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ROBOT SERVES UP PIZZA

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PARIS— For many people, the smell of a pizza fresh from the oven and lovingly crafted is a culinary delight that's hard to beat. But now that handcrafted pizza has a rival: pizza made by robot.



French startup Ekim wants to change and speed up the way pizza is made and served using a pizzaiolo robot that the company hopes to soon install in an autonomous 24/7 restaurant.

The robot's gestures have been programmed to match those of real-life pizzaiolos, or pizza makers, and with three arms it can make several pizzas at the same time.

120 pizzas per hour

"We are not faster than a pizzaiolo as we make a pizza in 4 minutes and 30 seconds because the pizzas are made on demand in front of the customer, we take time to cook them well, to put the ingredients," said Ekim CEO Philippe Goldman.

"But the robot has three arms, can coordinate tasks and make several pizzas at once. So yes, making a pizza takes 4 minutes 30 seconds, but we deliver one pizza every 30 seconds, which allows us to deliver 120 pizzas an hour when a pizzaiolo can only make 40 pizzas an hour," Goldman added.

The idea came from two Ekim engineers who grew tired of eating low-quality fast food when they were still students.

The robot is currently in a showroom outside Paris while Ekim searches for a location to start a pizza-making service, using produce from France and Italy.

Like with a vending machine, the concept would allow customers to order freshly made pizza at any time. Using an automated screen, they can choose from an array of pizzas, including the traditional Margherita and richer four cheese.

"People nowadays have less and less available time to eat, they hardly have 30 minutes to have lunch. Therefore, they have to choose between time and food quality. What we're doing is providing both," Goldman said.

Other restaurants around the world have used food automation to serve up meals, and one in California sees humans and robots making pizzas together.

But for some, a pizza can only be made by human hands.

“A human being is faster, he can tell if the dough is good or not,” Naples-born pizzaiolo Vittorio Monti said as he served up pizza in a Paris restaurant. “If there are any problems, the robot can’t tell, but the pizzaiolo yes.”