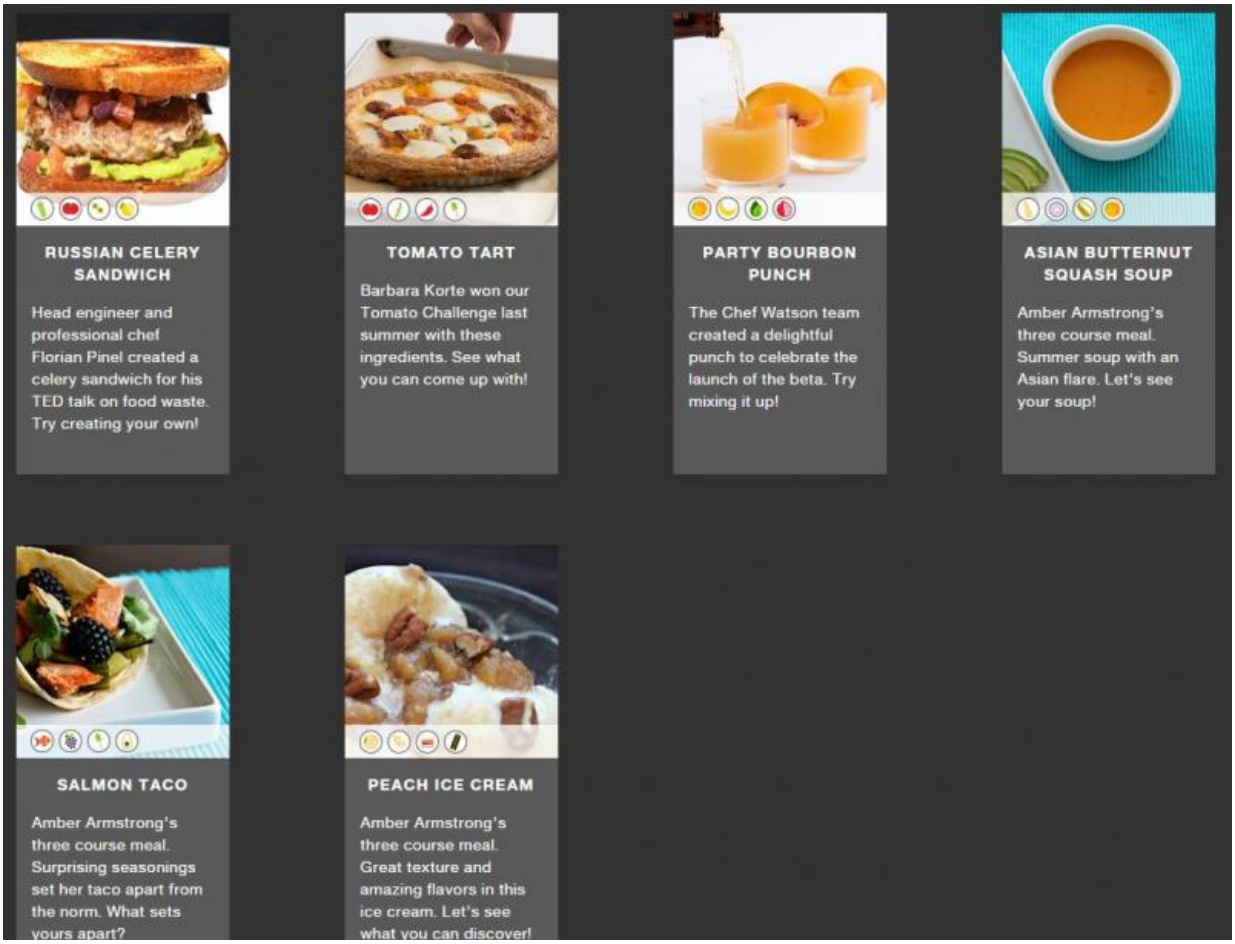
IBM Watson dices, kneads and prompts kitchen cooks

June 23 2015, by Nancy Owano



IBM is on a recognition roll with Watson. From businesses to sports to

medical science, IBM is calling up Watson's muscle in finding patterns and relationships hidden among data and unearthing discoveries via smart machines, in ways that many can appreciate if not adopt. Now the idea of Watson has been applied to the culinary arts.

Kitchen cooks who have always wondered what might happen if they put chocolate sauce in the kale or sprouts in the sherbet or lamb in the oatmeal, leave alone oatmeal in the lamb, may gain more confidence with a new Chef Watson app. It was announced Tuesday by IBM and the publication *Bon Appetit*.

The idea is to demonstrate how the cognitive computing system can "amplify" human creativity in putting together ingredients and preparing food. One can look forward to unexpected flavor combinations and new ideas.

IBM described a process where "people can start to discover new flavor profiles with as little as one ingredient. Based on that input, Chef Watson suggests three other ingredients that it predicts go well together. Chef Watson brings these flavor inspirations a step closer to the table by suggesting dish ideas, ingredient amounts, and preparation steps."

IBM trained Watson to understand (1)10,000 recipes from the Bon Appetit database (2) how ingredients are used in different dishes (3) cooking styles (4) food chemistry and (5) human taste preferences. Added information was integrated from users who participated in the beta. IBM said the app was used by "several thousand accomplished home cooks" to expand Watson's knowledge.

Watson is a cognitive computing capability. The system analyzes data, understands questions posed in natural language, and proposes evidence-based answers. Watson continuously learns from previous interactions. Watson in the kitchen was also prepped to cope with special needs, such

as Celiac disease, allergies or sensitivities to foods like nuts or dairy, or lifestyle choices such as vegetarian or vegan.

Chef Watson helps by allowing cooks to exclude specific ingredients. Stacey C. Rivera, digital director, *Bon Appetit*, said, "From cutting out gluten to limiting the amount of waste in their kitchen, the Chef Watson app proves: If you give cooks a tool to help them be creative in the kitchen, they will be."

The Chef Watson page asks, "Ready to do some cognitive cooking?"

Pictures on that page relay instant recognition that, from sandwich to soup to ice cream, the viewer has an invitation to turn kitchen tasks into creative engineering.

IBM, meanwhile, is making the Watson system known in the medical field with a Watson Health Cloud platform. This unit helps doctors and researchers, via personal health data anonymized, shared and combined with an aggregated view of clinical, research and social health data.

The BBC reported other ways in which Watson is being put to use. IBM is a technology partner during the upcoming Wimbledon tennis championships; also, talks from all previous TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) conferences have been inputted into the machine, allowing users to ask a series of questions based on the topics covered.

More information: www.ibmchefwatson.com/

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