

Hungry startup uses robots to grab slice of pizza

September 14 2016, by Terence Chea



In this Monday, Aug. 29, 2016 photo, co-founder and CEO, Julia Collins, right, chats with employee Jose Lopez as he makes pizza dough at Zume Pizza in Mountain View, Calif. The startup, which began delivery in April, is using intelligent machines to grab a slice of the multi-billion-dollar pizza delivery market. Zume is one of a growing number of food-tech firms seeking to disrupt the restaurant industry with software and robots that let them cut costs, speed production and improve worker safety. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

Did robots help make your pizza?

If you ordered it from Silicon Valley's Zume Pizza, the answer is yes.

The startup, which began delivery in April, is using intelligent machines to grab a slice of the multibillion-dollar pizza delivery market.

Zume is one of a growing number of food-tech firms seeking to disrupt the restaurant industry with software and robots.

"We're going to eliminate boring, repetitive, dangerous jobs, and we're going to free up people to do things that are higher value," said co-founder Alex Garden, a former Microsoft manager and president of mobile game maker Zynga Studios.

Inside its commercial kitchen in Mountain View, pizza dough travels down a conveyer belt where machines add the sauce, spread it and later carefully slide the uncooked pies into an 800-degree oven.

The startup will soon add robots to prep the dough, add cheese and toppings, take pizzas out of the oven, cut them into slices and box them for delivery.

"We automate those repetitive tasks, so that we can spend more money on higher quality ingredients," said Julia Collins, Zume's CEO and cofounder. "There will always be a model here at Zume where robots and humans work together to create delicious food."



In this Monday, Aug. 29, 2016 photo, Jose Lopez, at left, prepares pizza dough to be place on a conveyor belt and onto an automated sauce dispenser, at right, at Zume Pizza in Mountain View, Calif. The startup, which began delivery in April, is using intelligent machines to grab a slice of the multi-billion-dollar pizza delivery market. Zume is one of a growing number of food-tech firms seeking to disrupt the restaurant industry with software and robots that let them cut costs, speed production and improve worker safety. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

In Silicon Valley and beyond, tech startups are building robots to help reduce labor costs, speed production and improve safety in the restaurant industry.

San Francisco-based Momentum Machines is building robots to make gourmet hamburgers, and BistroBot, another San Francisco startup, has designed a machine that makes sandwiches while customers watch.

"We're trying to automate some of the stations you might find in

restaurants," said co-founder Jay Reppert. "It's quicker, it's cheaper, it's more consistent and it's this really fun experience to share with people."

Robots may be able to produce simple foods such as pizza, burgers and sandwiches, but they won't be taking over restaurants anytime soon because they still struggle with irregular tasks that require [fine motor skills](#), judgment and taste, said Ken Goldberg, who directs the University of California, Berkeley's Automation Lab.

"There are so many jobs in food service that are so complex that it will be a very long time before we have robots doing them," Goldberg said. "I want to reassure restaurant workers that the skills they have are still going to be of value."



In this Monday, Aug. 29, 2016 photo, cook Freedom Carlson, at left, prepares a pizza as it goes through a conveyor belt alongside sous chef Christopher Rongstad, at right, as co-founder and CEO Julia Collins, center, watches at Zume

Pizza in Mountain View, Calif. The startup, which began delivery in April, is using intelligent machines to grab a slice of the multi-billion-dollar pizza delivery market. Zume is one of a growing number of food-tech firms seeking to disrupt the restaurant industry with software and robots that let them cut costs, speed production and improve worker safety. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

Zume's founders say the company doesn't plan to eliminate any of its roughly 50 employees, but move them into new jobs as robots take over more kitchen work and the company opens new locations.

"There's way more work than there's people," Garden said.

Zume also wants to bring innovation to pizza delivery. This fall the startup plans to deploy trucks equipped with 56 ovens that can bake pizzas en route to customers, allowing them to deliver dozens of orders before returning to the kitchen.

The company is trying to shorten delivery times with software to anticipate when and what kind of pizzas customers will order.

Charity Suzuki regularly uses the Zume mobile app to order [pizza](#). She isn't bothered by the robot cooks.

"It's delicious. It's always hot and fresh when it comes," Suzuki said. "I can't tell the difference that it's made by a robot versus a human."



In this Monday, Aug. 29, 2016 photo, a robot places a pizza into an oven at Zume Pizza in Mountain View, Calif. The startup, which began delivery in April, is using intelligent machines to grab a slice of the multi-billion-dollar pizza delivery market. Zume is one of a growing number of food-tech firms seeking to disrupt the restaurant industry with software and robots that let them cut costs, speed production and improve worker safety. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)



In this Monday, Aug. 29, 2016 photo, Noel Lopez, at left, slices a pizza at Zume Pizza in Mountain View, Calif. The startup, which began delivery in April, is using intelligent machines to grab a slice of the multi-billion-dollar pizza delivery market. Zume is one of a growing number of food-tech firms seeking to disrupt the restaurant industry with software and robots that let them cut costs, speed production and improve worker safety. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)



In this Monday, Aug. 29, 2016 photo, CEO and co-founder Julia Collins, left, and co-founder Alex Garden pose for a photo in front of one of the company's delivery trucks at Zume Pizza in Mountain View, Calif. The startup, which began delivery in April, is using intelligent machines to grab a slice of the multi-billion-dollar pizza delivery market. Zume is one of a growing number of food-tech firms seeking to disrupt the restaurant industry with software and robots that let them cut costs, speed production and improve worker safety. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

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