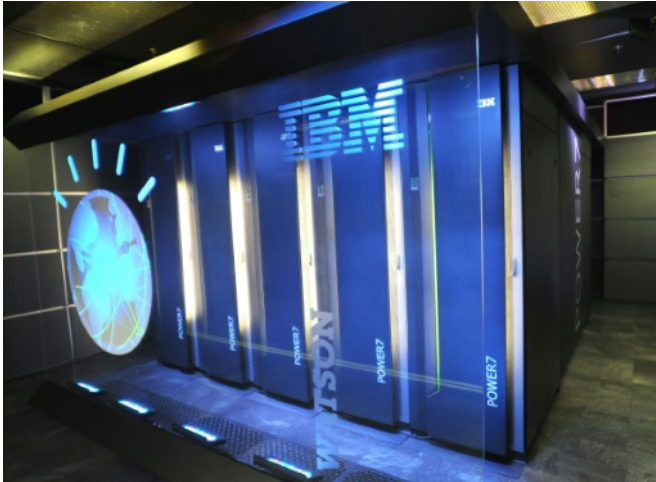


IBM acquires medical imaging firm to help Watson 'see' (Update)

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Watson, pictured here in an undated handout photo, is a work-load optimized system that can answer questions posed in natural language over a nearly unlimited range of knowledge

IBM said Thursday it was boosting the capacity of its Watson supercomputer, acquiring the medical imaging group Merge Healthcare for \$1 billion.

The new group will be integrated into IBM's Watson Health platform, which sifts through vast amounts of research and medical data to help health professionals improve treatment.

"The planned acquisition bolsters IBM's strategy to add rich image analytics with deep learning to the Watson Health platform—in effect, advancing Watson beyond natural language and giving it the ability to 'see,'" IBM said in a statement.

"Medical images are by far the largest and fastest-growing data source in the healthcare industry and perhaps the world. IBM researchers estimate that they account for at least 90 percent of all medical data today—but they also present challenges that need to be addressed."

IBM plans to analyze cross-reference medical images against a deep trove of lab results, electronic health records, genomic tests, clinical studies and other health data—which the company estimates represent 315 billion data points and 90 million unique records.

With the new platform Watson will be able to view medical images of a person at different times to detect changes or abnormalities.

"As Watson evolves, we are tackling more complex and meaningful problems by constantly evaluating bigger and more challenging data sets," IBM vice president John Kelly said.

"Medical images are some of the most complicated data sets imaginable, and there is perhaps no more important area in which researchers can apply machine learning and cognitive computing."

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