

# S.F. Chronicle debuts AI-powered restaurant recommendation bot

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Looking for a great restaurant can be an overwhelming experience.

Want excellent Indian food in San Francisco? Searching for a great coffee shop in Oakland? Internet searches can feel like a firehose of information with impossible-to-verify reviews from anonymous users and ratings that should be taken with a grain — if not a tablespoon — of salt.

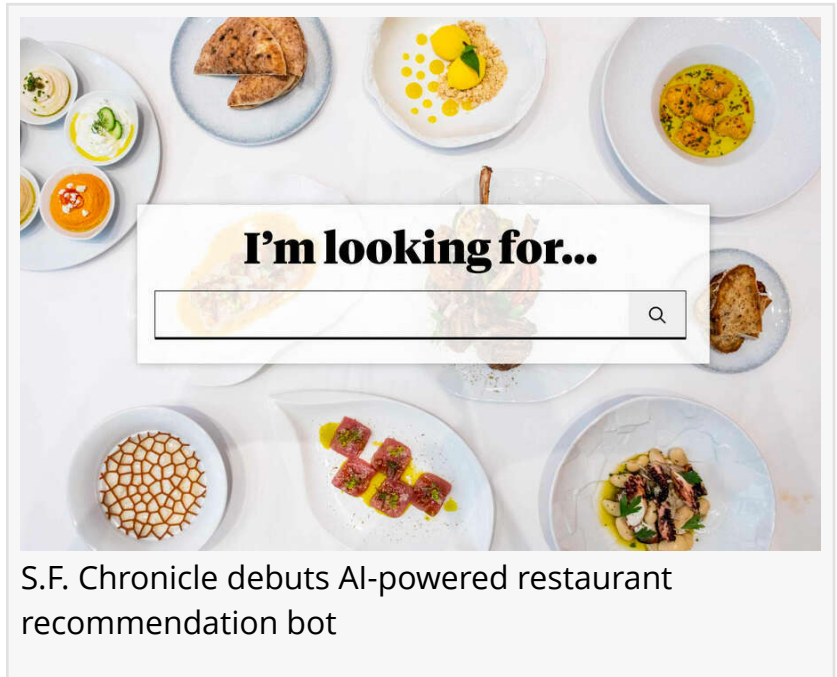
The San Francisco Chronicle has built a new trusted source for Bay Area restaurant suggestions with tips on where to get everything from dim sum to ice cream.

Introducing Chowbot, the Chronicle's new AI-powered restaurant recommendation bot launching this week.

The bot has been built off hundreds of reviews in the Chronicle's Top Restaurant lists, all written and vetted by the organization's experienced food and wine writers and critics.

When users type a query into Chowbot — "I'm looking for ... great pizza in Oakland," for example — the bot will parse all the information in dozens of food guides to offer recommendations, like Square Pie Guys and Hesh's Pizza. And it will cite its sources, so users can go straight to the Chronicle's list of the Top Pizza in the Bay Area and browse more of the writers' favorite slices.

"Our critics have eaten all over the Bay Area and have written up the best in the form of Top Restaurants lists — Top Pizza! Top Brunch! Top Dim Sum! — over the past few years," explains Senior Food + Wine Editor Janelle Bitker. "It's a lot of content for readers to sift through to find exactly what they're looking for. ... The goal is for this bot to make getting a recommendation



easier. And to have some fun!”

Chowbot was built by the HNP DevHub, a team of editorial engineers, data journalists and content strategists who collaborate with reporters and editors at the Chronicle and other Hearst Newspapers newsrooms across the country. Working with the SFChronicle Food + Wine team, the DevHub created a database of 65 guides covering nearly 1,000 restaurants and then spent months working on concepts that allow Chowbot to respond to readers’ prompts in useful ways.

“Our goal was always to make S.F. Chronicle’s dining recommendations and food expertise more accessible through this exciting new technology,” said Tim O’Rourke, Hearst Newspapers’ vice president of content strategy and founder of the DevHub. “Being able to build on top of the team’s exclusive reporting and highly vetted guides made this a logical project to harness the power of generative AI while being cautious in our approach.”

As for the technical side of the project, every query submitted to Chowbot goes on a multistep journey to return an answer to the reader. After passing through a content moderation check, Chowbot runs a query through what is called an embeddings model. That allows it to convert the query in a way that a computer can use to compare its meaning — or vibes — to the vibes of each of the hundreds of restaurants in our database. If a user were to ask Chowbot for pizza places in San Francisco, for example, Italian restaurants would be closer in “vibes” than sushi restaurants would be.

Once Chowbot does this comparison, it selects the three closest restaurants to a query to create a prompt that is passed to a fine-tuned version of the large language model GPT-3.5-Turbo, which powers OpenAI’s free version of ChatGPT. (Want to get even deeper into the weeds? Check out the “How we use AI” section at the bottom of [Chowbot’s page](#).)

Overall, Chowbot’s usefulness will only improve as the Food + Wine team updates and publishes more guides and the generative AI processes improve.

“Ultimately this bot is a reader-friendly tool that I think accentuates the hard work of our team — work that truly can only be done by humans,” Bitker wrote in a Q&A about the new bot. “This bot is trustworthy because of the source material: constantly updated reviews that reflect what it’s actually like to eat out right now.”

To try Chowbot, [click here](#). And for more information on the Chronicle’s AI-powered restaurant recommendation bot, read Bitker’s Q&A about [Chowbot here](#).

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