

# South By Southwest: Secrets, spying, chef Watson

March 11 2014, by Barbara Ortutay

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Edward Snowden talks during a simulcast conversation during the SXSW Interactive Festival on Monday, March 10, 2014, in Austin, Texas. Snowden talked with American Civil Liberties Union's principal technologist Christopher Soghoian, and answered tweeted questions. (Photo by Jack Plunkett/Invision/AP)

FOMO —or the fear of missing out— is a common complaint at the South By Southwest Interactive festival in Austin, Texas each year.

It's here, after all, that "Girls" creator Lena Dunham spoke on Monday at

the same time that NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden gave a teleconferenced talk. All the while, 7-11 trucks handed out free pizza in exchange for a tweet, and IBM showed off the capabilities of cognitive computing in a language anyone could understand: food.

Here's a sampling of what you missed if you weren't able to make the annual geek pilgrimage:

#### — WATSON IN THE KITCHEN

IBM served up a six-course tasting menu and gave out food samples to show off Watson, the computing system best known for winning "Jeopardy" three years ago. What happens when you ask a computer to analyze thousands of recipes and match chemical flavor compounds that are most likely to surprise people—but also taste good? Recipes a human would have never dreamed up, says Carly DeFilippo of the Institute of Culinary Education, whose chefs created the recipes inspired by Watson. Input a region—be that Russia, Kansas or Ecuador—a main ingredient or two and a type of food, such as soup or pie. The output: Creations such as a creamy Czech pork belly moussaka with peas, parsley root, cottage cheese and dill, or Kenyan Brussels sprouts with sweet potato puree, ginger and almonds.

IBM is quick to point out that Watson is not meant to replace chefs. Rather, the project is meant to get people thinking about real-life applications for [cognitive computing](#).

#### — WANT TO KNOW A SECRET?

An app called Secret is no longer hush-hush at South by Southwest. Launched just 40 days ago and especially popular in tech circles, Secret lets people share their deepest and darkest thoughts with the people they know, without their names attached. Co-founder David Byttow is quick

to point out that Secret is not anonymous, per se, nor is it necessarily about sharing secrets.

"The best things I see are not secrets but things that are meaningful," he says. The company set up a special South By Southwest feed of secrets its users are sharing in Austin this week. Here's one: "I used to bring out cocaine to share with people to help make new friends. Now I bring a really big phone charger. #getting old."



Lena Dunham gives a keynote during the SXSW Film Festival on Monday, March 10, 2014, in Austin, Texas. (Photo by Jack Plunkett/Invision/AP)

## — LOW BATTERY

Portable smartphone chargers may well be the event's hottest commodity

this year, as attendees rush from panel to meeting to party and more meetings with little time in between. Jessica Latterman, a marketing director from Washington DC, overnighted a small Anker charger to herself the day before leaving for Austin.

"It's my third time here and it's such a huge bummer when you lose battery life," she says. "It's kind of disrupting to go back to my hotel. I realized I had to do this, it was as if I was out of soap."

Mike Edgell, vice president and creative director at Toronto's 76 Brand Films, described a tangle of cables, battery packs and plates of barbecue ribs at dinner with a group of some 10 people.

"My phone was nearly dead," he says. "Two seats over my colleague offered a charge. It's almost like going back to the time when cell phones had [battery packs](#)."

Edgell thinks the battery problem will be resolved—it has to be.

"If there is any place in the world to present a problem like this, it's to this crowd," he says.

## — STANDING OVATION FOR SNOWDEN

Speaking via Google Hangouts from Moscow, Edward Snowden told a packed audience Monday: "I took an oath to support and defend the Constitution, and I saw that the Constitution was violated on a massive scale." He received a standing ovation after the hour-long talk with the ACLU's Ben Wizner and Christopher Soghoian.

"The most interesting point that was emphasized is that (regardless) of how you feel about what he did, it has improved security," says Kent Larson, principal research scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of

Technology's Media Lab.

For Daniel Miller, CEO of London creative agency Human After All, seeing Snowden talk gave a clearer idea of the man behind the news.

For someone whose "entire life has been destroyed," Snowden could have been "an angry guy shouting, ranting," Miller says. "He had done something very interesting but I had no idea he was an eloquent person, a nice guy, dignified."

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