

WILL KNIGHT

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OpenAI's CEO Says the Age of Giant AI Models Is Already Over

Sam Altman says the research strategy that birthed ChatGPT is played out and future strides in artificial intelligence will require new ideas.

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...is played out, it's unclear exactly where

OpenAI has delivered a series of impressive language in recent years by taking existing and scaling them up to previously unimagined sizes. It was likely trained using trillions of words of data and computer chips. The process cost over \$100

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But the company's CEO, Sam Altman, says further progress will not come from making models bigger. "I think we're at the end of the era where it's going to be these, like, giant, giant models," he told an audience at an event held at MIT late last week. "We'll make them better in other ways."

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Meanwhile, numerous well-funded startups and [Character.AI](#), are throwing enormous resources at developing new algorithms in an effort to catch up with OpenAI. The new GPT-4o ChatGPT was based on a slightly upgraded version of GPT-4o, but it also access a version powered by the more powerful GPT-4o.

Altman's statement suggests that GPT-4 could be the end of the road for OpenAI's strategy of making the model bigger and bigger. He did not say what kind of research or technology will take its place. In the [paper describing GPT-4](#), OpenAI noted the diminishing returns on scaling up model size, and the physical limits to how many data centers the company can build them.

Nick Frosst, a cofounder at Cohere who previously worked at OpenAI, says that

Altman's feeling that going bigger will not work indefinitely rings true. He, too, believes that progress on transformers, the type of machine learning model at the heart of GPT-4 and its rivals, lies beyond scaling. "There are lots of ways of making transformers way, way better and more useful, and lots of them don't involve adding parameters to the model," he says. Frosst says that new AI model

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text.

The first of these language models, GPT-2, was released in February 2019. In that form, it had 1.5 billion parameters, a measure of the number of connections between its crude artificial neurons.

At the time, that was extremely large compared to other models. It was part to OpenAI researchers finding that scaling helped models become more coherent. And the company made GPT-2's successor, GPT-3, still bigger, with a whopping 175 billion parameters. It was used to generate poems, emails, and other text that was indistinguishable from human. Research institutions to push their own AI models.

After ChatGPT debuted in November, memory that GPT-4, when it arrived, would be a model of similar complexity. Yet when OpenAI finally announced its new model, the company didn't disclose how big it was. It was no longer all that matters. At the MIT event, Altman said it cost \$100 million; he replied, "It's more than that."

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Although OpenAI is keeping GPT-4's size and inner workings secret, it is likely that some of its intelligence already comes from looking beyond just scale. One possibility is that it used a method called reinforcement learning with human feedback, which was used to enhance ChatGPT. It involves having humans judge

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