

Facing the Whiz

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Aric Rindfleisch
University of Illinois



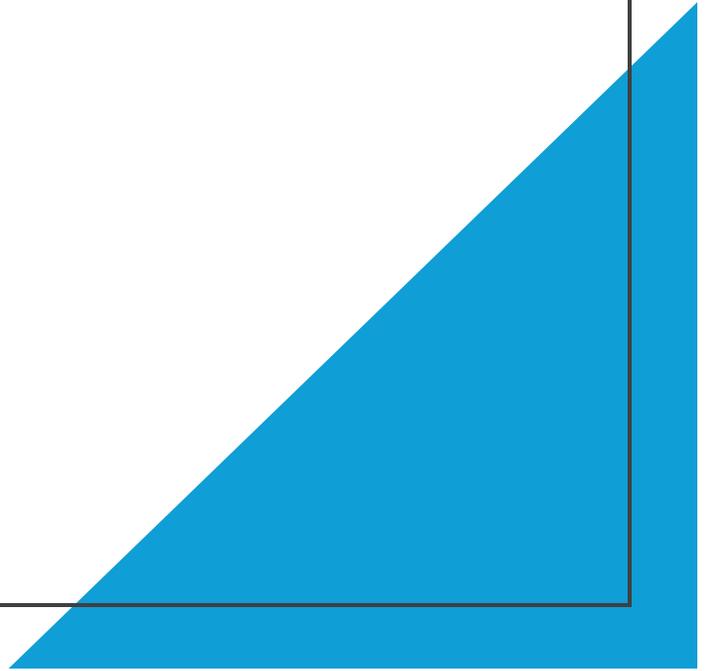


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Waseda

The Story of the Whiz



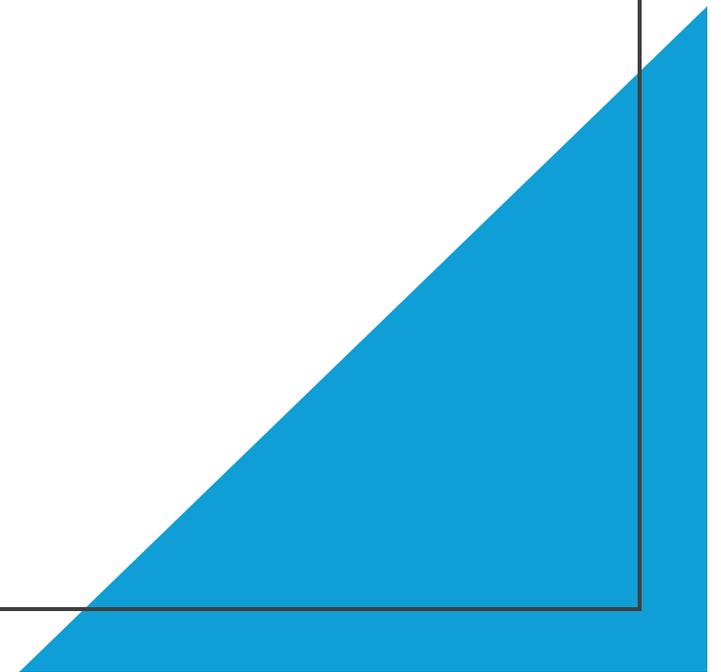




Two Questions

1. How did the Whiz get a face and start being used as a promotional tool?
2. Is it working?

**How did it get
a face?**





Robots in retail: Rolling out the Whiz

Aric Rindfleisch¹ · Nobuyuki Fukawa² · Naoto Onzo³

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Abstract

Robots are increasingly being employed in retail settings to accomplish a wide variety of tasks. In the years ahead, it is expected that most retailers will employ robots in some capacity and that these robots will alter the role of employees and change the nature of customer experience. However, since this revolution is in its early stages, scholarship in this domain is largely forward looking in nature and focused on the future rather than the present. Our research seeks to enrich and extend this literature by examining a recent robot deployment (i.e., the Whiz) across a large Japanese retail chain (i.e., Daiei). Specifically, we report an interview with executives from both Daiei as well as Softbank Robotics (the manufacturer of the Whiz). This interview touches upon a number of interesting topics including, how this robot is currently being deployed, how employees and customers are responding to this robot, and how it impacts store operations and retailer performance. We then reflect upon this interview to offer a set of future research directions. Our article is also accompanied by a commentary by Guha and Grewal (2022, in this issue) that offers additional insights into robots in retail.



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*「Whiz」販売台数。Grand View Research社調べ。2022年4月30日時点





The Motive

“The Whiz was introduced due to increased interest in hygiene management of our facilities following COVID-19. Due to limited staff, our stores needed help with cleaning and sterilization. This is where the robot became useful.”



The Response

“It proved to be an indispensable ally and attracted curiosity. In addition to being an effective cleaning system, we believe that the unique appearance of the Whiz has a futuristic vibe. We also found that the robot received a great deal of positive feedback from our customers and employees.”



The Reaction

“My department was asked if we could use the robot for sales promotions as well. Thus, we are checking what kind of posts about the robot appear on social networking sites, and after seeing some customer postings, our stores started decorating their cleaning robots”



The Promotion

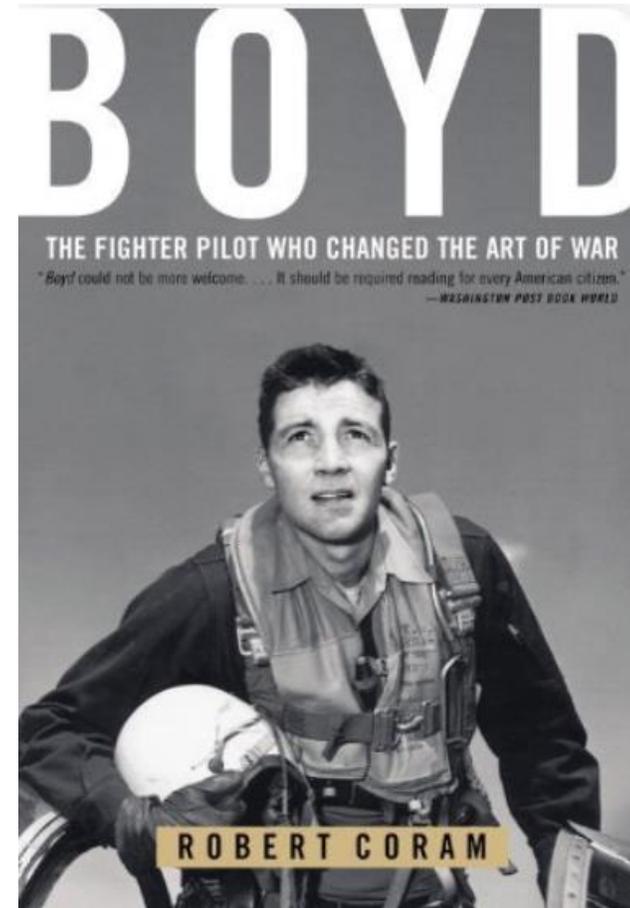
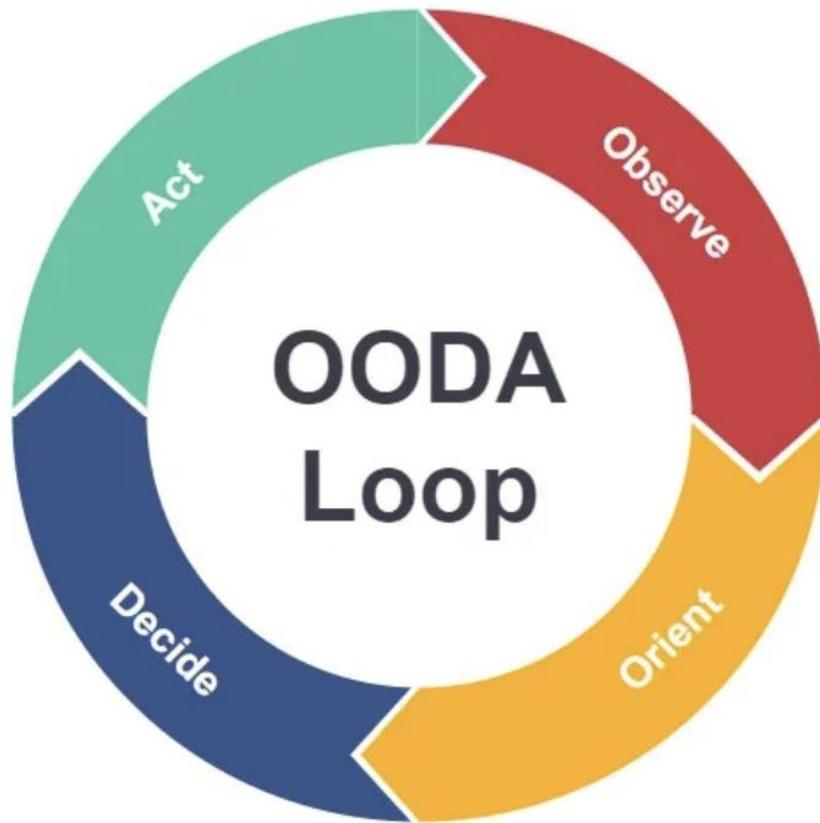
“We experimented several times with sales promotions. One of the first trials was a promotion of Japanese-style confectioneries. We displayed these confectionaries on the sales floor, as well as on the robots via POPs.”



The Face

“The store staff felt the robots were like characters. Our company’s mascot is “Mokkun.” So we tried to apply that to the Whiz by giving it a wide face with eyes, a nose, and a mouth.”

The OODA Loop



OODA Loop

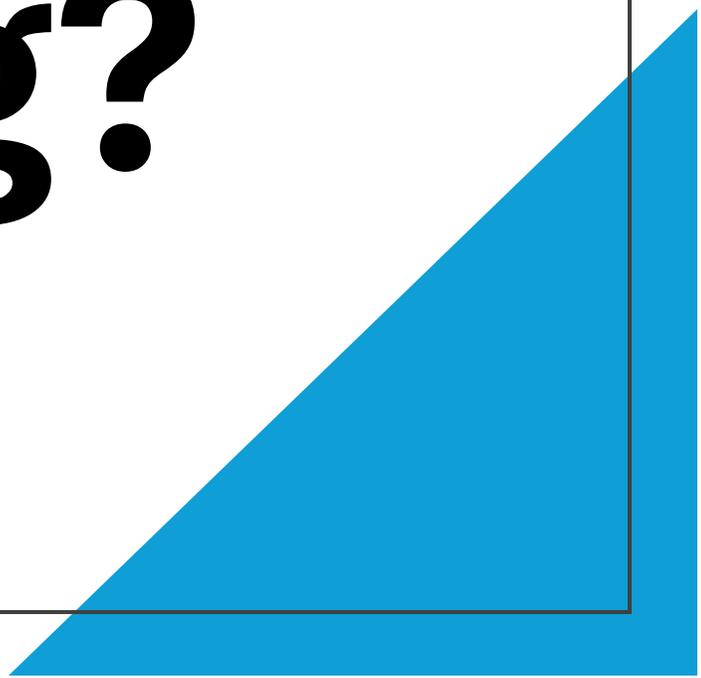
Observe: Noticed that customers like the Whiz.

Orient: Pivot the Whiz to an alternative use.

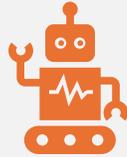
Decide: Chose to turn the Whiz into a promotional device.

Act: Added a sign, basket, and face.

Is it working?



Our Findings



The Whiz is viewed as a Robot not a Human.



The addition of a face makes the Whiz seem cuter and warmer.



The addition of a face is positively related with positive attitudes and behaviors towards the promoted product.

Field Study

Method: Field experiment across 8 stores of a retail chain across four weeks. Each store had either a face, no face or control condition. The robot promoted French Onion Soup.

Key Findings:

1. Daily sales were higher in the face condition (8.9) than in no face (7.9) or control condition (6.7).
2. Results are robust when controlling for number of customers and robot operating hours.
3. Examined the sales of two non-promoted products and found no significant differences across these stores.



Field Study

Daily sales of our target product vs. comparison products



Condition	French Onion Soup	Ramen Noodle	Coke
Face	8.90	1.60	2.59
No-face	7.94	1.70	3.44
Control	6.70	1.49	3.31

Sales of the target product are significantly different between the control condition ($M = 6.70$) vs face condition ($M = 8.90$) ($F(1, 149) = 4.35, p = .04, \eta^2 = .028$). No differences in sales are observed between control condition ($M = 6.70$) vs no-face condition ($M = 7.94$) ($F(1, 149) = 1.346, p = .25, \eta^2 = .0098$).

Takeaways

1. Robots can be a useful tool for marketers.
2. Small changes can make a big difference.
3. The OODA Loop may be an effective way to enact change during turbulent times.

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Thank you!
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