

Breaking the AI Accessibility Barrier: Ant Group's Vision for its Bailing Foundation Model

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In brief

Ant Group's Bailing foundation model is designed to make AI technology accessible to a broad audience, reflecting the company's belief that AI should be for everyone.

In the ever-changing field of artificial intelligence (AI) with heavyweight players such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, Alibaba's Tongyi Qianwen, or Baidu's Ernie Bot, Ant Group is taking notable strides with its Bailing foundation model, aiming to make AI technology more accessible for a broader audience.

Image: Zhengyu He, Chief Technology Officer of Ant Group

"At Ant, we believe AI, along with other technologies we develop, should be for everyone." Zhengyu He, the Chief Technology Officer of Ant Group, highlighted the company's commitment to inclusivity in technology during his speech at the Fortune Development Forum in Hong Kong on March 27, 2024. He said that ensuring the accessibility of AI-powered solutions is a cornerstone of Ant Group's strategy.

The Bailing foundation model, approved by the government in November 2023 for public release, has already shown impressive applications in the company's large-scale use cases. During the 2024 Chinese New Year, Ant utilized Bailing to create a generative AI feature that allowed Alipay users to feature themselves in classic movies as their beloved characters. This feature received over 600 million visits in just 12 days, showing the potential of integrating foundational AI models in engaging and new ways.

Image: Alipay's AI Theatre allows users to play as key characters in iconic scenes from classic films - one of the generative AI features offered to the public via the Alipay app during the 2024 Chinese New Year, attracting over 600 million visits in just 12 days.

Ant Group's success in deploying AI on such a large scale can be attributed to its strong technological infrastructure, which supports digital payment services for one billion consumers and 80 million merchants in China. The smooth operation of Alipay's AI-powered New Year campaign is a testament to the company's capability to handle massive digital engagements without hiccups.

Security and safety remain important as Ant Group expands its AI offerings. "We started from payment and we deal with people's money, so safety and security are in our DNA," the Ant Group CTO explained that the company conducts rigorous testing of all AI-powered products through its self-developed AI security detection platform, Yitianjian, and also through a technology ethics review process. This approach combines technology with human oversight to ensure the deployment of AI is safe and secure for the public.

Looking ahead, Zhengyu He expresses a cautious yet optimistic view on the development of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). He likens the current state of AI to a teenager, capable of notable tasks yet fundamentally reliant on existing knowledge. "The journey towards AGI is a marathon, not a 100-meter dash. You need to be incremental, you need to keep doing the hard work and keep investing." Before the first AGI arrives, Zhengyu He envisions a future where AI can autonomously generate new knowledge and make new discoveries, marking a notable leap forward for humanity.

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