

# WHAT CUSTOMERS EXPECT FROM RESTAURANTS IN 2024

An Ipsos White Paper

Authors: Carlos Aragon, Kaili Hunsaker



GAME CHANGERS



## KEY FINDINGS:

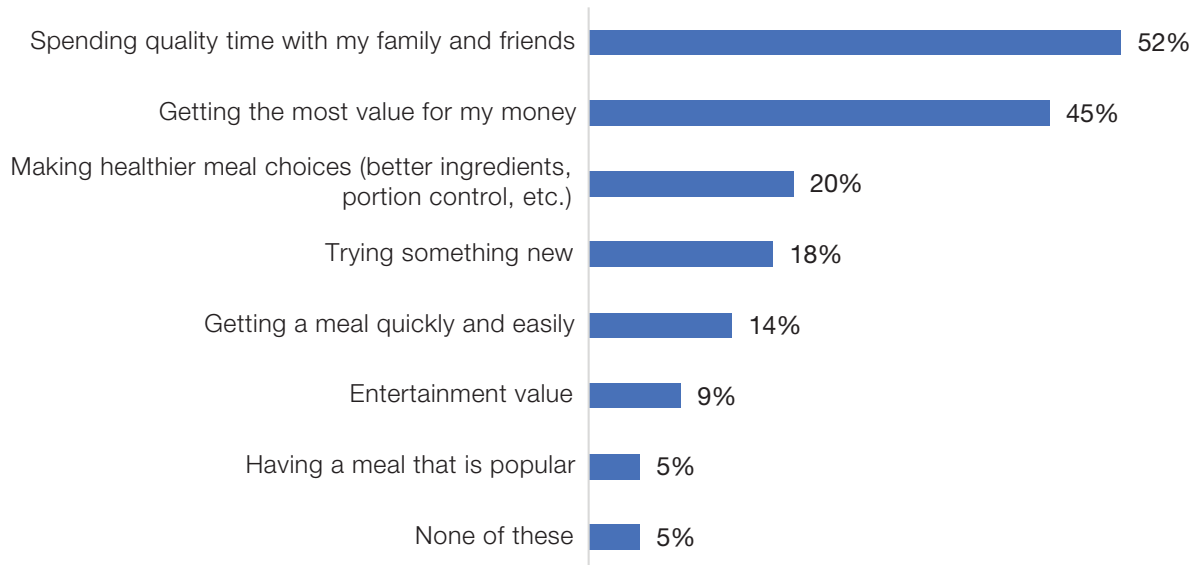
- As fall approaches, U.S. restaurants continue to face challenges include staffing (52%), burnout (50%), compensation (45%), and supply chain issues (40%).
- Within the food service industry, 42% of workers want to quit their job.
- Pandemic-era courtesy is over. Reasonable or not, consumers are expecting restaurants to have already solved their supply chain, staffing, and training challenges.



Unlike anything in many years, COVID shook up the restaurant industry with many winners and losers coming out of the pandemic. Now that a degree of normalcy has returned, restaurants are facing a number of challenges heading into 2024. Among restaurant managers and employees, their biggest challenges include staffing (52%), burnout (50%), compensation (45%), and supply chain issues (40%). Within the food service industry, 42% of workers want to quit their job.

At the same time, 31% of consumers want to dine at restaurants more frequently than pre-COVID, and their primary motivations are to try new foods and cuisines, as well as convenience (getting their food quickly). Secondary motivations include spending quality time with family and friends.

### Most Important Factors to an Enjoyable Dining Experience



## Pandemic-era courtesy is officially over

Consumers go to restaurants for the food, the experience, and quality time with their friends and family. And they're coming back in full force. They no longer grant food services businesses grace for COVID-pandemic challenges.

This means that, reasonable or not, consumers are expecting restaurants to have already solved their supply chain, staffing, and training challenges. Likewise, they expect that restaurants will have worked the bugs out of pickup and delivery technology and expect seamless operations.

As a result, delivering pre-COVID guest experiences in 2023 will result in a poor guest experience and lower overall customer satisfaction. We are seeing increasing frustration among consumers, and consumers are far less loyal to brands that are consistently underperforming.





## Delivering on consumer expectations

Pickup and delivery technologies are the new norm. But its speedy implementation for many restaurants proved painful. Communication is critical, but many restaurants fail to consistently communicate. 24% of restaurants fail to confirm an order and give a pickup time, while 19% do not provide clear pickup instructions, and a whopping 70% do not notify customers when their orders are ready. In addition, many restaurants force consumers to use their app for communication, rather than the consumer's preferred channel.

For many consumers, curbside pickup is still new, and the details differ between brands and locations. Despite this, many restaurants still fail to clearly explain how to pick up an order. Many consumers arrive and are then made to wait, either because the restaurant doesn't have their order ready, or because they are understaffed and unable to expeditiously get the order out to a consumer's vehicle. Simple things like acknowledging customers when they arrive, confirming their order is ready, etc., could improve this experience.

Finally, whether restaurants want to admit it or not, 3rd party delivery services still represent their brand. When they make mistakes, show up late, deliver cold food, etc., it reflects poorly on the restaurant as much as, if not more than, the delivery service. In research conducted by Ipsos, nearly half of consumers say they'll blame the restaurant as well as, or in addition to, the delivery service if there is a problem with their order.

## What's Next?

Restaurants must address three key issues to ensure they are able to satisfy customers in the post-pandemic era:

- Brands must focus on delivering a superior experience to what was acceptable pre-pandemic. Simple things like greeting customers when they enter, being friendly and helpful, and maintaining adequate supply levels are table stakes. This involves adequate staffing and training, and is equally important for pickup, where customers grow frustrated and express confusion when restaurants do not greet them as they arrive or provide confusing instructions.
- Integrated technology is also key; much like customers want to be greeted when they enter a restaurant, customers also want their orders to be confirmed, pickup times to be communicated, and restaurants to have orders ready when customers arrive. Consistent and clear communication is key; it is not actually possible to over-communicate with customers about their orders, particularly when they are experiencing something for the first time.
- Finally, regular measurement of the subjective customer experience, as well as measurement of objective metrics like wait time, being greeted on entry, order accuracy, etc., is critical to ensuring that restaurants are delivering on their brand promises and keeping customers satisfied.



## Author Info:

**Carlos Aragon**

Vice President, CHP

[carlos.aragon@ipsos.com](mailto:carlos.aragon@ipsos.com)

**Kaili Hunsaker**

Director, CHP

[kaili.hunsaker@ipsos.com](mailto:kaili.hunsaker@ipsos.com)

## About Ipsos

At Ipsos we are passionately curious about people, markets, brands, and society. We deliver information and analysis that makes our complex world easier and faster to navigate and inspires our clients to make smarter decisions. With a strong presence in 90 countries, Ipsos employs more than 18,000 people and conducts research programs in more than 100 countries. Founded in France in 1975, Ipsos is controlled and managed by research professionals.