



Fingers do the talking

LAUNCHED in Sydney three months ago, an online restaurant booking service is set to roll out across Australia's state capitals in the next few months.

Booking Angel, an independent technology provider, offers the first web text-to-speech technology for the restaurant industry designed to improve and increase bookings. Booking details typed in at its website trigger an automated phone message directly to the restaurant.

More than half of Australia's restaurants have an online presence, be it a stand-alone website or part of a directory like www.citysearch.com.au, www.eatability.com.au and www.bestrestaurants.com.au which in total attracted more than 390,000 visitors in June, according to website popularity ranking company alexa.com.

"It's so simple to use" says technology entrepreneur Dean McEvoy, former owner of the Roxbury Hotel in Glebe, Sydney. Diners visit the restaurant's website or find the site via an online food and wine directory.

They type in their booking details - time, date and number of patrons - in the web form, which is then converted into an automated voice message and sent via phone to the restaurant during its opening hours. The booking is confirmed, declined or changed by the restaurant's receptionist by following the prompts. It's easier than paying your electricity bill over the phone.

"The public's expectation of Internet requests is instant response" says McEvoy. This is virtually impossible for restaurants. My biggest frustration as a restaurateur was keeping in contact with booking inquiries via the internet and even fax. Sometimes customers would have to wait more than a day to receive a response, and sometimes faxes would go missing.

"This is just not good enough from the customer's perspective, nor does it create a positive image for the restaurant. This led my business partner, David Watson, and me to

create a customer relationship management CRM tool that fits with running a busy restaurant, satisfies customer service demands, maximizes internet bookings and ultimately makes the restaurant money. In addition, it's a form of advertising they can measure. Restaurants often advertise in papers and magazines, which is great for brand awareness, but it's hard to measure the success of the advertising in terms of bums on seats."

Booking Angel already has more than 40 restaurants in Sydney using the service. Tony Bilson from Bilsons Restaurant, one of Booking Angel's clients, says that unlike other services it benefits both the restaurant and clients.

I Thai Restaurant so-owner Joan Ng says she is very happy with the service. We've only just joined and have been getting bookings already.

It costs \$10 to sign up for a life membership, and the restaurant is charged a booking fee for each booking. For an average booking of four people referred through a directory website such as www.cityeater.com it costs the restaurant less than \$1.50 a head. If the referral comes through the restaurant's site, it is only 25c a head or \$1 a booking.

If customers don't show up there is no fee, and repeat offenders are banned from using the system. The phone call costs are met by Booking Angel, with no fees passed on to the customer.

If no-one answers the Booking Angel phone call, the technology defaults to ringing every 10 minutes until there is an answer. The potential diner is informed via email of the booking progress.

A concierge program will soon be launched as part of a value-added service to refer more bookings to restaurants, and SMS booking reminders will be hunched in October or November as part of the service.

Contact: Dean McEvoy, Booking Angel tel. 1300 367 148, email dean@bookingangel.com



Lorena Vergara presents Orso owner Silein Gmur with his award

Tops in Sydney

ORSO Bayside Restaurant has won the Sydney restaurant category in the 2004 Australian Achiever Awards for the second time. Based on customer ratings, Orso scored 98.7 per cent for customer service and relations.

Khusboo Indian Restaurant won the Melbourne restaurant category this year, while J&A Bakehouse won the award for Melbourne baking, pastry and pasta services and supplies.

Highly recommended restaurants - Sydney: Cafe Sel et Poivre, Darlinghurst; Cher Pascal Restaurant, Ransgate; Dakhni Indian Restaurant, Glebe; Golden West Chinese Restaurant, Winston Hills; India Down Under, Potts Point; Lim's Charcoal BBQ Buffet Restaurant, Hurstville; Mancini's Woodfired Pizzeria, Lugarno; Nadia's Cafe, Blacktown; Ocean Bay Seafood, Mascot; Ottimo Italian Eatery, Drummoyn; Pretty Jade Chinese Restaurant, Kings Langley; Taj Indian Cuisine, Beverly Hills; The Greening Cove Seafood Restaurant, Milsons Point; Viva Thai Restaurant, Balmain.

Melbourne: 2 Faces - The Restaurant, Geelong; Amber Indian Restaurant, Sunbury; Balti Indian Cafe, Carlton; Bandidos Mexican Cantina, Mitcham; Casa di Capri, Chadstone; Centre Noodle, Clayton; China Max Restaurant, Essendon; Chui's Fizzzy Chinese

Cuisine, Fitzroy; Co (Asian Cuisine), Mt. Joe's Restaurant, Br. Masala, Northcote; D Indian Cuisine, Bullecourt Restaurant, Hampton; The House of Cha Ferritree Gully; Gaze Melbourne; Hentani & Brighton; Giggetts Res. dya; Indian Palace Res. Indian Tukka on V. wood; Kaneda Japan Melbourne; Lilydale Restaurant, Lilydale; N. Chinese Restaurant, Curry House, Mt. W. Cafe, Bar & Grille, Boti Indian Restaura Shintaro Restaurant, C. Orchid Thai Restaura town; Taj Agra Ind Ringwood; Termini, Thani Restaurant, Fir. Hampton Park; Tivoli. rant, Malvern; Tokyo T. rant, South Yarra; Top Windsor; Tower Sun Asian Food, Melbourne

Highly recommend and pasta services and bourne; Elegant Oce Olives Cafe Bar & B Timstock Trading Hir

Gift of good ta

RESTAURANTS throughout Australia are being invited to join a new gift voucher scheme being promoted through a website. Each Delectable Dining Gift Certificate is for a specific restaurant, and founder Nadia Fullerton says her company, delectable.com.au, is acting as a restaurant agent on a commission basis. Restaurants can enrol with the scheme through an online form, and then will be listed with a profile page.

Fullerton says she came up with the idea after buying gift certificates for friends. "We thought it would be a good idea for restaurants. A limited number do have their own gift certificates, but our concept is to have one central website for restaurants throughout Australia."

So far 12 Sydney restaurants have signed up, and Fullerton, whose husband is also involved in the project, is spreading her net to include estab-

lishments in the Blue Central NSW Coast.

Her father owned has worked in restaur her brother in Brisban restaurant.

Contact: Nadia Full tel. 0414 391 303, email info@delectab www.delectable.com

Award w

RPR's has been na rant in the Restau Queensland Gold C Excellence. Other win Modern Austral Award; The Restau Cave Island Resort.

Restaurant in a W House, Albert River W