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## Robotics conference whirs into Hub May 15

Boston Business Journal - May 11, 2007 by [Todd Wallack](#) Journal staff

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RoboBusiness, a four-year-old industry conference, is set to open in Boston May 15, giving dozens of Massachusetts robotics companies a chance to network and show off their wares.

For instance, Black-I Robotics Inc., a Tyngsboro startup, plans to debut a new line of robots Tuesday called the LandShark -- a six-wheel, 2.5-foot vehicle designed for everything from disabling bombs in Iraq to taking environmental readings in the wake of toxic spills.

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Two other Massachusetts companies, **Foster-Miller Inc.**, in Waltham and **iRobot Corp.** (Nasdaq: IRBT) in Burlington, already make robots used by the military. But Black-I CEO Brian Hart, who gained national attention when he pushed for better armor to protect U.S. soldiers after his son was killed in Iraq, said Black-I robots will be less expensive and have different uses than the Foster-Miller and iRobot machines.

"They are complementary," Hart said. "You wouldn't replace a hammer with a screwdriver."

The conference, held in Pittsburgh last year, is also an opportunity for the Bay State to crow about its robotics cluster, which includes more

than 150 companies and at least 1,500 employees.

iRobot, one of the convention's main corporate sponsors, may be the best known robotics company in the country because of its line of household robots. Including its other robots, the company said, it took in \$39 million in the first quarter but continued to lose money as it spends millions of dollars a quarter on marketing and research.

Foster-Miller, another RoboBusiness sponsor that has more than \$100 million in annual sales, recently purchased two small Pittsburgh robotics companies, **Automatika Inc.** and **Applied Perception Inc.**, for \$9.2 million. Foster-Miller is a unit of QinetiQ Group PLC, a British company.

Separately, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Falmouth has helped pioneer the field of underwater robotics. And a number of academic institutions, including the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology**, **Boston University**, **Tufts University**, **Brandeis University** and the **University of Massachusetts** have courses or research programs that include robotics.

The conference, which is expected to draw 1,200 attendees to the Hynes Convention Center, is being organized by Robotics Trends of Upton and IDG World Expo, a unit of **International Data Group** in Boston. Unlike some other robotics conferences, RoboBusiness is focused on business development, rather than consumer products or academic research, said Dan Kara of Robotics Trends.

Speakers will include Claude Bolton, a high-ranking **U.S. Army** procurement official, and Massachusetts Lt. Gov Tim Murray. The Robot Hall of Fame, based at **Carnegie Mellon University**, is also slated to announce the latest inductees at the conference.

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