

As seen in the InfoCommerce Report October 1, 2006

Restaurantchains.net continues quest to provide accurate, timely content

To continue its mission to provide the exact information customers seek in a timely manner, RestaurantChains.net- a market research firm that provides sales leads to the foodservice industry-last month launched a new release of its online database. Users can now select a variety of criteria (such as geography, headquarters, average sales amount) to pinpoint the companies they wish to target. "Previously, they could only select three", said Keith Gellman, publisher of Irvington, NY-based RestaurantChains.net, which is a sister data product to Research Report for Foodservice. They can also enter their own numbers (such as number of seats, number of units) to create a more customized target list. Users are then presented with the results in seconds. They can export the data to an Excel file and even import it into their content management software programs.

Another new feature of the database is the inclusion of average unit volume. This information is difficult to obtain, but RestaurantChains.net uses its industry knowledge and expertise to calculate these figures. All of this data is collected on a group of 4,000 restaurant chains and multi-concept restaurant companies.

RestaurantChains.net verifies its information every four months and the company ensures that every field of information is accurate. The company makes outbound calls to update database records instead of waiting for its listing organizations to send back questionnaires. "It's done by hand, on an outbound method," said Gellman. "That's the difference with us."

Sales and marketing professionals are the main customers. However, Gellman noted that the database is garnering interest from C-level restaurant executives and consultants as well.

Because RestaurantChains.net verifies its information so frequently, there are always many updates and changes that must be made to the database. Customers are continually updated about changes through weekly alerts, a service launched about a year and a half ago. The alerts appear in chart form and list company names and the dates of the changes. Some of the data listed in the alerts includes new locations a company has opened, personnel changes, expansion into new states and companies that have either increased or decreased their number of units.

Customers also receive alerts in the form of a newsletter. The RestaurantChains.net Alerts newsletter, which is sent to customers and prospects via email, officially launched in the beginning of 2006. The data is presented in the form of small articles (with headings such as emerging concepts/trading areas and continually growing concepts/companies), highlighting growth of the public and private restaurant chains the company tracks during a four-month period. The newsletter is sent to 8,000 people each week. "It's the best [prospecting and sales] tool we've ever had," said Gellman. "People

contact us about it and it drives people to buy the directory. The reason we did the newsletter and the alerts is to show [customers] proof of worth and keep users plugged in. Our emphasis is to drive people to sales.”

The newsletter is currently free, but Gellman said the company anticipates converting it to a paid subscription offering. It already features sponsorship advertising (Companies can place an ad for \$500). The newsletter is archived on the company’s Web site. (www.restaurantchains.net)

Another sales tool RestaurantChains.net launched this year in March is a blog that is accessible on the company’s Web site. Gellman writes the blog and said he posts a new entry every 10 to 12 days. “What the newsletter and blog have done is raised our credibility,” noted Gellman.

While the company has certainly made a lot of enhancements in 2006 alone, Gellman said RestaurantChains.net is not yet finished with providing more value for its customers. “We’re going to get more into trend analysis and data analysis,” he said. RestaurantChains.net already provides some analysis through its Restaurant Incubator Index (which is a feature of the newsletter).

RestaurantChains.net offers two online products available by annual subscription. Online Lite (which is priced at \$495) and Online Pro (which, at \$895), includes all of the features of Online Lite plus immediate exporting and label making functions). Custom lists are also available.

InfoCommerce Report Commentary: While the Internet has changed so many aspects of this business, we do still believe that hard work and creativity are rewarded. Almost every day we see newcomers entering markets with well-established and successful data publishers, and by rolling up their sleeves to deliver fresher or deeper data, or analytics, or by slicing data or packaging it differently to meet a specific need, they can still find success. Rather than speaking to low barriers to entry, we think this speaks to the infinite malleability of data, because in most cases the newcomer and the incumbent publishers can both thrive.

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