Hot Clicks: Google's AI Can Schedule Your Hair Cut

Rounding up IT and advanced tech-related news impacting government and industry.
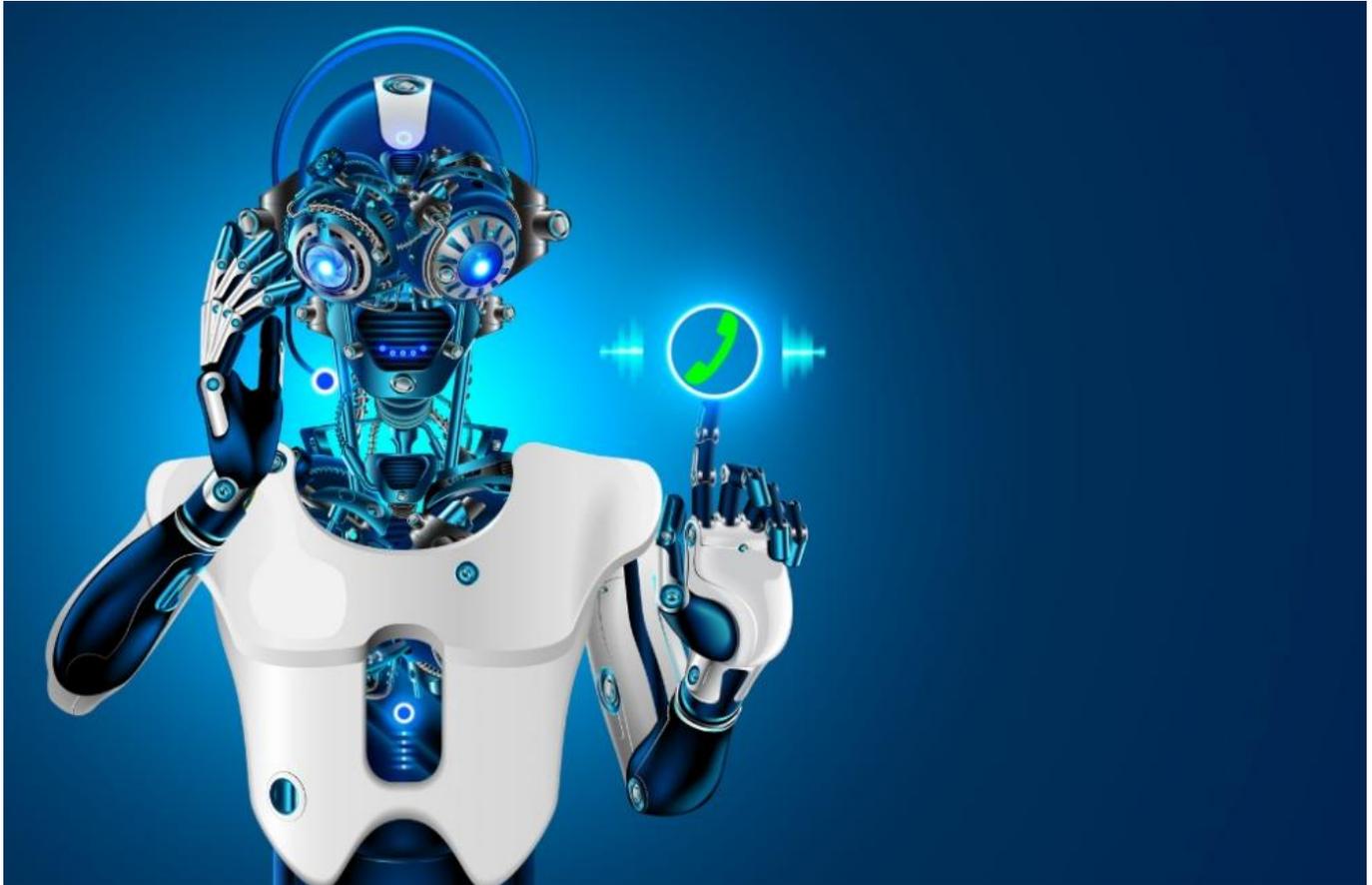
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Illustration: Andrey Suslov/iStock

And sound just like a human while doing it. At Google's I/O 2018 conference, company CEO Sundar Pichai presented Google Assistant's newest feature: it can make phone calls on your behalf. On stage, he played the recording of a phone call placed by the assistant to a hair salon to schedule an appointment on a specific day, within a specific time slot. And the voice sounded completely natural and realistic, even adding "mm-hmms" and "uhms."

It's called Google Duplex, and Pichai said the assistant can understand the nuances

of conversation. It's something Google has been working on for many years, and while it seems like superadvanced artificial intelligence (Pichai said it can react intelligently even during an unexpected conversation), it's still under development.

Google will conduct more testing of Duplex this summer to help users with specific tasks, like make restaurant reservations and schedule salon appointments. Ultimately, Google wants to add to its capabilities — but the company wants to be transparent about how the voice is used. [The Verge](#)

Connected Airplanes Face Cyberattacks

Commercial planes are becoming more and more connected to the internet of things, and just like all things with a network, they run the risk of cyberthreats. In fact, there has already been hacks of aircraft and aviation systems, like in-flight entertainment systems, data communications between pilots and ground controllers, and airline operation systems.

Alan Pellegrini, president and CEO of Thales USA, said a hack in Europe once even caused flight cancellations. And the safety risk is rising, largely because of the increase in device connectivity, the aviation industry quickly changing the way aircraft systems are connected to ground systems, and in time, the use of satellites for navigation with next-generation air traffic control.

Safety features around flight control systems are "robust," according to Pellegrini, but they're not perfect, and there's room for improvement. But it'll take industry and government working together to fully combat aircraft cyberthreats. [Aviation Today](#)

Is Your Siri Responding to Hidden Commands?

University lab researchers in the U.S. and China figured out how to send hidden commands to Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa and Google's Assistant, and humans can't hear them. Specifically, they've secretly activated the artificial intelligence systems on smartphones and speakers to make phone calls, turn on airplane mode and open websites. They did this by hiding the commands in white noise played over loudspeakers and through YouTube videos, and by embedding commands directly into recordings of music or spoken text.

So, while we hear music, Alexa hears instructions the listener didn't provide. There's no evidence these tactics have left the lab, but could it be used to secretly add something to your shopping cart or unlock doors? It's a great example of how advances in AI can be manipulated.

Researchers are making small changes to audio files to cancel out the sound the AI was supposed to hear, and replace it with a sound that can be transcribed differently by the machine while being undetectable to humans. Who knew audio attacks were the next threat? [New York Times](#)

Your Jacket Can Tell You Where Your Uber Is

Google's smart jacket, that is. The company's smart-fabric jacket platform called Jacquard isn't new, but its ability to connect to Uber and Lyft is. If you happen to own the Levi's Commuter jacket, the update (which will be pushed out next week through the Jacquard apps), allows users to tap a button from the cuff, called the Snap Tag, to work with ride-sharing services. It doesn't call an Uber of Lyft for you, but when a ride is called, the jacket pings the wearer when the ride is 3 minutes out and when it arrives.

The Snap Tag lights up and vibrates to alert the wearer, or the wearer can brush the jacket's smart cuff fabric to hear the information, like status of their ride, via connected headphones.

And there are other new features, too, like tagging your location in a new "Places" mode, and a gesture control that turns noise canceling on and off with certain headphones. [CNet](#)

Elon Musk is at it Again

This time, it's with his Boring Company, which just finished its first 2.7-mile tunnel underneath Los Angeles, getting one step closer to the reality of pods shuttling commuters at superfast speeds underground.

If approved, Musk said the tunnel will start offering free demo rides to the public in a few months, and fares will be less than the price of a bus ticket.

And though Musk originally shared videos of cars using the tunnel underground, he said the tunnels are first and foremost for pedestrians and cyclists. This is pending regulatory approvals, of course, but Musk noted he has received strong support from public officials and regulators. Want a sneak peak? Musk shared a timelapse video of the tunnel on his Instagram account showing a complete ride. [Mashable](#)

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