

# Diners Have High Expectations for Restaurant Tech

Operators and customers are on the same page regarding mobile payments and Wi-Fi

## ARTICLE |

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**A**s in many industries, there is a gap between consumer expectations and business execution for restaurants. Operators are often slow to adopt new technologies and those that they've implemented aren't always satisfactory.

In a February 2018 survey of US internet users and restaurant executives by [BRP \(Boston Retail Partners\)](#) and [Windstream Enterprise](#), restaurant operators met consumer expectations on only two factors: contactless/mobile payment, for which 32% of consumers valued it and one-third of operators offered it, and Wi-Fi availability (44% both valued it and offered it).

**Important\* vs. Well-Executed\*\* Dining Experience Features/Technologies According to US Restaurant Diners and Executives, Feb 2018**

% of respondents

	Important*	Well-executed**
Ease of ordering and payment	71%	45%
Discounts and promotions	63%	35%
Drive-thru availability	56%	37%
Wi-Fi availability	44%	44%
New interactive tools and technology	35%	33%
Mobile/web order-ahead	34%	26%
Contactless/mobile payment availability	32%	33%
Curbside delivery	29%	24%
Interactive digital content	29%	22%
Ordering kiosk	27%	31%

*Note: \*responses of "important" and "extremely important" in determining at which quick-service/fast-casual restaurant to eat among restaurant diners ages 18+ who had eaten at a restaurant in the past 6 months; \*\*responses of "excellent" execution among restaurant executives*  
 Source: BRP (Boston Retail Partners) and Windstream Enterprise, "Restaurant Digital Crossroads: The Race to Meet Guest Expectations," July 12, 2018

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Consumer expectations will be even higher over the next 24 months. The most important factor now (71%) and in two years (81%) is simply ease of payment, but just 45% of restaurant operators said they had "excellent" execution. Two of the biggest jumps in consumer expectation between now and 2020 will be the ability to order ahead digitally (a 55% increase) and Wi-Fi availability (up 59%).

In the case of Wi-Fi, little things mean a lot. Availability of guest Wi-Fi was cited by 70% of consumers as an important factor in deciding where to dine. And Wi-Fi was rated the top technology that has had a positive impact on the dining experience, higher than tech that would seemingly be more difficult to implement like tableside ordering devices or mobile payment apps.

This wasn't a fluke. Free **Wi-Fi was also the most important tech offerings** among US internet users deciding where to dine in a Q1 2018 **AlixPartners** survey. Roughly one-third mentioned this as influential.

Free Wi-Fi may not affect sales directly, but it can be used as an engagement tool since sharing photos, uploading videos and checking in to locations is now a common practice.

By 2020, 86% of restaurant operators plan to offer Wi-Fi, and if they follow through on their plans, mobile point-of-sale (POS) systems will

see a surge in adoption during that same timeframe. Just 26% of restaurants offer this payment method now, but 59% are planning on rolling it out.

Why is it so important that restaurants get up to speed on digital offerings when dining is such an offline experience?

BRP estimated that just 6% of US restaurant sales came through digital channels in 2017. But that figure is forecast to increase to 13% in 2020 and grow to 30% by 2025.

The study also quantified the payoff in investing in digital dining experiences, which translates to roughly a 20% increase in average guest spend, with bigger gains coming from millennials (26%) and Gen Z (22%).