

Axios Detroit

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1 big thing: Robotics showcase invades downtown

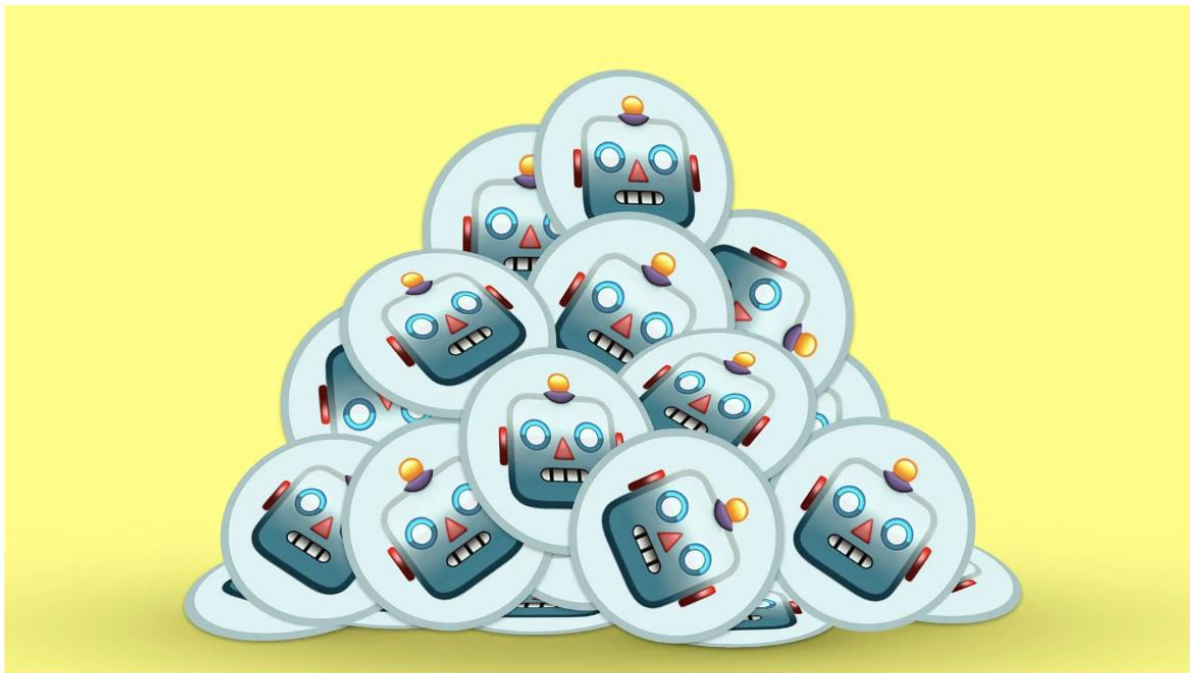


Illustration: Natalie Peeples/Axios

The future of [robotics, manufacturing and artificial intelligence](#) is downtown this week.

Why it matters: Fast-paced technological innovations, [the AI explosion](#) and an ongoing labor shortage are driving interest in the growing robotics industry, which includes several in-state companies.

- More than 25,000 registered for this week's [Automate conference](#) at Huntington Place, North America's [largest robotics and automation](#) event.
- The showroom floor was packed yesterday with hundreds of exhibitors showing off their products in action.

State of play: Arm-like robots that pick up and move items — sometimes called articulating robots — were plentiful.

- [Mujin](#)'s precision picker swooped toward a tote carrying screws with a swift and smooth motion. Its pinchers gently picked them up one at a time and placed each inside a separate container.
- Another company, Norton Shores-based [Smart Vision Lights](#), unveiled its new hidden strobe technology — lighting that strobos up to 4,000 times per second without appearing to flash. The company says the innovation achieves the heightened brightness of strobe lighting without the headache-inducing flickering.

Between the lines: Robots used for manufacturing are often characterized as job killers. Companies at Automate countered that by citing [low unemployment](#) and workforce needs.

- Robots can specialize in work that humans dislike — tasks that are [dirty, dull or dangerous](#).

Of note: The conference also has robotics-adjacent panels and speakers discussing technology topics such as ChatGPT and space exploration.

- Gregory Robinson, former director of NASA's [James Webb Telescope project](#), described the telescope's development and launch.
- He was asked if he believes in extraterrestrial life during the Q&A portion and responded, "The probability is in that favor, I would say hands-down."

What's next: Today's keynote speaker is Michigan State men's basketball coach [Tom Izzo](#), who's expected to talk about applying leadership and teamwork principles to automation.

- Registration for the rest of the conference is open until 3pm Thursday.