

Telepresence Robot and Self-Balancing 150 Degree Wide Angle Lens Camera are enhancing the Remote Conferencing, Education and Medicine experience



David Cann
Co-Founder & CEO
Double Robotics Inc.

CEOCFO: What was the concept when you started Double Robotics?

Mr. Cann: I was a telecommuter for years before my co-founder and I started the company. After a few years of working remotely with colleagues, I realized that I was not becoming friends with my co-workers at all. I didn't learn much about them, their families, their birthdays or anything like that. I experienced being disconnected from my co-workers while working remotely and it was disappointing to not be able to build relationships like that. My co-founder, Marc DeVidts, and I saw an opportunity to bridge the gap between remote workers and their colleagues. When the iPad 2 came out, we thought we could make a simple version of a telepresence robot using the new iPad technology. It started out as a way to get telecommuters into the office on a more permanent basis and get more face time with their co-workers.

CEOCFO: What are you offering now?

Mr. Cann: Telecommuting is still our core use case and accounts for eighty percent of the robots we've sold to date. We have also expanded into other verticals like education and healthcare. In education, we've seen great success with homebound students who have a condition or disability, or are receiving cancer treatment, etc. that are still able to attend school via Double. Traditionally, a school would send a tutor to the student's home but, sometimes that ends up being months of time and can be very expensive and isolating for the student. Using Double saves on costs in that way, and the student also get the social aspect of school since they're now able to see and talk to their friends. Another growing market is operations facilities. We've seen that engineers are not able to travel to their company's factory as often as they like or are not able to hire people in different locations around the world, so using Double has been helpful in those situations. The opportunities with telepresence are endless, but the core use case for Double continues to be telecommuting.

CEOCFO: Where is the privacy an issue? Day to day, how does it work for people?

Mr. Cann: We take privacy very seriously so the video connection used in Double client apps is always secure. It's based on the WebRTC video standard, through our third-party service, OpenTok. In regards to how it works, in the first couple of days of using a Double, there is certainly a novelty of having a robot in the office. However, that usually wears off in a few days. Once you get into that mindset and transport your mind into thinking that you are actually at the office, and you go about your daily morning routine of getting dressed, brushing your teeth, etc., you simply log into your robot just as you would walk into the front door to the office and be there all day. Then you may walk off for lunch just as you might go out for lunch. People get used to it. After a few days, it just becomes another person there in the office and they almost forget that there is technology between them.

CEOCFO: What is the set up process?

Mr. Cann: The setup is very simple. If you are able to use an iPad, you are able to set up a Double. You simply attached the iPad head to the robot, plug in the Audio Kit and Camera Kit, and you're ready to roll. We work with IT departments to help integrate Double into their workflow. Many IT departments like that we're iPad-based because they have great mobile device management features and it's oftentimes already integrated within the company. It has been a good partnership with using the iPad for our product.

CEOCFO: There are well known clients on your website. What are a couple examples of how it is used and in what type of office situations?

Mr. Cann: One of our great use cases is at LinkedIn. They started out with one robot for an engineer who was moving a couple states away due to family reasons, yet they wanted to keep him on the team. They were trying to brainstorm ideas

of how to do this and how to have him work remotely and efficiently and thought they would try a Double. Turns out it was a great experience for them. LinkedIn has since rolled out several Doubles to different telecommuters around the states. Now, we are working with their global head of videoconferencing in order to do a large rollout of all of their remote workers and to even potentially grow their remote workforce over time.

CEOCFO: *Have similar products been tried? What is the state of the industry at this point?*

Mr. Cann: We are not the very first telepresence robot out there. When telepresence robots first came out, they were almost experimental in a way and were very expensive to purchase and not easily acceptable by the average business user. We came in at the right time with the right product at the right price point and are proud to be today's market leaders. We found a sweet spot of high quality product, high ROI, but at an affordable price point. The price point has not been an issue for us. Businesses just want to see value coming out of a product and they want to have positive ROI.

CEOCFO: *What has changed, if anything, in the product over time?*

Mr. Cann: Over the last two and a half years since we started shipping, we have been very heavily focused on improving the user experience and improving the driving experience. That said, we've made a handful of product developments in particular so the robot driver can navigate easily, know where they are in the building, and feel comfortable and confident while driving. All of our product developments over the last few years have been a direct result of customer feedback.

CEOCFO: *What specifically is better today?*

Mr. Cann: We just recently released Camera Kit, a new accessory that includes a 150 degree wide angle lens and a 5 megapixel camera. In the previous version, we were relying on the built-in camera of the iPa, which is a vertical frame. The new camera is a nice, wide field of view you can see, so now the driver can see six people at a conference room table instead of just two. This is a huge improvement and is based entirely on user feedback of wanting to be able to see more in the picture.

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CEOCFO: *Do many people try it because your robot is cool and then see it is as really worthwhile or are people understanding the possibilities and the depth of what it offers before they purchase?*

Mr. Cann: Both aspects certainly come into play. We are able to get our foot in the door at many companies because they see our product as wild, crazy and cool, yet at the same time, they can still see the possibilities and how it would be effectively used within their company. It feels like the future at work. I think that is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It can a little bit of a hurdle for us to convince more conservative folks who are not used to the concept of telepresence, but in the end, they do tend to come around and see the different ways it's benefiting their company. It truly is a whole different experience than just working over Slack or chat or even just traditional video conferencing.

CEOCFO: *How are people finding out about Double Robotics?*

Mr. Cann: We have been fortunate to have received a great deal of press over last few years, and we have been featured on a handful of TV shows like Modern Family, The Good Wife, NCIS, and, most recently, The Bachelor. We find that our biggest channel for hearing about new customers is word of mouth. People see these in other people's offices when they visit and it instantly becomes a point of conversation. We offer a very visual product and it has a cool factor that people want to learn more about. That is a big advantage for us.

CEOCFO: *What about the manufacturing and inventory?*

Mr. Cann: We do all final assembly in our offices in Burlingame, California. We have parts made around the world and shipped here for final assembly. We do that for a couple of reasons. The biggest one is it keeps our iteration cycle very tight. If we want to make a change or upgrade, we can roll it in fairly quick, whereas any normal factory environment, you have to take weeks or months to roll in changes like that. It also keeps our cost down in terms of levels of inventory and things like that. We can operate on a very tight schedule and keep the quality very high at the same time.

CEOCFO: *What about customer support should there be issues?*

Mr. Cann: We have a fantastic customer support department and we try to go above and beyond whenever possible. It's a very high quality product so we've seen a very low rate of repairs required. My co-founder and I met on the TV show

“BattleBots” back in 2002. He is now our CTO and head of engineering and continues to be a BattleBots participant to this day. He knows how to build robots that are very robust and protective of the inner workings of the robot. We are very happy with the quality of the product and so are our customers.

CEOCFO: *What happens when you walk into it? Does it knock over?*

Mr. Cann: It bounces right off things. It has an active balancing technology, like that of a Segway, so it will do its best to not tip over even if bumps into something or push it.

CEOCFO: *What surprised you through the whole process?*

Mr. Cann: A big learning experience for us has been working with enterprise companies and learning about the sales process and the time it takes to do roll outs. That has been a new experience for us as we are more product-focused founders than business-focused founders. It has been very interesting to see how business processes function within companies, schools and universities as well. It is great to be able to work with high quality costs and not be forced to make the cheapest possible thing just to get the price point up.

CEOCFO: *What might be different a year from now at Double Robotics?*

Mr. Cann: We are always working to find ways to enhance the user and driver experiences. We are beta testing right now to create enterprise features for companies to manage dozens or hundreds of Doubles in their organization. We are very excited about how telepresence will continue to grow and to hear more amazing stories from our customers.

CEOCFO: *What might people miss when they first look at Double Robotics?*

Mr. Cann: I think one mistake is that people will see it a toy or a luxury rather than a benefit to both the remote worker and his/her colleagues in the office. The biggest complain that remote workers have is that they feel disconnected to their members. And this could have a negative impact on productivity, effectiveness, and overall company culture. Once people have that experience of being in the office through a Double, their entire experience has been transformed. That remote worker can actually be there to engage in everyday office conversation, birthday celebrations, impromptu meetings, etc., and it is a much different experience. I think that is one of those things that you have to experience to understand.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine



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