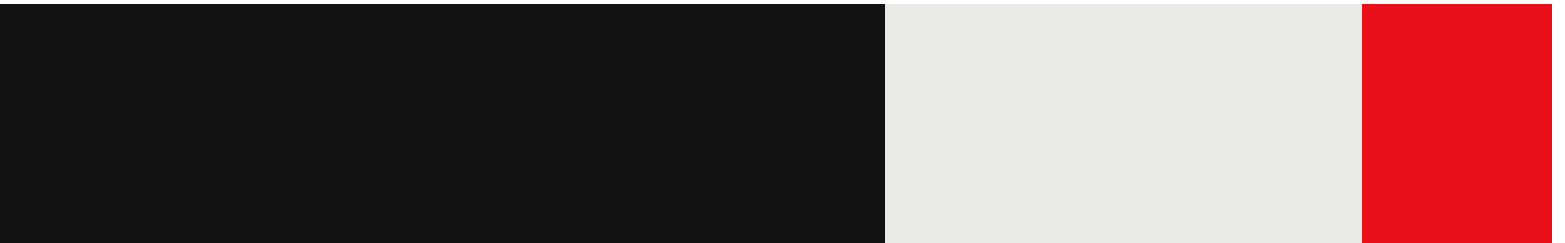


# The return of the office

## Article



**Don't call it a comeback:** Foot traffic to office buildings has been slowly increasing, according to Placer.ai.

- While January saw its biggest dip in foot traffic since 2019 (a 56.1% decrease), the gap is getting smaller, with August levels at 38.7% below 2019.
- When compared with last year, May and June saw the largest increases of workers returning to the office (up 36.9% and 25.2% year over year, respectively).
- That dropped in July to just 9.4%, but visits were back up in August, signaling forward momentum.

**Dress for the part:** As consumers continue to navigate hybrid work, there may be less of a distinction between what they wear at home versus in the office.

- “There’s a blurring of the lines between work and social outings,” Sara Tam, chief merchant officer of **Rent the Runway**, told Bloomberg, noting that women are opting for clothes that are more bright and colorful that they can wear in and out of the office.
- Data from The NPD Group backs up this **shift to more casual work attire**. Sales of dresses have grown 27% since last year, but most consumers are gravitating toward less formal and restrictive silhouettes like sundresses and T-shirt dresses.

**Food for thought:** About 49 million **employees were working from home** as of July 2022, an increase of 11 million compared to June, per The NPD Group. In the fight for the food dollar, at-home retail sales has the majority stake at 62.5%, while foodservice earns 37.5% of the spend.

- To keep costs down, many consumers swapped eating out for at-home food, leading to a 3% decrease in foodservice traffic in July. As prices ease and more consumers go back to the office, they may splurge for the convenience of restaurant food.
- Corporate foodservice will also see a boost from a return to in-person work. Year-over-year case sales from distributors to corporate foodservice operators increased 35% in the second quarter, though they still remain 31% below pre-pandemic levels.

**Setting the pace:** As they attempt to navigate the new normal, many companies may look to industry leaders for answers. But they may not find that one size fits all.

- Last week, CNBC reported that **Amazon CEO Andy Jassy** had no plans to make employees return, though he did admit there are some things that are more difficult while working from home.
- In April, **Google** began requiring most employees to be in the office at least three days a week, and has had a steady flow of COVID-19 outbreaks, according to CNBC.
- Nearly 1,300 **New York Times employees are boycotting** the company’s back-to-the-office policy by staying home this week, per The Observer.

**Outlook unclear:** Consumer behaviors shaped during the pandemic are still driving purchase decisions—for now. But as more employees dip their toes back into in-person work, old habits may resurface, which would be a boon to both foodservice and retail.

*This was originally featured in the Retail Daily newsletter. For more retail insights, statistics, and trends, [subscribe here](#).*