

Chef cooks up assistance on-line

My Recipes website helps food outlets run their concerns more profitably

by **Georgina Bond**

These days Gavin Lovett is more used to dissecting recipes on screen than in the kitchen. The chef-turned-businessman has developed a tool to help restaurants cost their menus and discover the nutritional content of their recipes with the click of a button.

Inputting ingredients into Lovett's My Recipes website allows chefs to cost an entire menu within hours, as opposed to old pen-and-paper methods which could tie them up for days. It also breaks the recipe down into its nutritional components, comparing each against their recommended daily intake amounts. After 10 years cheffing here and in Europe, Lovett decided he had hit on an area where the industry needed assistance.

He estimates 90 per cent of restaurants do not cost their menus properly, despite the vital connection this has to running a profitable business.

Although menu-costing software isn't new, My Recipes provides ingredient costing and availability specific for New Zealand at market prices which are updated from suppliers daily.

It is also thought to be the first to incorporate nutritional analysis, and Lovett believes food outlets will be required to provide this information more and more as consumers become more health-conscious.

The website can also help 10,000 food outlets track down their closest supplier for specific ingredients.



NEW GADGET: A computer features large in consultant chef Gavin Lovett's kitchen

Lovett is targeting the service at la carte restaurants, cafes, caterers, school lunch rooms, hospitals, rest homes and holiday camps.

He came up with the idea while working as a head chef at a cafe in Holland. In a bid to reverse the fortunes of the struggling cafe, he set about costing a new menu from scratch. The process took one month, and saw turnover doubled as a result.

Returning to New Zealand three years ago, he thought this sort of exercise could help improve on the average 20-month lifespan of Kiwi restaurants, and explored the concept of an online costing tool with Dunedin-based dietitian Amber Strong.

Meanwhile, under the company name Menu du Jour, Lovett got the ball rolling creating menu covers and layouts, designed to detract attention from the price and promote the most profitable meals.

He also started importing dissolvable food labels from the US for chefs to label containers.

Up until a year ago, this was all done after hours while working as a fulltime chef at the InterContinental Hotel in

>> Menu Du Jour

- Menu Du Jour created an online tool to cost recipes and analyse the nutrient content of meals
- Costings are based on the latest market prices for ingredients
- The company plans to make the tool

Wellington. Now he works alongside five other fulltime staff at the company's Albany office, and has a network of consultant chefs around the country who can develop recipes for clients - a service well used at a time when head chefs are in short supply.

My Recipes was launched last month and has 120 members so far, who pay \$640 for a one-year membership.

The Auckland University of Technology has expressed interest in incorporating My Recipes into the curriculum for its hospitality management and culinary courses, as has the Manukau Institute of Technology.

Future plans include adapting the service for overseas customers, while expanding the site for household use could be just months away.