

Website comes to aid of chefs

By Charmain Smith

A new website for chefs and caterers enables them not only to cost their menus easily and efficiently, but also to find out the nutritional content.

The site, MyRecipes (www.myrecipes.co.nz) is the brain-child of former chef and Menu Du Jour owner Gavin Lovett. He worked closely with Dunedin-based dietitian Amber Strong to develop the site, which also features a menu guide labelling system allowing chefs to identify items and suppliers matching special criteria such as organic, GE free, Kosher, sugar-free, low-fat and gluten-free. These can then be incorporated into menus and recipe cards.

Amber Strong, who is doing a masters degree in nutrition at the University of Otago, was working as a private dietitian specialising in allergy and intolerance in Wellington.

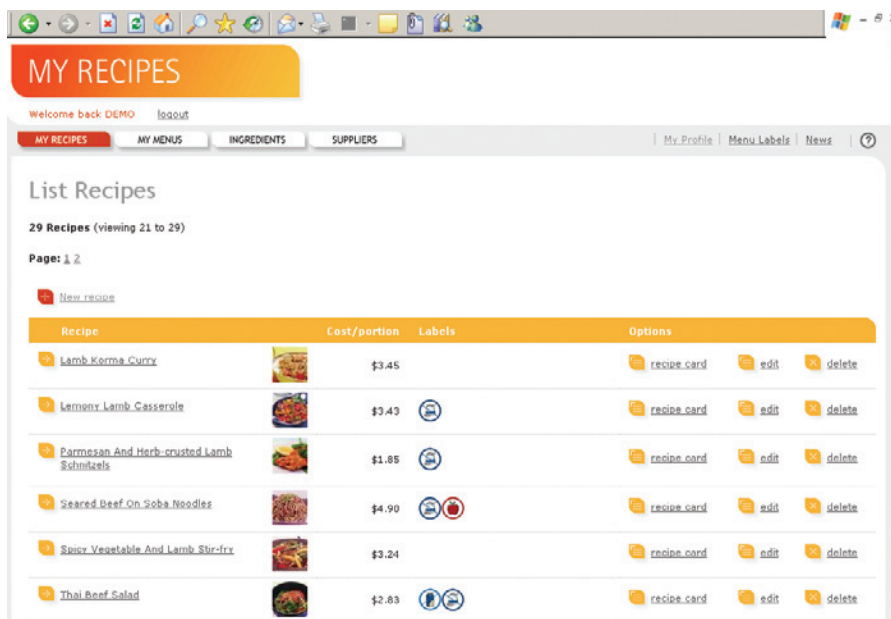
When people were diagnosed with diabetes or an allergy they just stopped eating out because it was too difficult.

"Most places don't take people seriously. They think an allergy equals they don't like it. So I wanted to create something that would help restaurants cater to those people and it fitted with what Gavin wanted to do with the costing, so it made sense to do it together."

As chefs put their recipes in, the system calculates the cost per portion based on the suppliers pricing and the nutritional value of the dish. For institutions like rest homes it also compares it to the recommended daily intakes.

It also indicates whether recipes are gluten-free, dairy-free, suitable for people with diabetes, heart disease, vegetarians or vegans, and whether it contains nuts. There is also the capability to indicate whether menu items are Kosher, halal or organic, but those rely upon getting the right ingredients from suppliers, she said.

"I think in terms of added value for a



Gavin Lovett

restaurant to be able to reach customers being able to identify even one meal that was low fat or that might be suitable for someone on a dairy free diet, at least they are offering options for those people."

If we follow the trend in the United States, everyone from restaurants, cafes, fast food chains to schools, rest-homes and hospitals will one day be required to provide more nutritional information to diners - particularly in light of the mounting obesity debate, she said.

Mr Lovett says MyRecipes was born after he took a head chef role at a



Amber Strong

Dutch café during his OE.

"The café I was working in was having a rough time with a succession of owners over a short period of time," he explains. "I was passionate about the business and wanted it to work so I went about costing recipes for a new menu I was introducing. "I realised then that costing and creating recipes for menus is a time-consuming task that can tie up chefs for sometimes days. But it is an essential job given the most critical consideration in running a profitable food-service business is knowing your recipe costs and pricing your menu accordingly.