A.L.I.C.E. AI Foundation

Promoting the adoption and development of A.L.I.C.E. and AIML free software.

P R E S S R E L E A S E

A.L.I.C.E. AI Foundation Site Launched

Will Promote Adoption and Development of
Free Open Source Conversational Agent Software

14 May 2001—San Francisco CA: The A.L.I.C.E. AI Foundation is pleased to announce today the launch of its new web site at www.alicebot.org.

The A.L.I.C.E. AI Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the adoption and development of the A.L.I.C.E. and AIML technologies.

A.L.I.C.E. ("Artificial Linguistic Internet Computer Entity") is a free open source software package that implements a sophisticated, completely customizable conversational agent or "chatter bot". AIML ("Artificial Intelligence Markup Language") is an XML-based language used to build the agents. Both technologies were originally developed by Dr. Richard S. Wallace, and released to the public under the GNU General Public License (GNU GPL) in 1995. Since that time, more than 300 developers around the world have contributed to the development of the software, which is now in its fourth major version.

A.L.I.C.E./AIML conversational agents have numerous applications in e-business, e-commerce, customer service, education, and entertainment. They converse in natural language, and carry on seemingly human conversations, completely changing the nature of the web experience.

Unlike similar commercial products that typically cost thousands, tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of US dollars, A.L.I.C.E. and its source code are in the public domain—available free of charge to developers as well as commercial users. Just like Linux, Perl, Samba, and over 140 other software packages in use today, A.L.I.C.E. is released under the GNU GPL, guaranteeing that the software and any derivations of it will always remain "free"—in the sense of "liberated", the original intent of the "open source" movement.

Being free open source software makes A.L.I.C.E. more attractive for commercial users not only because of the unbeatable cost differential, but also because it reduces the risk that an implementation will suddenly become "unsupportable" if a vendor withdraws a product or goes out of business.

A growing number of A.L.I.C.E. implementations are available on the web (links are provided at the foundation's site), and some commercial players such as Creditlyonnaise have also chosen A.L.I.C.E. for their bot-based projects.

A.L.I.C.E. "out of the box" includes a large AIML knowledge base containing approximately 30,000 categories (units of knowledge that a bot can speak about). An A.L.I.C.E. bot can literally be up and running within minutes, customized to a "botmaster's" taste simply by editing a small set of bot properties that includes its name, age, and other characteristics. Further customization can be done with the help of freely available editing tools. Also, a growing number of companies are also offering A.L.I.C.E./AIML implementation services.

Wallace, who co-founded the Foundation along with three other individuals, chairs the organization's Board of Trustees. He explained, "We are attempting to follow the course set by other free software nonprofits such as the Free Software Foundation, the Apache Foundation and the recently formed Python Foundation. Our main objective is to promote the adoption of the software, while making it available to all commercial players on an equal basis. We would also like to fund ongoing research and development through the Foundation."

Noel Bush, a co-founder and also a member of the Board, was formerly the Vice President of Engineering of Artificial Life, Inc. He stated, "It's very refreshing to work in an open source environment. The pace of development is exciting—just in the past two months I've seen developers from around the world implement at least ten new and fascinating capabilities for A.L.I.C.E. within a matter of days! A new post arrives on the Alicebot mailing list, and—boom—suddenly it turns out A.L.I.C.E. is working with peer-to-peer technologies. You can't beat that kind of a development cycle."

Jon Baer, the lead developer of the most active A.L.I.C.E. development stream, spoke about P2P applications of A.L.I.C.E. in a recent post to the community's mailing list. "The JXTA stuff has made it pretty easy—what happens is alicebot.net would be made as a 'rendezvous' connecting everyone else in the group running the same service (Alice), in which a peer (bot) can either be an individual or act as a rendezvous itself and let people know that it is an Alicebot." In such way, A.L.I.C.E. bots around the world can exchange knowledge with one another and improve their accuracy. Baer has built hooks from A.L.I.C.E. into the open source JXTA project (from Bill Joy and Mike Clary) that makes P2P-enabling applications a snap.

Baer also co-founded the organization and serves on the Board, along with Nika Dubrovsky, a Russian Internet entrepreneur and contemporary artist.

The founding Board is pleased to premiere the new web site using the same domain name as was formerly used by Wallace's venerable alicebot site for several years. Recently the site has seen a dramatic increase in traffic as a result of the exposure from its inclusion on the web site promoting Steven Spielberg's upcoming movie *AI.*

A.L.I.C.E. has also proven itself on the playing field in direct competition with other bots. Last year, A.L.I.C.E. won the Loebner Prize, a competition established by millionaire Hugh Gene Loebner to challenge participants to build a computer program that can imitate a human being in the spirit of mathematician Alan Turing's proposed experiment called "The Imitation Game". A.L.I.C.E. was ranked "most human computer" by a panel of judges including linguists, philosophers, psychologists and writers. This year several AIML (Artificial Intelligence Markup Language) chat robots are expected to enter the competition, to be held at the London Science Museum on October 13, 2001.

The A.L.I.C.E. AI Foundation was recently registered as a non-profit organization in the State of California, and is in the process of filing for registration as a US non-profit. Financial contributions from US companies or individuals may be tax-deductible. Plans are also underway to register divisions of the Foundation on an international basis.

The Foundation gratefully acknowledges the generosity of SunLit Surf Internet Services, who is hosting the new site.

The Foundation encourages everyone interested in this fascinating technology to visit its new site. There are myriad ways to participate in the effort, and all are welcome to join the 300-plus-strong community.

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