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Software gets restaurant waits down to a science

(<http://www.suntimes.com/news/metro/391810,CST-NWS-rest18.article>)

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BY [JANET RAUSA FULLER](#) Staff Reporter

You know the drill: You walk into a busy restaurant that doesn't take reservations and ask for a table. The best the hostess can do is give you an approximate wait time. The most you can do is hope she's right.

That guessing game may be over.

Some restaurants have begun using a new software that, according to the Milwaukee company that makes it, tells you exactly how long you have to wait.

Trade show this weekend

"We like to think that we're more accurate than that 18-year-old you've been using," said Claire Ellington, vice president of marketing for GuestBridge Inc.

The company hopes to persuade more restaurants of that when it shows off the software at the National Restaurant Association's annual show, opening Saturday at McCormick Place.

The trade show is expected to draw more than 73,000 restaurant industry types on the lookout for the next big thing in dining rooms, kitchens -- even bathrooms.

The GuestBridge software tracks how many tables are seated, how long they've been filled and even which diners have ordered margaritas before.

Similar software exists, but when it comes to calculating wait times, "We have the most sophisticated algorithm for it in the industry," Ellington said.

"It works unbelievably," said Kent Strom, general manager of Joey's Grill and Lounge in Bellevue, Wash., which uses the software.

"Literally, your front door knows what's going on at all times," he said.

ALL IN THE GRILL

You, too, can cook like Grant Achatz.

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The Niles lab that developed the Anti-Griddle -- a stainless steel surface that stays at 30 degrees below zero -- for the superstar Chicago chef is making it available to the masses.

Polyscience will be showing it off at the National Restaurant Association show, starting Saturday.

Achatz, who rarely leaves his kitchen at Alinea, will be on hand to demonstrate how it flash-freezes liquids into funky shapes.

The company has begun selling the devices on eBay, and home cooks are snapping them up, despite the price tag.

Janet Rausa Fuller