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Folsom startup Foodom pairs chefs with people who want home-cooked meals

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Former tech executive Reneta Jenik started her home-chef online platform Foodom at the end of 2019 to connect professional chefs with customers who want someone to come into their home to cook meals for them, sometimes for a week in advance.

COURTESY OF FOODOM

Foodom founder and CEO Reneta Jenik

She initially meant it to serve chefs by getting them out of stressful positions in restaurants and to serve busy people who don't have time or skills to cook at home.

"I want to connect the community to have local chefs come to the home to relieve stress for everyone," Jenik said.

She launched the portal in March, just as Covid-19 lockdowns began. The timing actually helped grow the business, Jenik said. A lot of professional chefs were suddenly out of work, and a lot of families suddenly had to come up with 21 meals a week.

"The pandemic came and made it worse for both sides," Jenik said. "For the chefs, this is one of their only sources of income. Clients are stressed. They are working from home. Suddenly, the kids are eating all their meals at home."

The chefs follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines on social distancing and wear masks, Jenik said. They either use what ingredients the client has on hand or they can shop for the customer — or a combination, she said. That is handled by the site.

The service now has 10 chefs each in the Bay Area and Sacramento. The chefs clean the kitchen before they leave, and they tend to make food for a week. They also can make food following special diets. The clients choose their menu on the site, and then the chefs follow tested recipes. They prepare everything from scratch, as much as possible.

The chefs are independent contractors, and they have their own businesses licenses, insurance and certificate in food safety training.

Foodom, which is based in Folsom, charges 20% for the business chefs find through the site, and it handles billing and marketing.

“It’s easier for them to do what they love,” Jenik said.

The cooking fee ranges from $10 to about $70, plus the cost of ingredients. They tend to make between six and 10 servings. There is a $100 minimum to engage a chef.

Until the end of 2019, Jenik worked in marketing for the AI technology and machine learning group at Intel Corp.’s (Nasdaq: INTC) campus in Folsom, following stints at Western Digital Corp. (Nasdaq: WDC) and SanDisk.

“It was hard to leave one of the best jobs out there. It was just an opportunity I wanted to try," she said.

Jenik declined to disclose Foodom's revenue. She said the company is “small and private. It’s early days.”

Jenik is the only employee now, but she has used local developers to build the site and to customize off-the-shelf plugins. Jenik said she plans to raise growth capital to build an in-house development team.

Jenik said she started the company because many people are not efficient in the way they buy food, and they tend to make impulse

purchases at the store.

“I was tracking my invoices, and I saw that half of my shopping is impulse buying,” she said. “In this case, the chefs do the buying. They buy only what is needed.”

Having the chefs in the home also cuts down on sometimes substantial packaging waste from ordering out, Jenik said. “I see this as an environmental and social impact company. It is not just feeding people."

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