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Online Reservation Company Closes In On Millionth Diner

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OpenTable Inc., a pioneer in online reservations service for the restaurant industry, recently surpassed the 1-million-diner mark through its OpenTable.com restaurant reservation Web site.

The San Francisco-based company said the landmark followed a year of triple-digit growth in registered membership and monthly diners seated through the free service.

During the 12-month period from August 2001 to August 2002, the number of OpenTable.com diners increased 140 percent to more than 240,000 registered members.

During the same period, monthly diners seated through the service tripled.

The way the program works, diners go to the OpenTable Web site, scan for available times and tables, and can instantly confirm reservations.

The free service eliminates telephone calls, bypasses restaurant answering machines and is available 24 hours a day -- making it increasingly popular with hotel concierges, travel agents and administrative assistants.

While Orlando is not one of OpenTable's major markets, several Orlando-area restaurants have signed up to use the service, including Roy's and Timpano Italian Chophouse.

Thomas Layton, CEO of OpenTable, Inc., said the growth of online restaurant reservations nationwide is similar to the growth in online ticketing and travel, in that once people try it, they find it is easy and become repeat customers.

OpenTable's millionth diner, for example, was Jane Pon of San Francisco, who made an online reservation at Bacar for her birthday. She began using OpenTable.com two years ago, and has made more than 36 online restaurant reservations since then.

OpenTable officials said online restaurant reservations can boost revenue for restaurants on the network.

In the company's home market of San Francisco, for example, participating restaurants received an average of more than 270 seated diners per restaurant during August from reservations made through OpenTable.com, up from 67 during the same month a year earlier.

If the diners each spent \$30, not unusual for the San Francisco area, then the participating restaurants each earned an average of \$8,100 in revenue through the reservations system.

In another benefit to restaurants, the system allows participants to develop a database that can be used to customize marketing based on guest preferences and dining histories.