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OpenTable.com serves up restaurant reservations

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OpenTable.com, a San Francisco-based company, has opened an Atlanta office and plans to launch its real-time online restaurant reservations network here later this month.

Atlanta is expected to become one of its top markets.

"Our team said there are a ton of great restaurants in Atlanta and that people there are very, very Internet savvy," said spokeswoman Regan Daniels. So far, 11 restaurants have signed up to use the service.

"We replace the paper reservations book at the host stand with an electronic touch-screen computer that is connected to the Internet 24 hours a day," Daniels said. "It eliminates the hassle of calling all over town in search of an available table."

Here's how it works: Consumers log onto the OpenTable site and select a city. Then, they can search by restaurant name, neighborhood, type of cuisine or price range. OpenTable gives directions and reviews and lists entertainment and hours of operation. Reservations are instantly confirmed by e-mail. The site will also send invitations to guests.

On Wednesday, the company also announced the launch of OTconciierge, an interactive online program that gives hotel concierges direct access to reservations books at hundreds of the nation's top restaurants.

OTconciierge allows hotels to search for availability based on city, neighborhood, cuisine type and price range.

The first cities offered will be San Francisco, Chicago and New York.

Similar services are available in the cyber world.

SavvyDiner.com operates in the Atlanta market. The Seattle-based company lists more than 600 restaurants in 27 cities.

"Atlanta is a great market, probably the fourth-busiest behind Seattle, Chicago and San Francisco," said Craig Utt, vice president of business development. SavvyDiner sends requests to a 24-hour call center and reservations are made by phone.

Use of technology is increasing in the restaurant industry, said Steven Anderson, president of the Washington, D.C.-based National Restaurant Association. At a recent trade show in Chicago, nearly 300 exhibitors were Internet companies.

A recent survey found that 13 percent of adults used the Internet to get information about restaurants that they hadn't patronized before. Additionally, about 40 percent of the National Restaurant Association's members have Web sites.

"One of the reasons this industry is growing so dramatically is that people have less time," Anderson said. "They're using the Internet to order ahead and to make reservations. It's huge."

Rafih Benjelloun, owner of the Imperial Fez and Fairlie-Poplar Cafe & Grill restaurants, said he is satisfied with reservations coming through his own Web site.

"It's been tremendous," he said. "You wouldn't believe it, but we get over 100 hits a day and five to six reservations a week. It makes life a lot easier."