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7 November 2013 Last updated at 02:32 GMT

Build-your-own toy robot construction kits unveiled

A US company has unveiled build-your-own toy robots that can drive, wiggle and react to the world around them.

The modular system, called Moss, uses magnetic balls as joints and hinges, has no external wires, and works without the user having to write any computer code.

By attaching a Bluetooth module, players can control the robots remotely using a smartphone or tablet.

The system has been developed by Modular Robotics in Boulder, Colorado.

The company launched the toys on crowdfunding website Kickstarter.

But chief executive and design director Eric Schweikardt told the BBC: "We're already making Moss so we don't need the Kickstarter funding. But in 2013, it seems like the place where people look for cool new tech products."

The final version of the robot kits would "begin shipping in January or February", he said.

"We're at the very beginning of an exciting time for consumer robotics."

Hod Lipson, professor of engineering at Cornell University, New York State, said: "Modular robotics have been around for decades, and we've always believed they could be cheap, robust and versatile. In practice, they've proved to be expensive and fragile.

"Modular Robotics is one of the first companies putting in the effort to mass-produce these things."

He believes such toys could help make robotics accessible to young children and interest them in engineering from a young age.

Although he used to teach Mr Schweikardt, Prof Lipson stressed that he had no financial interest in the company.

In October, scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology showed off cube-shaped robots that can flip, jump and assemble themselves into different shapes.

The small robots, known as M-Blocks, have no external parts but can move using an internal flywheel mechanism and stick together using magnets.

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