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OpenTable

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Given that the dot.com landscape is littered with junk food these days, OpenTable.com stands out like a gourmet meal.

A San Francisco-based start-up, OpenTable has already signed up some 320 restaurants in the Bay Area, Seattle and Chicago to be part of an online reservation network the company expects will mushroom into the thousands by year-end, says CEO Chuck Templeton.

Given that the dot.com landscape is littered with junk food these days, online restaurant reservation systems such as Templeton's stand out like a gourmet meal. No more waiting for a restaurant to open so you can stake your claim to a prime Saturday night slot. No more being at the mercy of a harried restaurant hostess with bad phone manners. No more settling for Chinese take-out.

Templeton says his salespeople, after encountering initial reluctance, are having no trouble selling restaurateurs on the value proposition. "Six months ago we did, but now everyone is welcoming us with open arms," he says. "It's been quite a dramatic shift."

OpenTable is a soup-to-nuts operation, too. They'll equip an eatery with hardware, software, setup services and a digital subscriber line (DSL) connection for about \$1,000, plus a monthly fee of between \$200 and \$400.

Templeton figures his network needs to drive only a few new customers per week to his clients for those restaurants to realize a return on their investment.

The venture hasn't been all peaches and cream, Templeton admits. "It's a more difficult business to build than I thought it was going to be because there is so much infrastructure," he says.

For example, landing DSL lines can be more difficult than finding fresh seafood in some places. "In New York, it's not moving as fast as we'd like," he says.

In New York, of course, a lot of things don't move as fast as we'd like.

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