the drive-thru to ensure a fast, frictionless ordering experience for customers engaging with Wendy’s FreshAI.”

Maybe I’m a pessimist, but I’m skeptical about how this works out in the long term. People can barely handle the cashier-less kiosks at Mcdonald’s, and now you want them to talk to an AI? Hangry people don’t want to hear about your GPU shortage and how it’s slowing down their orders – just saying.

https://www.theverge.com/2023/5/9/23716825/wendys-ai-drive-thr

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