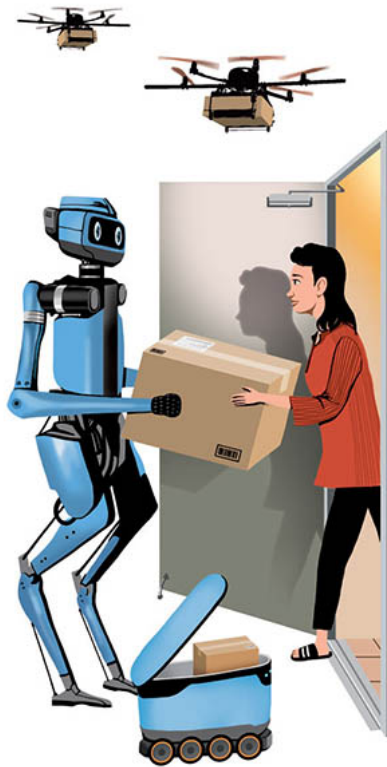


## Coronavirus Accelerates Contactless, Automated World

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The coronavirus and other epidemics have made a "contactless chain" in commerce an increasingly attractive proposition, but speeding up automation also means jobs are getting even scarcer.

Robots, vending machines, self-checkout and all the rest were rapidly catching on in Korea even before the coronavirus epidemic. But where once it was only supposed to save money on wages, it is now also becoming attractive to customers as a way of avoiding infection risks.



Online retailers are inundated with orders but the boom comes with some difficulties -- they do not have enough staff to protect the warehouse workers from infection. One solution is to replace human workers with robots, and manufacturers have been flooded with orders since the outbreak of the epidemic.

Industry insiders said many companies are spending freely on robots but freezing wages and other overheads.

Both businesses and customers prefer contactless delivery. If the current situation continues for a year or two long enough to grow accustomed to automated orders and payments.

Contactless culture is spreading to offices as well, where staff have quickly embraced telecommuting and video conferencing to prevent infection. YouTube recently announced it will have artificial intelligence handle searches for harmful content.

Once work has been ceded to the machines, humans cannot take it back. Businesses will be unwilling to rehire people making huge investments into automated processes, while consumers who have grown used to contactless purchases want to interact with human workers either.

Epidemics have often brought huge lifestyle changes. Cholera prompted cities in the western hemisphere to build modern sewage systems in the 19th century, and coronavirus could accelerate a similar revolution of mighty computer networks to isolate people in a sanitized bubble. But how the millions who will lose their menial jobs, from parking attendants to waitresses, can cope will become one of the most pressing issues of the near future.