

Online booking site hungers to expand

DAMON KITNEY THE AUSTRALIAN APRIL 28, 2014 12:00AM



Dimmi chief executive Stevan Premutico says Australian restaurants are stuck in the dark ages when it comes to bookings.
Source: News Corp Australia

THE online restaurant reservation company backed by Telstra, Village Roadshow and Qantas is poised to expand its global distribution network through a deal with Restaurant & Catering Australia to populate the Australia.com website.

Dimmi, which has partnered with more than 35 restaurant, travel and leisure websites, including Google, TripAdvisor, Yahoo and UrbanSpoon, believes the new alliance will further bolster its ability to generate restaurant bookings from international visitors.

“This will add a further feather in the Dimmi cap as we continue to focus on helping restaurants to attract more of the local and international customer,” said Dimmi chief executive Stevan Premutico.

Australia.com is a prime source of website traffic for international visitors planning a trip to Australia. Restaurant & Catering Australia is the industry body that represents the interests of restaurants and caterers.

Dimmi is also poised to unveil another international partnership over the coming months, which Mr Premutico said was close to being formalised.

Dimmi, which means “tell me” in Italian, celebrates its fifth birthday this year and is now the nation’s largest online restaurant booking network, boasting partnerships with outlets such as Rockpool, Quay, St Crispin, Pilu, Ormeggio at the Spit, San Telmo, Bomba, Catalina, Toko, 4 Fourteen and Must Wine Bar.

Dimmi is an adaptation of the US online booking and restaurant reservation system Open Table and

charges restaurants on a per-booking basis.

Mr Premutico said Dimmi was now seating a million diners every quarter and had increased turnover by 200 per cent over the past two years.

The group made headlines earlier this year when it struck an alliance with Qantas allowing people to earn frequent flyer points through the Dimmi website.

Two years ago it secured the support of Telstra's venture capital arm — the telco's applications and venture group — for a cornerstone shareholding in the business in partnership with Village Roadshow.

In addition to Telstra and Village, Dimmi has 10 private shareholders and boasts a high-powered board, including Chris Chard, managing director of Village Roadshow Entertainment, Roadshow Television and Roadshow's digital distribution business.

Other directors include LinkedIn managing director Cliff Rosenberg, Google retail, technology and consumer product general manager William Easton and Macquarie Capital Advisers director Glen Butler.

Now Mr Premutico's next big ambition is to digitise the Australian restaurant industry through a multi-million-dollar capital expenditure program to put online diaries in restaurants across the nation.

“Australian restaurants are still largely stuck in the dark ages with most of them still using the old-school pen and paper diary to run the most critical part of their business — their bookings,” he said.

“This is causing a massive disconnect between the restaurants and their customers. Restaurants are still operating in an analog world but their customers are digital and this divide causes a rift and frustration. We are three years behind the rest of the world — we need to catch-up quickly.”

In Australia, 7 per cent of all restaurant bookings are made online — the rest are on the telephone — compared to San Francisco where the number is over 50 per cent.

Dimmi recently entered into a long-term strategic partnership with ResDiary, one of the world's leading Reservation Systems, which now allows it to offer restaurant clients a cloud-based product for a fee of \$149 per month compared to the tens of thousands of dollars some were previously spending on such systems.

Dimmi has also recently partnered with point of sale providers Micros and IMPOS to allow its restaurant partners to get more out of their online diary.

“It now means that the full experience is connected and more seamless than ever before — from the booking to being seated to paying the bill,” Mr Premutico said.

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