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

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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 improving their AI algorithms in an effort to catch up with OpenAI. ChatGPT was based on a slightly upgraded version of GPT-3.5, but users can also access a version powered by the more powerful GPT-4.

Altman's statement suggests that GPT-4 could emerge from OpenAI's strategy of making the most of existing models by adding more data. He did not say what kind of research would take its place. In the [paper describing GPT-4](#), the company notes that diminishing returns on scaling up model size limit the company's ability to build them.

Nick Frosst, a cofounder at Cohere who previously worked at DeepMind, says 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 a massive leap forward; in its original 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 what most companies had at their disposal. OpenAI researchers finding that scale was key to creating a model that was both coherent and capable. And the company made GPT-2's success public, encouraging others to build on it. A year later, the model was even bigger, with a whopping 175 billion parameters, allowing it to generate poems, emails, and other text that could be used by research institutions to push their own AI models forward.

After ChatGPT debuted in November, many people assumed that GPT-4, when it arrived, would be a major improvement in terms of complexity. Yet when OpenAI finally announced the new model, the company didn't disclose how big it was. In fact, it's been longer all that matters. At the MIT event, Altman was asked how much the model cost. He replied, "It's more than that."

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 the quality of generated text and provide feedback to the AI to refine its responses.

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NICK SRNICEK

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## OpenAI CEO Sam Altman: The Age of Giant AI Models Is Already Over

Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, says the company is moving away from large AI models and toward smaller, more specialized ones.

By **MAXWELL ZEFF** | Jan 23, 2026

Photo: Getty Images / iStockphoto

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JASON PARHAM

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LAUREN GOODE

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