

It's Google's turn to ask the questions

Notes & Cues:**Article:**

At Google's annual developer conference this past week, CEO Sundar Pichai played a clip of what seemed to be a mundane human interaction: Someone calling to make an appointment with their hairdresser. The two voices negotiated the date and time, with the "assistant" providing the client's name for the reservation.

But it wasn't two humans conversing. Instead, Pichai said, it was Google's artificial intelligence called Google Duplex making the call to the unwitting hair salon receptionist.

Many observers noted the human-like "ums" Duplex inserted into its speech to cover for the time it needed to generate the appropriate responses. Alex Rudnick, a professor at Carnegie Mellon and director of the university's Speech Consortium, says that technique has been proposed before, but what Duplex did really well was imitating the little conversation cues that humans unconsciously use to signal that information is new or important. Gone was the stilted monotone we typically associate with virtual assistants.

While the Duplex caller is still in the early stages of testing—and Google has said the final product will inform those it calls that they're speaking with a bot—Pichai's on-stage demonstration was a show of force. Problems like booking a restaurant are rather trivial, but it's not hard to imagine scheduling meetings with the assistant or waiting on the phone with a cable company to upgrade services. Instead of voicemail, maybe we'll automatically reach the person's assistant.

Summary: