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## Word of mouth to be a food guide

SMALL WORLD  
SAM SPIRO

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With more than 9,000 restaurants in Hong Kong and a confusing array of culinary choices, it can be hard to know where to begin.

The clutter caught the eye of three local entrepreneurs who decided to produce a restaurant ratings guide of a different flavour. Enter WOM (Word of Mouth), the first collection of reviews and ratings written by the general public.

"Whenever we get together we always talk about food, and our friends call us for recommendations too. They've started calling us the food gurus," said Samanta Pong Sum-ye, one of three partners in the venture.

"We'd been wondering why there hasn't been a really good restaurant guide for Hong Kong."

Diners are invited to express their views online. The idea is simple. Logon to [www.womguide.com](http://www.womguide.com), select the venue, and then rate it on a scale of one to five in the areas of food, drink, service and ambience. And if what you are looking for is not in the database, you can add it.

The first hard-back edition of



Word of Mouth's Samanta Pong

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the WOM guide should hit the bookshelves early next year. Ms Pong says the first edition should include 1,100 restaurants, with cut-off date for reviews for the first issue around the middle of next month.

Since the site began in September, about 100 restaurants have been added by voters to the initial database of 1,000. And it's not confined to Hong Kong's finest. She says the city's unsung treasures, the dai pai dongs, are there too.

The review box also has space for comments, which Ms Pong believes will help put the WOM guide in a class of its own. "It is people's comments that will make this guide different - comments that are honest, witty and clever," she says.

At the moment the site does not provide online reviews for people to read, although there is a top-10 list of restaurants and work is being done to the site to enable voters to edit their reviews. A web-based version of the guide is in the pipeline.

"We want to get to the point where people automatically think, 'I'm going out for dinner, I'll just check to see what WOM says about the restaurant.' They can't do that yet but by the end of next year, or in early 2006, a web-based version will be available," she says.

The updated site will be a subscription service.

Ms Pong says she will not be giving up her day job. "I work for a business owned by my family and leaving is not an option. In fact, we all have day jobs, and I don't think my partners will ever quit either."

In the long term, they hope to introduce the concept to cities across the region. "We all pray this will really take off," she says.

**Wom**  
wordomouth