

Why We Love Robotic Co-Workers (And You Should, Too!)

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The future of robotics has never seemed more bright for SMEs. At Alberts, we love working with robotic co-workers. In fact, co-bot Franka joined our development team quite smoothly.

When robotic co-worker Franka Emika arrived, the Alberts' engineers felt like kids unwrapping a lego box.

“A robot? We are really gonna work with a robot?”

Franka, an easy to program robotic arm, found her place in the team quite smoothly. Having her as a member to help out with long-term reliability testing on the [Alberts Smoothie Station](#) was music to our developers' ears. [It is so much more fun.](#) Imagine what a couple more months of exploring Franka's possibilities could do!

The Future of Robotic Co-Workers

Robotics has made vast improvements over the years. The traditional robots in industrial environments are expensive (priced at above \$100,000). They also require highly-skilled staff to be programmed and are quite unsafe. That's why they are almost always kept in cages. The traditional, industrial robots often *replace* human labor instead of *augmenting* people's capabilities. With robotic co-workers (or cobots) like Franka coming into play, the game is changing. Robots and humans can now complement each other and benefit from the combination of their strengths. While robots can tackle mundane tasks, humans can focus on higher-level challenges.

Robotic co-workers are the future of manufacturing. Their global sales are [expected](#) to grow to \$3.3 billion by 2020. Franka, for example, is much safer than other cobots. She can work alongside humans without posing a risk. In addition, she is easy to program, even for non-experts. Other benefits, compared to the traditional ones, are the fact that robotic co-workers improve worker ergonomics *and* that they are much cheaper.

If you think it is too early to start considering robotic co-workers, then think again. They are already [flipping your burgers](#) and [preparing your pizzas](#), while the cooks have more time for the important things.

The cards are being shuffled: suddenly, not only large factories, but also SME-sized factories have the possibility to use robots in their production lines.

It seems like a robotic revolution might just be around the corner!

How We Do It at Alberts

In collaboration with our manufacturing partner [Tecmore](#), and the [Robotics and MultiBody Mechanics Research Group](#) (R&MM) from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and [Flanders Make](#), we are running long-term reliability tests with robotic co-worker Franka.

Currently, we are integrating Franka in our test set-ups with the [Alberts Stations](#). The video below shows how this goes (while, Alberts-style showing how much fun it can be). Franka takes a fresh smoothie out of the Alberts Station, while we are testing the Station's process-reliability. Do you see a human doing this +100,000 times? (Hint: the answer is no.)

Letting co-bots do all the heavy and tedious work will come with ergonomic advantages for factory workers. Process-wise, everything will run a lot smoother when frequently altering the production line. We have to be honest: robots are much less likely to make a mistake than we humans are, aren't they?

“As a research partner, R&MM has recently submitted research proposals on both EU and Flemish level. The goal is to increase both productivity and ergonomics of human workers through robotic co-workers” (Prof. Dr. Ir. Bram Vanderborcht)

Robotic co-workers, like Franka, let us imagine a future where we produce everything locally. In contrast to the “made in China” offshoring movement from the past decades, a vast manufacturing reshoring is taking place and will continue over the next decade. In the future, we hope to build thousands of Alberts Smoothie Stations in local hubs and that will only be possible with the help of robotic co-workers.

“As a use-case in these research projects, Alberts will be one of the first SMEs to adopt these new technologies” (Dr. Ir. Glenn Mathijssen)

You Should also Look Forward to Working with Robotic Co-Workers!

If you are an SME, wondering how to scale-up without having to go to China for the manufacturing of your product, you might want to look into the possibilities of robotic co-workers. Working day and night and making less mistakes, they have become a relatively cheap and feasible solution to optimize the ergonomics of your production line.

We sure are looking forward to exploring all possibilities with Franka.

Are *you* ready?

Learn more about how robotic co-workers are changing the manufacturing landscape. Alberts co-founder and Phd researcher at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and the University of

*Pisa Glenn Mathijssen will give a presentation at your event upon request via **team@alberts.be**.*

Visit www.alberts.be to discover the Alberts Smoothie Station, the innovative and healthy solution to sugary snacks at offices and schools you've been looking for.