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Getting back to basics

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(11/01/2004 9:00 AM EST)

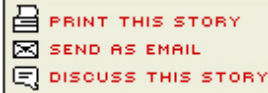
The only overseas branch of Sony Corp.'s Computer Science Laboratories is clearly going against the grain. As more European electronics companies' R&D groups come under pressure to invest in applied-technology development rather than basic research, the mission of Sony CSL in Paris is to do good science before considering the corporation's bottom line.

Founded in 1996, the Paris branch of Sony CSL focuses heavily on basic research in the arts and language. Nevertheless, some of its results have already shown up in Sony's product line, including the user interface technologies in Sony's Vaio computers and mobile camera phones, said Mario Tokoro, president and founder of Sony Computer Science Laboratories Inc.

In addition, a technology developed at the lab that allows the expression of emotion in a synthetic voice has been implemented in Sony's robot Qrio, said Pierre-Yves **Oudeyer**, associate researcher at Sony CSL. Basic clicker-training techniques, whose software was also developed in Paris, are used in Sony's robotic dog, Aibo.

"I find more than a few research results that can be adopted in Sony's products, given a nudge in the right direction," said Tokoro, who strives to balance science and engineering. A big believer in the inspirational effect of engineers and scientists working together, Tokoro noted, "Of course, it's in our interest to contribute our research results to Sony's products."

But doing so is not the only value, or even a priority, for the fundamental research at Tokoro's labs. When asked about criteria for choosing research topics, Tokoro said, "Our priority is to search for new fields where Sony can excel in the future, while getting engaged in top-notch, advanced research



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projects that can be globally recognized, which we believe in return helps improve Sony's brand value."

Sony Computer Science Laboratories in Tokyo has only 25 re-searchers, while Sony CSL Paris has seven full-time researchers and an equivalent number of research assistants and PhD students funded by universities. "We want only a selective team of the very best, world-renowned scientists, so that more talented researchers can be drawn to our labs," Tokoro said.

"Our job is to grow apples and polish apples," said lab director Luc Steels. "You can't expect the trees to take their apples to market."




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