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How Octopus Robots repositioned itself towards building disinfection in front of Covid-19

To help combat Covid-19, livestock sanitation robot manufacturer Octopus Robots has returned to disinfecting buildings, which it abandoned due to a lack of market six years ago. It has teamed up with cleaning specialist Fybots to offer a new solution.

It all (re)originated from [a tweet](#). On March 20, the company Octopus Robots (Maine-et-Loire, France), known for its solutions for sanitizing chicken farms, posted a video showing its robot disinfector wandering around the shelves of a supermarket. The image might have seemed banal, so much so that since the beginning of the Covid-19 epidemic, this type of robot has been proliferating. However, it was reminiscent of Octopus Robot's position as a forerunner, which in 2014 took the gamble of designing a robot dedicated to the aerial disinfection of building surfaces, from factories to airports.

This positioning could have given the young company a wide lead... if it had not reoriented itself in the meantime. "Our initial project was indeed to make an aerial surface disinfection robot adapted to establishments receiving the public, such as airports, factories or supermarkets," relates Bertrand Vergne, the new managing director of the company with a dozen employees. But the project didn't find its market and we redirected ourselves towards poultry farming, where the need existed".

A return to basics, in partnership

It is only since the crisis that interest has woken up and Octopus has quickly returned to its first target market. Focusing mainly on its disinfectant diffusion module, which it plans to market on its own robot and in partnership. The specialist in robotic industrial cleaning solutions, Fybots, based in the Yvelines region of France, has thus started integrating Octopus diffusion devices to enhance its decontamination robots, which it plans to deliver starting in August.

"Soil sweeping and disinfection are more effective together," explains Guillaume Arnoud, Fybots' executive director, "and the robot uses the same cartography for both

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operations, which can take place at the same time or at a different time." No order has yet been signed, but "we have already recorded about twenty pre-orders," assures Guillaume Arnoud, who notes that the demand for automatic cleaning and disinfection of public places and warehouses is strong.

A dry mist of biocidal product

Without leaving the farm, Octopus wants to take advantage of the new awareness of epidemic risks to add a string to its bow. This is good news for the company, whose technologies for livestock farms are struggling to mature because of their difficulty in coping with the harsh environment of poultry houses.

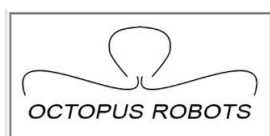
Octopus' experience in thermal fogging, a product diffusion technology, is the key to this strategy. Independent of the robot itself, the Octopus thermal fogging device generates a dry, smoke-like mist of biocidal product consisting of droplets 12 micrometers in diameter. The company says it can be directed to target certain equipment. At an average speed of 20 centimeter per second, the Octopus automaton should be able to disinfect some 2,500 cubic meter per hour.

Broadcasting without damaging electronic equipment or tissue

Thanks to the fineness of its particles, this type of fog remains in suspension, passes everywhere and does not get wet," explains Bertrand Vergne, "which makes it possible to decontaminate every nook and cranny of a room by saturating it with fog without damaging electronic equipment or fabrics". Another advantage: the toxic fog cannot be spread in the presence of humans, but disappears quickly and should allow buildings to be reopened after a few hours, Octopus assures. The company, which employs about ten people, claims to have considered "about a hundred" biocidal products to select two of them: hydrogen peroxide and chlorine dioxide, which can be used according to the needs and constraints of each.

In order to guarantee the efficiency of their solution to industrials, Octopus Robots is now looking to validate in laboratory different protocols (depending on the products used and their concentration) of surface disinfection by air. A sesame difficult to obtain but which would allow Octopus and Fybots to take a good start in the emerging but already competitive market of robotic disinfection of public places. In France, Shark Robotics, a specialist in security robots, has joined "Vendéen" forces with MG-Tech to offer its own remote-controlled decontamination solution. It remains to be seen whether this time the offer will really find its demand.

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