

Chinese tech giant Baidu just released its answer to ChatGPT

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The inevitable comparison to GPT-4

With the fresh release of GPT-4, it's no surprise that people are looking to compare the two. But it's difficult to do so. Both companies are guarded about the technical details of their chatbots.

[GPT-4 is bigger and better than ChatGPT—but OpenAI won't say why](#)

We got a first look at the much-anticipated big new language model from OpenAI. But this time how it works is even more deeply under wraps.

[Like OpenAI](#), Baidu also decided to not reveal how many parameters there are in the latest version of Ernie. The number of parameters in a model is usually seen as an indicator of how powerful it is. Figures are available for their last-generation products: OpenAI's GPT-3, released in June 2020, had 175 billion parameters, and Baidu's Ernie 3.0 Titan, [released](#) in December 2021, had 260 billion parameters.

Although Ernie Bot can't analyze images like GPT-4, it does offer more output options. In the presentation, the chatbot read out the text answer in Sichuanese, a popular dialect spoken in southwestern China. Li also said the model can generate audio in other varieties of Chinese, like Cantonese, Hokkien, and the Dongbei dialect.

The quality of the answers it provides might be another matter. In a livestream after the launch, [X.Pin](#), a Chinese tech publication, asked both Ernie Bot and GPT-4 some of the same questions in Chinese. While the Baidu technology could answer most questions coherently, it made more mistakes. It had trouble correctly answering trivia questions about Chinese history, remembering the context in which questions were posed, and generating code to make a mini game. The reviewers were also unable to test out the video generation ability. Ernie Bot refused to do so, saying it needed some time to edit and process the data.

Rushing it out for business partners

Earlier this week, the Wall Street Journal [reported](#) that to get Ernie Bot ready for the big launch, Baidu asked employees to work through public holidays, hired additional contractors to review the bot's answers, and pooled resources like Nvidia's A100 computing chips from other AI teams at the company.

Since then, there have been other hints that the chatbot was not ready for wide deployment. Baidu had previously said that Ernie would be integrated into many of the company's products, including self-driving vehicles and the flagship search engine. But the product release featured none of those applications or explanations of how such integration would work.

Many observers were disappointed that the release event used only pre-recorded videos of interactions with the chatbot, which can be easily filtered and edited. It was also pointed out that many of the multimodal functions showcased on Thursday can already be achieved with Baidu's current AI tools, like the image-making AI from 2022 or a video editing tool it released [in 2020](#), so the innovation is more about integrating them into one more accessible interface.

While Baidu has developed different kinds of AI models for years, Ernie Bot looks more like a way to package the company's existing capabilities for business users to adopt more easily.

And it's clear that enterprise clients, instead of the general public, were the main target of this launch event. "Ernie Bot won't just impact search engines and internet companies. It will impact every single company," Li said during his presentation. "It will shorten the distance between every company and their customers."

According to Baidu, 650 companies had signed up before Ernie Bot's launch to use the technology, and more than 30,000 others have applied for the API access since the launch event. Previous news reporting suggests the companies interested in using the chatbot include the computer maker Lenovo, the travel portal Trip.com, and several Chinese automotive companies. While there's currently no indication of what these partnerships may look like, we'll likely find out more as Baidu rolls out the API in the coming months.