

'What Do You Recommend?'

Facebook looks to make more fans in the restaurant world

Empathica's GoRecommend application offers franchises a new way to spread goodwill among restaurants and their customers.

By Adam Elrashidi

When it comes to franchise restaurants and marketing in the social networking world, it's not just about how many fans a chain's Facebook page has, but about how many fans those fans have.

Enter Empathica: a consulting firm that helps companies maintain their consumer bases by surveying customer loyalty. This past April, the Ontario, Canada-based company rolled out GoRecommend—a Facebook application that allows the site's users to write a recommendation of a restaurant after they've had an enjoyable dining experience. With consumers becoming increasingly judicious with their restaurant dollars, Empathica hopes to provide its clients with a tool that—despite its primitive nature compared to the ubiquitous banner ad—is a no less effective and influential form of advertising: word of mouth.

It works like this: After downloading the application, users are invited to fill out a survey detailing their experience at a particular restau-

rant. Those users are then invited to share their recommendation with their friends via wall post and Facebook's newsfeed feature, which displays the recent activities of a user's friends. Despite the fact that posts are gussied up with a chain's logo and specific store information, the user's review is kept fully intact—no matter how blunt or crass it may be. (Posts cannot be viewed, however, if a user has turned off certain notifications.)

"(Recommendations) communicate a story and come from a friend, giving the recommendation intimacy and context," says Andrew Datars, Empathica's vice president of product management. He adds that a recommendation not only gives a "significant amount of authenticity" to the idea behind a brand, but also raises that brand's awareness and consideration to the consumer. Since June, Empathica has generated about 3,000 page recommendations—which would amount to nearly 450,000 impressions, given that recommenders have an average of 150 friends who all see the reviews, according to Empathica's theory of the service.

Of course, the incentives in social networking have to go both ways, and GoRecommend indeed offers a grand one—literally. According to the application's Facebook page, each time a user makes a recommendation, that user will become eligible to win \$1,000 in a daily drawing. In addition, for each recommendation

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made by a user's friends, that user will receive up to nine extra entries for that day's drawing. As of press time, the application had more than 2,400 active users, as well as a rating of 4.1 out of 5 stars (based on 13 votes).

While GoRecommend's incentives appear to be a novel and certainly engaging idea, the service still has a way to go before its clients see the kind of response that turns Web traffic into real-life traffic. For example, competitor T.G.I. Fridays recently hit 1 million fans through a conventional TV spot that tied in its Facebook with a free burger offer. [FT](#)