

# The Future of Artificial Intelligence

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## AI 129 Competition for Talking Avatars Benefits from More Venture Capital Funding



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Here are some of the movers and shakers for talking avatars.

Fix8 is a Los Angeles company that animates your expressions, letting you communicate over video live via a personalized avatar. It has just raised \$3 million in a first round of venture backing. The funding comes from Vickers Financial Group, a Singapore-based private equity firm. Fix8 had partnered with the Shanghai Media Group to offer something called "AuditionsTV," where audiences can submit fix8 content for insertion into live or taped programming. Fix8 says it will soon launch a mobile edition.

Gizmoz, an Israel-based company that lets you create 3D avatars, has raised \$6.5 million in a second round of venture funding. DoCoMo Capital — a subsidiary of NTT DoCoMo, Japan's largest cell phone operator — led the round, which Gizmoz plans to use for expansion in Asia. ngi capital and previous investors Benchmark Capital and



Freddie McMahon



“My personal ambition is to deliver human-controlled artificial intelligence for the acquisition and application of knowledge on a universal and unifying scale. Reaching this goal would simply change everything.”

A interview about ai can be found at <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/Libertango-Radio/2008/10/16/Freddie-McMahon-talks-about-Human-Controlled-Artificial-Intelligence-for-Immersive-Learning>

Columbia Capital also participated. Gizmoz is also unveiling a new partnership with AOL, which will allow AOL Instant Messaging users to animate their chats with Gizmoz avatars. The company says it has already created animations to illustrate more than 50 trigger words that can be used in a chat, such as “blabla” and “brb”.

Big Stage Entertainment is a new generation digital media company enabling vivid personal projection in online activities. BigStage.com, currently in restricted beta, offers breakthrough technology allowing users to easily create and integrate a life-like 3-D avatar of themselves, called an @ctor, into everything from famous movie scenes, TV shows and video games, to music videos, short video clips, virtual worlds, still images, user-generated content, instant messages, e-mails, social networks and more – instantly. (Refer to AI 56). It has raised \$2.9m funding.

Meez, is another site that lets you play around with customized avatars so that you can escape your real world and dabble in fantasy. It was launched by Sean Ryan, who previously ran the music site, Rhapsody. But Meez wants to let you take your avatar wherever you go, including eventually on cell-phones. It is owned by Donnerwood Media, of San Francisco, which has received \$4.3 million in venture funding from Battery Ventures, Transcosmos Partners, Allen & Co. and other individual investors.

IMVU, is another company that lets you customize your avatar and go off and chat with people in virtual bars and coffeehouses. Ries, 28, co-

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About Me



Freddie McMahon

Logical thought impacts everything we do everyday. My ambition is to help everyone to become faster and smarter at logical thought. This is indeed a grand challenge, but is now close to being realized. The implications are universal and could well be unifying in many areas.

founder of IMVU.com, an avatar-creation and instant-messaging

service that's lined up more than \$8 million in venture funding.

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Union Square Ventures invested in Oddcast, which is a leading provider of flash based avatar services to the marketing community and small and medium businesses. Oddcast uses SitePal which is a speaking avatar platform to deploy "virtual employees" on websites that can welcome visitors, guide them around the site and answer questions. The use of SitePal on commercial websites has been controversial because many visitors report finding them annoying. Some research has shown that they can increase sales in comparison to using static photographs.

Posted by Freddie at 06:14 

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