

The Role of Tech in the Fight Against Coronavirus

By Marga Hoek

Track and inform

We're more connected now than ever before. This is key to our ability to track the disease, which is, in turn, key to beating it. Technology companies like BlueDot and Metabiota have helped analyse and predict the virus's spread – helping to contain it. Facebook has generated maps that display population density, demographics and travel patterns, enabling researchers to decide where to send supplies and how to mitigate the outbreak.

Information - and the speed and scale at which information can travel - is also crucial. The Indian Government and the World Health Organisation (WHO) have created Whatsapp chatbots to provide real-time information, to not only inform the population about the virus but also to prevent misinformation spreading, which has become a significant problem. This is a simple and highly effective way to share correct information with the population. No

doubt other countries will follow. Similarly Google, Facebook and Twitter are working to identify and, most importantly, eliminate misinformation, steering people to reliable sources of information like CDC and WHO.

Prevention is better than cure

We have learnt that disinfecting is key. We are all washing our hands more often but tech can take care of larger surfaces. Germfalcon, for instance, is a germ-killing robot with smartly placed ultraviolet lamps that can sanitise airplanes from most viruses. It works both on surfaces and in the surrounding air. Danish self-driving disinfecting robots are also saving lives.

Protection masks are scarce, way too scarce, yet solutions are on the rise. Two Israeli startups are, for instance, currently working on washable, reusable masks embedded with antiviral and antibacterial agents that could prove more effective than disposable masks and can, of course, be used multiple times rather than thrown away. Diving masks are also proving to be quite

applicable. Researchers at Brussels University have developed a protection mask based on the Decathlon diving mask, which covers the entire face. The masks were a hit last year and very popular for amateur snorkelers but they are now an important medical aid!

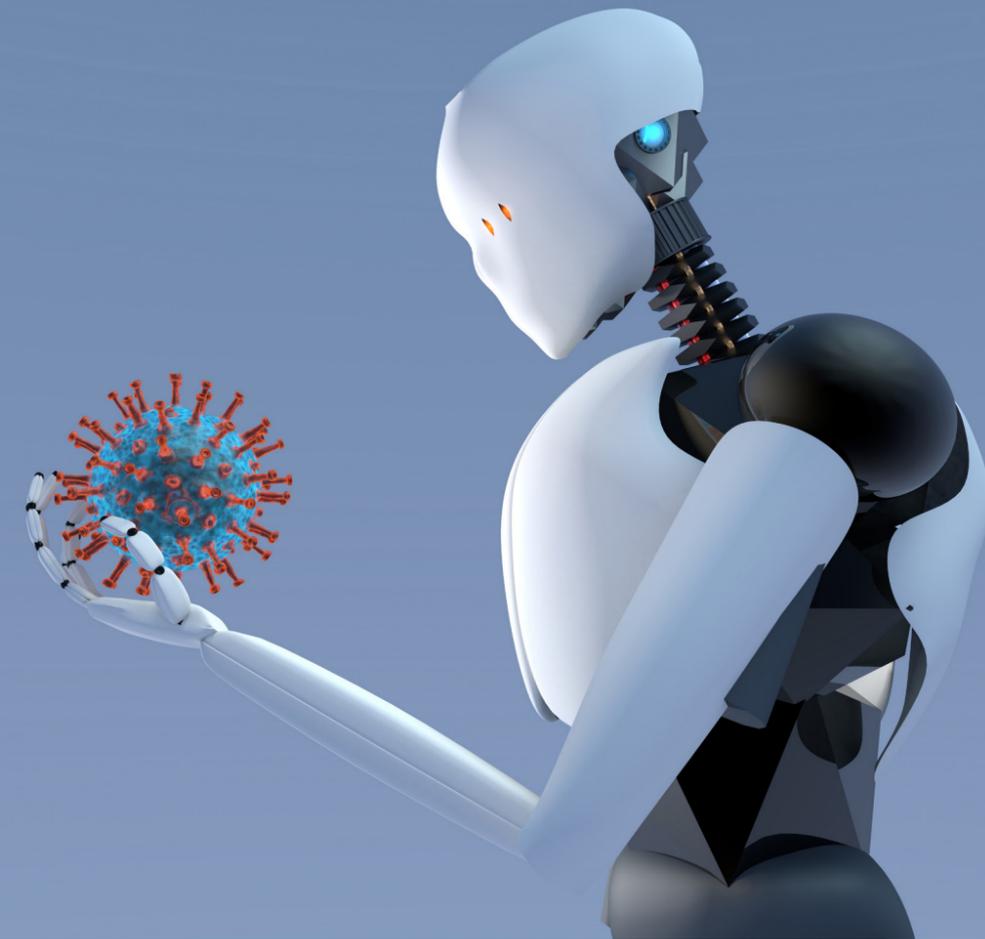
Unlike humans, robots aren't at risk

People must be protected. Robots and drones can work in our place. They are not at risk. Terra Drone is using unmanned aerial vehicles to transport medical supplies. Drones are also being used by the police throughout this crisis to monitor people's actions and ensure government measures taken to control the virus are being abided by.

In China, robots from the catering industry have been put to work in more than 40 hospitals across the country, moving through the hospital and cleaning the floors to prevent the spread of the virus and save lives. At a smart hospital in Wuhan, where it all began, robots stepped in

In this new war against COVID-19, tech for good has become integral to our response. It has led to unexpected collaborations that cross borders and industries. It has helped to enable lightning-fast responses to the crisis, from new virus-tracking apps to ventilators. We've witnessed an explosion of creativity in finding solutions to the unprecedented challenges the world is now facing. For many, tech for good has provided a light in the dark, hope on the horizon.

Many of us within this sector have been hoping for this moment. Though no one would ever have wished it would happen in this way. The advanced technological solutions proliferating around the world demonstrate the immense power of tech for good. Let's explore the ways they're helping us fight COVID-19.



In China, robots from the catering industry have been put to work in more than 40 hospitals across the country, moving through the hospital and cleaning the floors to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

to take vital signs and deliver meds but also to entertain quarantined patients. They performed robo-dances to take people's minds off the disease for a bit.

Lending a hand to those in need

With so many people suffering – both from being isolated as well as with the disease – tech initiatives can bring great relief. Often people need help in practical and emotional ways. It is heartwarming to see great tech initiatives offer relief. The New York company Invisible Hands, for instance, is matching those in need with volunteers who can help. Those most at risk in the community can simply fill out an online form to request a grocery delivery and Invisible Hands matches them up with an available volunteer who lives nearby and puts them in touch with each other.

United against the virus

A collaborative eco-system has sprung up across the world and people are coming together to help fight COVID-19 with tech for good, however they can. For instance, a team of Dutch Technical Medicine students have come together and set up OperationAIR – a program to develop ventilators as quickly and cheaply as possible. There are similar initiatives around the globe and, although many won't make it past a prototype, no doubt some useful solutions will help beat the shortages.

The Catalysts is another great example. A group of social tech organisations that work alongside civil society, they have pooled their resources to play a part in the COVID-19 response. They realised that many organisations do not have the resources required to handle the crisis but together they can help build digital services that are able to reach millions of people. The group, which is still growing, includes companies like Ayup Digital, Neotribe, Outlandish, The

Developer Society and others. They're working to, for instance, offer online advice on remote working for companies adapting to the current crisis.

The current crisis has presented an opportunity for tech to come into its own and showcase the hugely positive impact it can have on society. COVID-19 looks set to be the tipping point for tech for good – cementing its place in the world.

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