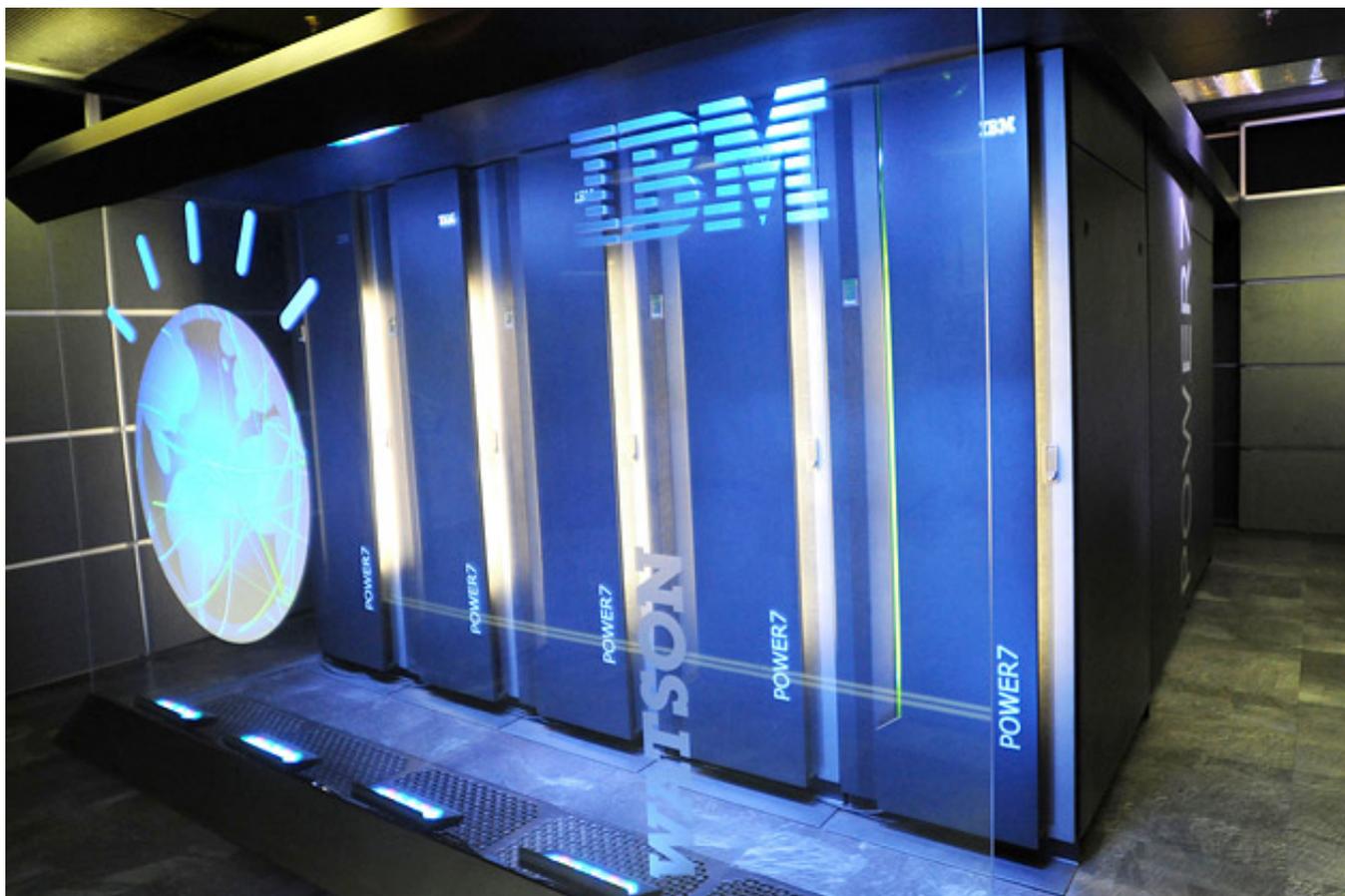


# IBM's Artificial Intelligence Problem, or Why Watson Can't Get a Job

By Drake Bennett | January 10, 2014



Photograph by IBM via AP Photo

The IBM computer system known as Watson

What if we built a super-smart artificial brain and no one cared? IBM ([IBM](#)) is facing that possibility. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the company is having a [hard time](#) making money off of its *Jeopardy*-winning supercomputer, Watson. The company has always claimed that Watson was more than a publicity stunt, that it had revolutionary real-world applications in health care, investing, and other realms. IBM Chief Executive Officer Virginia Rometty has promised that Watson will generate \$10 billion in annual revenue within 10 years, but according to the *Journal*, as of last October Watson was far behind projections, only bringing in \$100 million.

The *Journal* article focuses on difficulties and costs in “training” Watson to master the particulars of various businesses—at the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, at [Citigroup \(C\)](#),

at the health insurer WellPoint ([WLP](#)). But there may also be another issue: the sort of intelligence Watson possesses might not be a particularly good fit for some of the jobs IBM is looking at.

Klaus-Peter Adlassnig is a computer scientist at the Medical University of Vienna and the editor-in-chief of the journal *Artificial Intelligence in Medicine*. The problem with Watson, as he sees it, is that it's essentially a really good search engine that can answer questions posed in natural language. Over time, Watson does learn from its mistakes, but Adlassnig suspects that the sort of knowledge Watson acquires from medical texts and case studies is "very flat and very broad." In a clinical setting, the computer would make for a very thorough but cripplingly literal-minded doctor—not necessarily the most valuable addition to a medical staff. There may well come a day when computers can spit out diagnoses and treatment regimens, leaving doctors little to do but enter data and hone their bedside manner, but that day has not yet come.

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To be useful in real-world medicine today, Adlassnig suggests, IBM would be better served designing tools to help inform doctors' own clinical evaluations. Watson's competition in that niche would be the database PubMed and, of course, Google([GOOG](#)). Neither of the two is going to make anyone feel bad about their *Jeopardy* prowess, but they're a lot cheaper than Watson; they were designed to help people answer questions, not beat them at it.

### **STORY:** [IBM Makes More Money, Selling Less of What People Want](#)



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