IBM has launched Watson Assistant
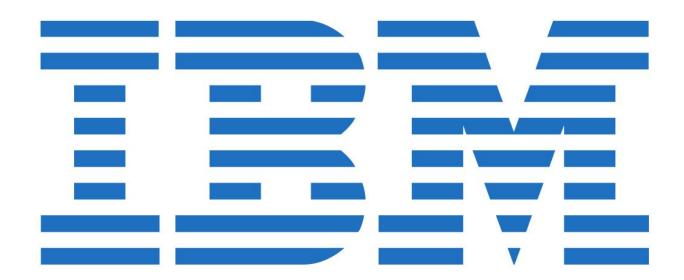
March 21 2018, by Bob Yirka

IBM has officially unveiled its Watson Assistant, a voice recognition and assistant system meant to serve as the back end of customized customer front-end systems. IBM announced at its annual Think conference that Watson Assistant is now available for use by interested customers.

Most people are aware that voice recognition systems have become much more sophisticated in recent years—it is difficult to find a large corporation not using one to field customer calls. At the same time, companies like Amazon, Google and Apple have been continually updating and upgrading their virtual assistants. Now, into this field steps IBM with a plan to allow others to use the widely known Watson as a

back end to their customized front end. The idea is to allow a customer to create an application that interfaces directly with a customer, but then hands off [voice](#) [recognition](#) and assistant duties to Watson Assistant. One such test customer, Munich Airport, has already developed a system that allows customers to interact with airport-based robots by letting them ask for what they need and then giving them information such as flight and gate information or directions on how to get where they need to go.

Though Watson Assistant may offer many if not most of the same features as Google Assistant or Amazon's Alexa, it does so indirectly. IBM has made it clear they have no intention of selling hardware devices to customers—their intention is to sell the power of Watson to companies that have a need for such services but lack the resources or will to build one on their own. Such customers, IBM reps have noted, can choose a different name for their intelligent agent, preserving their bond with their own customers. The system will also be able to learn about customers individually, ala Siri, with data stored on the IBM cloud. IBM has hinted that they expect that Watson will become popular with hospitality application developers.

Watson is very well known, of course, due to its appearance on the TV game show Jeopardy seven years ago, when it beat two human champions. Since that time, Watson has appeared in the news regularly as new customers seek to make use of its top-notch [voice recognition](#) abilities. Watson not only hears a person speaking, but is known for being able to make better sense of what has been said than other such systems.

More information: www.ibm.com/watson/services/conversation/