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## TASTEMAKING THE BUZZ BUILDERS

*How ready-to-launch restaurants fill seats fast.* BY ERIN BYERS MURRAY

LIKE MANY RESTAURANTS IN Boston, Union Square's Journeyman has a website, a Facebook page with 300-plus fans, and a Twitter feed. But as of early April, the 36-seat Somerville eatery didn't have a full kitchen yet, let alone tables and silverware; the owners hope to open this month.

It's an increasingly common tactic: using cheap, readily accessible websites and blogs to ignite interest in a forthcoming restaurant, engage potential diners, and, ideally, pack the place from day one.

Tse Wei Lim and Diana Kudajarova, the pair behind Journeyman, insist their efforts aren't part of an "official" marketing strategy. But their followers are salivating—and spreading the word—as the couple track their progress on the Web. Since neither has opened a restaurant or worked extensively in the hospitality industry before, every potential customer counts. "You know the statistics on restaurant mortality," says Lim. "You

need every advantage you can get."

Over in Harvard Square, the new Russell House Tavern publicized its opening by taking a similar tack (a photo-heavy blog, pre-opening Twitter buzz). But in this case, the owners set out to control the message, not just spread it.

Designed to curb speculation on message boards like Chowhound, "our blog spelled out when we were opening," says Patrick Lee, co-owner of Russell House. Plus, by introducing would-be diners to the chef, manager, and ownership team, Lee is hoping to attract long-term customers. "People already feel attached to the place," he says.

Indeed, forging a connection is what restaurateurs like chef Chris Parsons of Winchester, who recently transformed his seafood restaurant Catch into Parsons Table, have found most successful. "It's a way to show the personal side [of owning a restaurant], like the photos of my daughter Lily in the kitchen," he says.

For chef Joanne Chang, pre-selling her third Flour bakery, in Central Square, was about full disclosure. "Most people think you sign a lease and you open. But there's so much more," she says. With daily tweets about everything from building permits to healthcare, Chang has built a list of 1,200 Twitter followers. She also solicits menu feedback, like opinions on whether the tacos at her Asian restaurant, Myers + Chang, were too flimsy. (They were, according to one follower.) "People are fascinated by details," she says.

However, the social media method doesn't allow room for error. "You can't do a soft opening, because everybody knows instantly [when you're open]," says Journeyman's Kudajarova. But because she and Lim are hoping to ramp up quickly, they're willing to take risks. "We're aware that we're not very restaurantlike, that we're not of this industry," says Lim. "So why shouldn't we try something new?"

### ON THE MOVE

*What's shaking on Boston's restaurant scene.*

Brookline's Roadhouse is now **American Craft**, a casual locavore eatery—and we're raising a pint to the makeover. ☑ Kendall Square's foodie takeover continues with the reopening of **Evoo**. American bistro **Bergamot** has taken over Evoo's old home near Inman. ☑ Hot new sushi spot **Basho** opens near Fenway this spring. Sashimi, meet the Sox. ☑ Barbara Lynch's **Menton** is open in Fort Point. Be warned: It's priced for a serious splurge. **DONNA GARLOUGH**