

Startup Keen Technologies raises \$20M to advance controversial AGI

Article

The news: Leading software engineer and video game developer **John Carmack**, who served as **Meta's Oculus** CTO, has launched startup **Keen Technologies** with the aim to achieve

human-like AI.

- The startup has raised **\$20 million** in a financing round with former **GitHub CEO Nat Friedman**, **Cue** founder **Daniel Gross**, **Stripe CEO Patrick Collison**, **Shopify CEO Tobi Lütke**, and **Sequoia**, among other investors, [per](#) TechCrunch.
- Recently interviewed by **MIT** researcher **Lex Fridman**, Carmack said he believes AI will someday be like a human being or living creature, capable of being a “universal remote worker.”
- **Regarding AI ethics**, he said, “I really stay away from any of those discussions or even really thinking about it,” [per](#) Salon.
- In response to a question about Keen’s mission, Carmack [tweeted](#), “AGI or bust, by way of Mad Science!”
- Keen Technologies is among an estimated 72 projects globally focused on developing human-like AI, or AGI (artificial general intelligence).

A counter movement is brewing: On the flip side of some technologists’ cavalier attitude toward AI advancement is a growing subset of researchers who want to ensure positive social outcomes for AI’s use.

- Researchers at **New York University’s AI Now Institute**, along with other groups, are pushing back on approaching AI development in the spirit of Meta CEO **Mark Zuckerberg’s** mantra, “move fast and break things.”
- AI Now co-director **Meredith Whittaker** [told](#) Time, “How do we make sure you move as slowly as you have to, to get it right. Because the consequences for the rest of us aren’t worth the payout that you’re going to get if you do break things.”

A nuanced issue: AI has already demonstrated that it can have both positive and negative outcomes. As such, efforts to make it match or surpass human intelligence warrant careful consideration.

- AI has shown its prowess in [drug discovery](#) and helped lay the foundation for fast development of COVID-19 vaccines.
- However AI social media algorithms have also [fueled](#) inflammatory content linked to violence. Such content is now being [mimicked](#) by Meta’s AI **BlenderBot 3**.

- Outcomes could also be mixed, with AI helping manufacturers stay afloat during labor shortages while also putting people out of work.
- Meanwhile, face-tracking “earables,” which can read users’ facial expressions, could be helpful for people with social deficits but also breach privacy and cause bias.

Charting a positive course: Despite AI’s rise as a polarizing issue, there’s a potential pathway for companies pushing innovation while not bulldozing over ethical concerns.

- Startups and tech giant subsidiaries developing AI could **establish themselves as public benefit corporations (PBCs) to advance the technology in a way that’s helpful, not harmful.**
- PBC standards require businesses to demonstrate accountability to both their shareholders and the public good.
- This would encourage companies to develop AI with the public’s benefit in mind and show how the technology is working toward that goal and not merely maximizing profits.

Steps that Have Not Been Taken Toward Trustworthy AI at Their Company According to Decision-Makers Worldwide, April 2022

% of respondents

Reducing unintended bias

74%

Tracking performance variations and model drift

68%

Making sure they can explain AI-powered decisions

61%

Developing ethical AI policies

60%

Tracking data provenance, changes in data, and model versions

60%

Guarding against adversarial threats and potential incursions to keep systems healthy

59%

Monitoring AI across cloud and AI environments

55%

Safeguarding data privacy through the entire life cycle

52%

Source: IBM, "Global AI Adoption Index" conducted by Morning Consult, May 19, 2022

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