

Value on the Menu:

How Consumers Feel About Restaurant Prices, Quality, and Service





Executive Summary

This comprehensive study, based on responses from **1,410 consumers**, reveals significant insights into dining habits, preferences, and perceptions. Key findings include a moderate increase in dining out frequency compared to two years ago, generally positive experiences with food quality and service, but **growing concerns about value for money**. The report highlights opportunities for restaurants to enhance customer satisfaction through improved service, strategic pricing, and targeted promotions.

1,410 consumers

reported a moderate increase in dine out frequency compared to two years ago, despite growing concerns about value for money.





Introduction

The restaurant industry continues to evolve rapidly, shaped by changing consumer behaviors, economic factors, and societal shifts. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for restaurants to remain competitive and meet customer expectations. This study aims to provide a comprehensive view of consumer dining habits, preferences, and perceptions, offering valuable insights for restaurant owners, managers, and industry stakeholders.



The study provides valuable insights into evolving consumer dining habits and preferences, helping restaurants stay competitive and meet changing customer expectations.



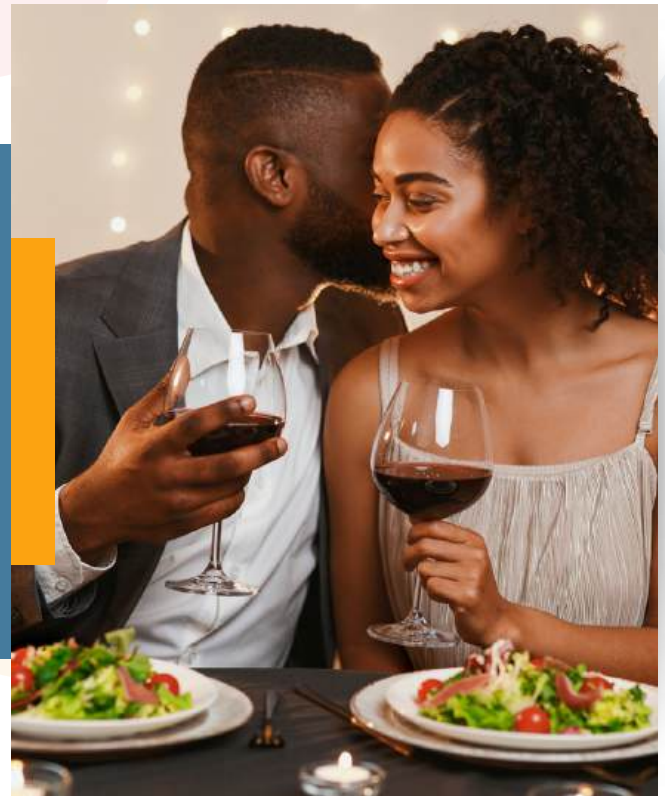


Methodology

We conducted an online survey of **1,410 consumers**, gathering data on their dining habits, experiences, and preferences. The survey included questions about dining frequency across various restaurant types, changes in dining habits compared to previous years, satisfaction with recent dining experiences, perceptions of value, and factors that influence dining decisions. This approach allowed us to capture a broad spectrum of consumer perspectives and behaviors in the current restaurant landscape.



A survey of 1,410 consumers revealed shifts in dining frequency, satisfaction, and perceptions of value in today's restaurant landscape.





Detailed Findings

1. Dining Frequency and Habits

The frequency with which consumers dine out provides valuable insights into market demand and consumer behavior. Understanding these patterns helps restaurants optimize their costs, operations and marketing strategies.

Our survey revealed that the majority of consumers dine out at sit-down restaurants 1-4 times per month, with **35.2%** dining out 1-2 times and **26.6%** dining out 3-4 times. Only a small percentage (**8%**) dine out more than 10 times per month, while **1.8%** never dine out at sit-down restaurants.

For quick-service restaurants, the frequency is similar, with **44.7%** visiting 1-2 times per month and **31.1%** visiting 3-4 times. Fast food and drive-through visits show a comparable pattern, with **43.1%** going 1-2 times per month and **23.6%** going 3-4 times.

Interestingly, food delivery remains less frequent, with **77.5%** of respondents ordering delivery only 1-2 times per month.





Sit-down Restaurants:

35.2%

Dine out 1-2 times per month

26.6%

Dine out 3-4 times per month

8%

Dine out more than 10 times per month

1.8%

Never dine out at sit-down restaurants



Quick-service Restaurants:

44.7%

Visit 1-2 times per month

31.1%

Visit 3-4 times per month



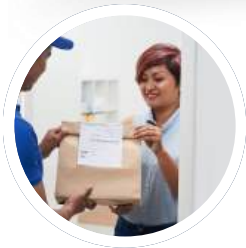
Fast Food/Drive-through Visits:

43.1%

Visit 1-2 times per month

23.6%

Visit 3-4 times per month



Food Delivery:

77.5%

Order delivery 1-2 times per month

These findings suggest that while dining out remains a regular activity for most consumers, there's significant room for growth in visit frequency. It's crucial for restaurants to focus on strategies to increase repeat visits and encourage more frequent dining, particularly in the food delivery segment which shows lower engagement.

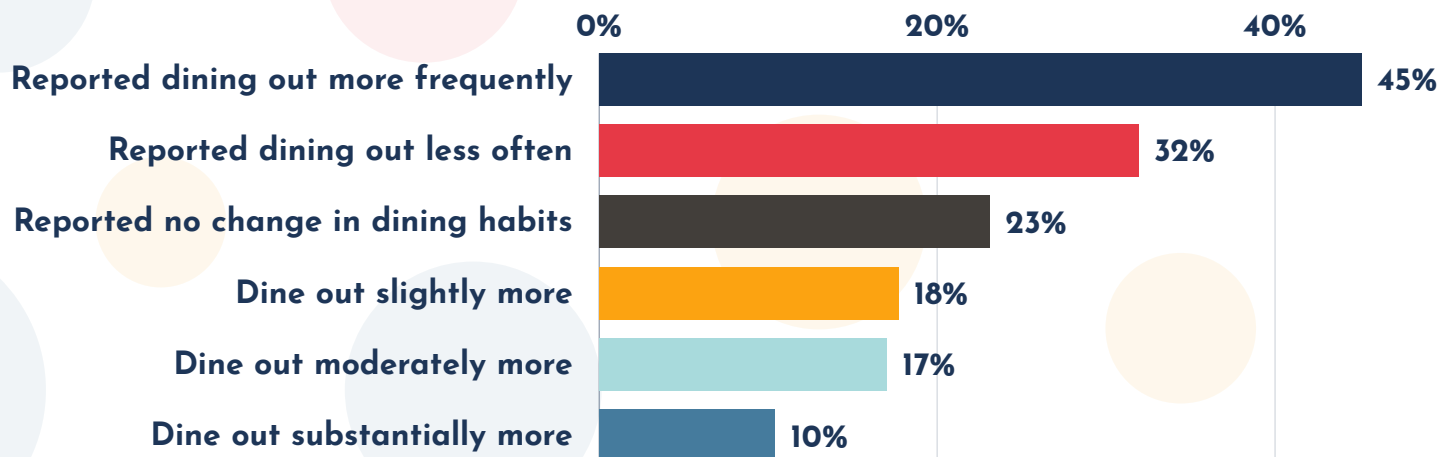


2. Changes in Dining Habits

Dining habits are not static; they shift over time, reflecting broader societal and economic changes. Tracking these evolving patterns offers crucial insights into current consumer behavior and potential future trends.

Compared to two years ago, **45.1%** of respondents reported dining out more frequently (**10.4%** substantially more, **17%** moderately more, and **17.7%** slightly more). Conversely, **31.9%** reported dining out less often. **23.1%** saw no change in their habits.

This overall increase in dining out frequency is encouraging for the restaurant industry. However, the significant portion of consumers dining out less often (**31.9%**) shouldn't be overlooked. Restaurants need to investigate the reasons behind this decrease - whether it's due to economic factors, changes in lifestyle, or dissatisfaction with dining experiences - **and develop strategies to re-engage these customers.**



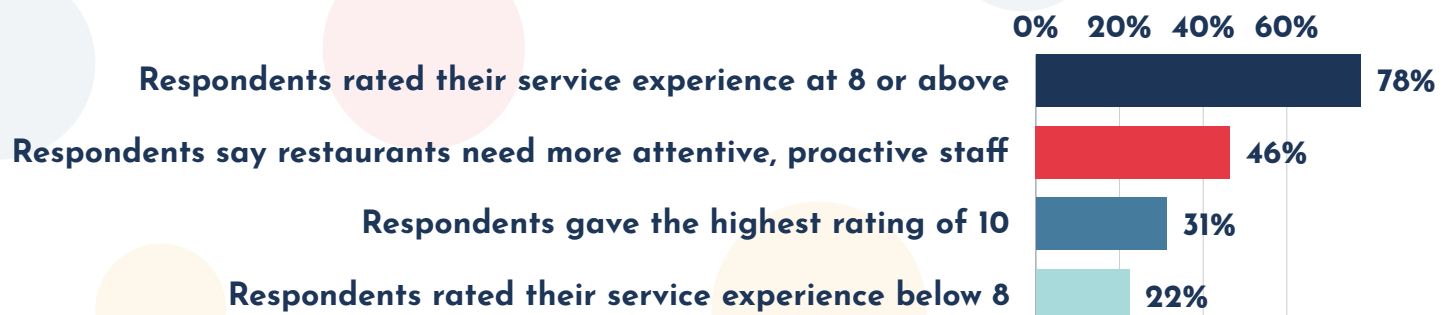


3. Service Quality Perceptions

Exceptional service can transform a meal into a memorable experience, significantly impacting customer satisfaction and loyalty. Our survey asked respondents to rate their most recent service experience on a scale of 1 to 10.

The results were largely positive, with an average rating of 8 out of 10. A substantial **77.7%** of respondents rated their service experience at 8 or above, with **31.2%** giving the highest rating of 10.

While these numbers are encouraging, they also reveal room for improvement. **22.3%** of respondents rated their service below 8, indicating nearly a quarter of diners are having less than stellar experiences. Given that **46.4%** of respondents believe restaurants need more attentive and proactive staff to improve, there's clearly an opportunity to enhance service quality.



Restaurants should focus on consistent staff training, implementing robust feedback systems, and creating a culture of exceptional service to push more experiences into the outstanding category.



4. Food Quality Perceptions

Food quality is arguably the most crucial aspect of the dining experience. Our survey revealed similar results to service quality, with an average rating of 8 out of 10 for respondents' most recent dining experiences.

An impressive **80.5%** of respondents rated their food quality at 8 or above, with **31.1%** giving the highest rating of 10. These numbers suggest that restaurants are generally meeting or exceeding customer expectations regarding food quality.

However, the fact that **51.2%** of respondents believe restaurants need to improve food quality and consistency indicates a disconnect between overall satisfaction and specific experiences. This suggests that while one-off experiences might be positive, consistency remains a challenge for many restaurants.



To address this, restaurants should focus on standardizing their food preparation processes, regularly training kitchen staff, and implementing rigorous quality control measures. Additionally, gathering more detailed feedback on specific menu items could help identify areas for improvement.



5. Value Perception

Diners weigh their overall experience against the price they pay, making value perception a key driver of customer satisfaction and repeat business. Our survey delved into this critical aspect of dining out, revealing insights into how consumers evaluate their restaurant experiences.

Our survey found that **58.6%** of respondents perceived their last dining experience as either "excellent value" (**14.4%**) or "good value" (**44.2%**). While this is positive, it also means that **41.4%** of diners felt they received only fair or poor value for their money.

This perception of value (or lack thereof) is further emphasized by the fact that **67.5%** of respondents believe restaurants need to offer cheaper prices to improve. This suggests a significant gap between customer expectations and current pricing strategies.





Food service providers must carefully evaluate their pricing strategies in relation to the quality of food and service they provide. This might involve re-evaluating portion sizes, ingredients used, or finding operational efficiencies to reduce costs without compromising quality. Alternatively, restaurants might need to better communicate the value they provide to justify their prices.



Restaurants should reassess pricing strategies or better communicate value to align with customer expectations and justify costs.





6. Factors Influencing Dining Decisions: The Loyalty Paradox

Understanding what motivates customers to dine out more frequently can help restaurants tailor their offerings and marketing strategies. However, our findings reveal a concerning trend that restaurant owners need to approach with caution.

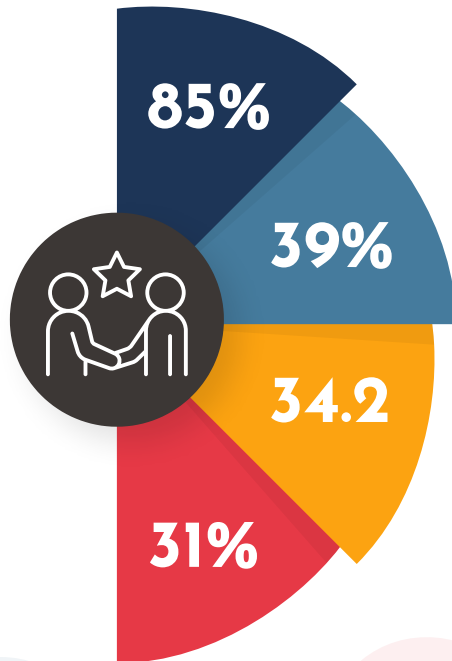
Discounts and promotions emerged as the most significant factor influencing dining decisions, with a staggering **85%** of respondents indicating this would encourage them to dine out more often. While this might seem like an easy win, it presents a double-edged sword for restaurants.

Relying heavily on discounts and promotions builds transactional loyalty, not emotional loyalty. When a restaurant down the street offers a better deal, these price-motivated customers are likely to switch without a second thought. This creates a race to the bottom that's unsustainable for restaurants in the long run.

Other factors, which could contribute more to emotional loyalty, ranked lower in influencing dining decisions, but in reality will drive longer term emotive loyalty. Better customer service/experience (**39%**) and new menu items (**34.2%**) followed behind discounts and promotions in motivating diners. Limited-time offers (**31%**), while potentially useful for creating urgency, also ranked lower than purely price-based incentives.



The Loyalty Paradox:



- Discounts/Promotions:**
 85% would dine out more often due to discounts and promotions.
- Customer Service:**
 39% are motivated by better service.
- New Menu Items:**
 34.2% are influenced by new dishes.
- Limited-Time Offers:**
 31% are encouraged by limited-time deals.

This stark contrast reveals a critical challenge for restaurants: how to balance short-term sales drivers with long-term loyalty builders. While price clearly dominates as a concern for many diners, restaurants must find ways to elevate the importance of experience and quality in customers' minds.





The key takeaway?

Restaurants need to craft a balanced strategy that leverages the drawing power of promotions while simultaneously investing in areas that can build emotional loyalty. This means:

- Using periodic promotions strategically to attract new customers
- Continuously improving customer service to create memorable experiences
- Regularly updating menus to keep offerings fresh and exciting
- Educating customers about the value of quality experiences beyond price

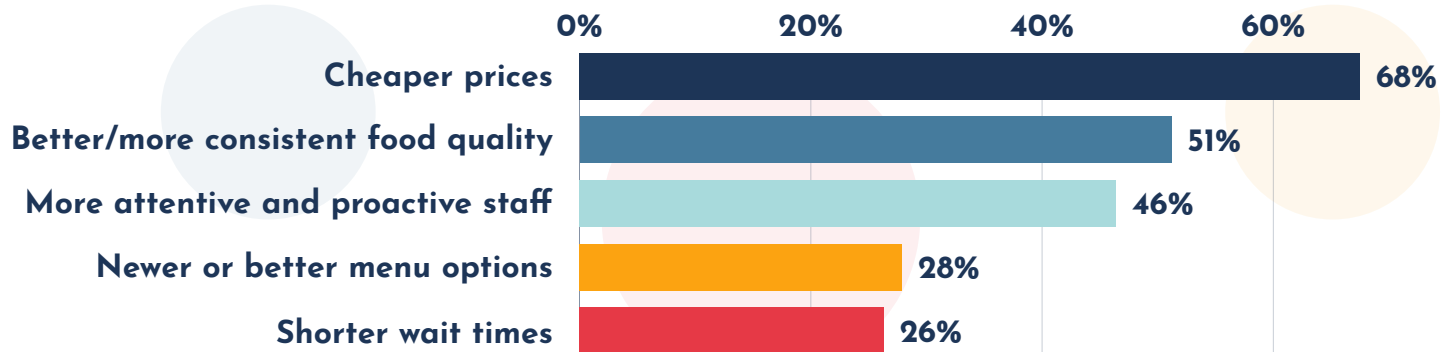
By shifting focus from mere transactions to building relationships, restaurants can work towards cultivating a loyal customer base that chooses them not just for deals, but for the overall value they provide. This approach can help restaurants break free from the discount spiral and build a more sustainable business model in the long run.





7. Areas for Restaurant Improvement

To provide actionable insights for restaurants, we asked respondents what they believe is needed to improve. The top areas identified were:



These findings present an interesting paradox when viewed through the lens of emotive loyalty. While cheaper prices top the list, the next three items - food quality, staff attentiveness, and menu innovation - are key drivers of emotional connection and long-term loyalty.

This data underscores the challenge restaurants face: meeting customers' desire for value while also creating experiences that foster genuine loyalty. Simply lowering prices may attract customers in the short term, but it's the quality of food, service, and overall experience that will keep them coming back.





Restaurants should approach these improvement areas strategically:



Pricing:

Rather than simply cutting prices, focus on communicating the value behind your pricing. Educate customers on ingredient quality, preparation methods, and unique offerings that justify the cost.



Food Quality:

Consistency is key. Invest in staff training and quality control measures to ensure every dish meets high standards. This consistency builds trust and loyalty over time.



Staff Awareness:

Well-trained, engaged staff can transform a meal into a memorable experience. Prioritize hiring, training, and retaining staff who can provide exceptional service.



Menu Innovation:

Regular updates keep the dining experience fresh and exciting, giving customers reasons to return beyond just good deals.



Efficiency:

Streamline operations to reduce wait times without compromising quality or service.



By addressing these areas holistically, restaurants can create a value proposition that goes beyond price alone. This approach can help build the kind of emotional connection with customers that leads to true loyalty - choosing your restaurant not because it's the cheapest, but because it offers the best overall experience.

Ultimately, while meeting customer expectations on price is important, food service providers should strive to excel in areas that create lasting impressions and emotional connections. This balanced approach can lead to sustainable success in a highly competitive industry.



Restaurants should focus on creating lasting emotional connections with customers by offering a superior overall experience, not just the lowest price.





8. Limited Time Offers and New Menu Items

Limited time offers (LTOs) and new menu items can be effective tools for driving customer engagement and repeat visits. Our survey explored consumer behavior and attitudes towards these offerings.

In the past year, **53%** of respondents tried new menu items or LTOs 1-3 times, while **26.5%** did so 4-6 times. Only **6.5%** never tried new items or LTOs. This suggests that the majority of diners are open to trying new offerings, presenting an opportunity for restaurants to drive engagement through menu innovation.

Furthermore, **61.7%** of respondents indicated they were either "very likely" (**16.3%**) or "likely" (**45.4%**) to visit a restaurant because of an LTO or new menu item. This underscores the potential of LTOs and menu updates as tools for attracting customers and driving traffic.



Regularly updating menus and offering limited-time items can effectively engage customers and encourage repeat visits, helping restaurants stay competitive.





53%

Tried new menu items or LTOs 1-3 times in the past year



26.5%

Tried new items 4-6 times



6.5%

Never tried new items or LTOs



61.7%

Likely to visit a restaurant because of an LTO or new menu item



16.3%

"Very likely" to visit due to an LTO or new menu item



45.4%

"Likely" to visit due to an LTO or new menu item



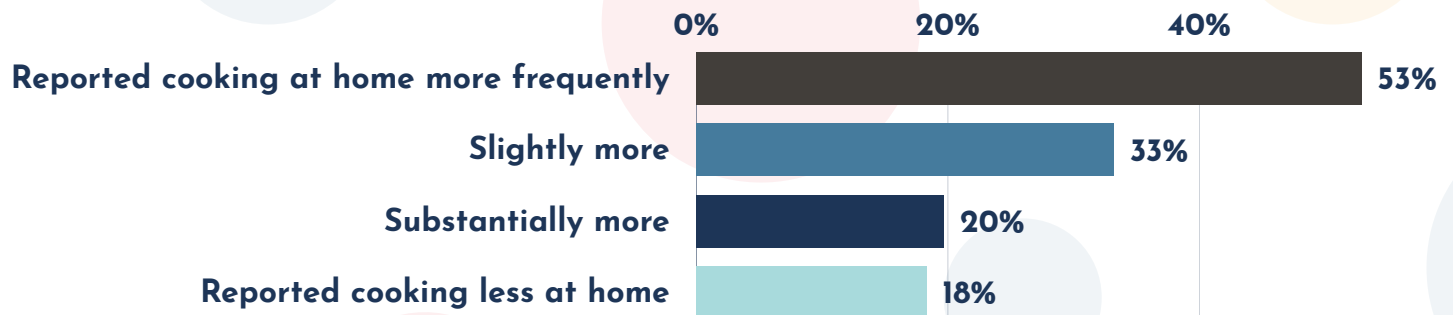
Restaurants should leverage this consumer openness to new items by regularly updating their menus and offering LTOs. However, they should also ensure that these new offerings align with their brand identity and meet the same quality standards as their regular menu to maintain customer trust and satisfaction.



9. Shift Towards Home Cooking

Our survey also explored shifts in consumer behavior towards home cooking, which can impact restaurant visits.

52.9% of respondents reported cooking at home more frequently than in the past (**19.7%** substantially more, **33.2%** slightly more). Only **18.3%** reported cooking less at home. This trend towards increased home cooking could pose a challenge for restaurants.



However, it also presents an opportunity. Restaurants could explore offering meal kits, cooking classes, or premium ingredients for home cooking to tap into this trend. Additionally, emphasizing the unique experiences and convenience that dining out offers could help maintain customer engagement despite the increase in home cooking.



Offer meal kits or cooking classes to tap into the home cooking trend while highlighting the convenience of dining out.

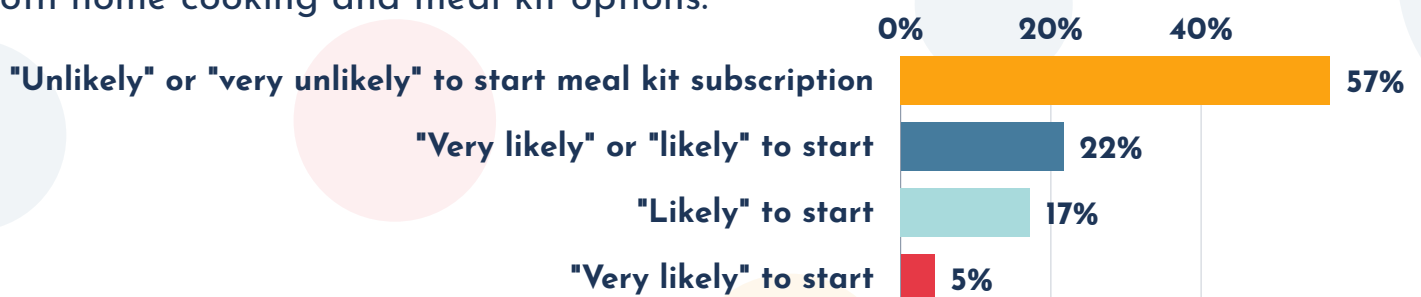


10. Meal Kit Subscriptions

As an alternative to both dining out and traditional home cooking, we explored consumer interest in meal kit subscriptions.

The results show limited enthusiasm for this option, with only **21.7%** of respondents indicating they were "very likely" (**4.5%**) or "likely" (**17.2%**) to start a meal kit subscription if they don't dine out or order delivery. A significant **57.2%** were either "unlikely" or "very unlikely" to do so.

While meal kits may not be a major threat to restaurants at this time, the **21.7%** of consumers open to this option represent a segment that restaurants should be aware of. Offering convenient, high-quality dining experiences that can't be easily replicated at home remains crucial for restaurants to compete against both home cooking and meal kit options.



Restaurants should focus on offering unique, high-quality dining experiences that can't be easily replicated at home to stay competitive against meal kits and home cooking trends.



Recommendations

Based on our findings, we recommend the following strategies for restaurants to enhance customer satisfaction and drive business growth:

Optimize Pricing and Value Communication: With **67.5%** of respondents citing a need for cheaper prices, restaurants must carefully evaluate their pricing strategies. This doesn't necessarily mean lowering prices across the board, but rather ensuring that the value provided justifies the price point. Consider implementing tiered pricing options, combo deals, or loyalty programs to provide value at different price points.



67.5% of respondents cited a need for cheaper prices

Enhance Food Quality and Consistency: Given that **51.2%** of respondents believe restaurants need to improve food quality and consistency, this should be a top priority. Implement rigorous quality control measures, standardize recipes and preparation methods, and regularly train kitchen staff to ensure consistency.



51.2% of respondents think restaurants should improve food quality and consistency.



Improve Service Quality: With **46.4%** of respondents calling for more attentive and proactive staff, investing in comprehensive staff training programs is crucial. Focus on developing soft skills, product knowledge, and efficient service techniques. Consider implementing mystery shopping programs to regularly assess and improve service quality.



46.4% of respondents believe restaurants need more attentive and proactive staff.

Strategically Use Promotions and Limited Time Offers: While **85%** of respondents are motivated by discounts and promotions, and **61.7%** are likely to visit for LTOs or new menu items, use these tactics judiciously. Focus on creating value-added promotions that enhance the dining experience rather than simply discounting prices. Ensure that these offerings look and taste as good to your customers as they did in your test kitchen, and use them as opportunities to showcase your restaurant's unique qualities. This approach can help attract customers without falling into an unsustainable discount spiral, while building trust and encouraging repeat visits based on quality and experience rather than price alone.

85% of respondents are motivated by discounts and promotions.

61.7% are likely to visit due to LTOs or new menu items.



Regularly Update Menu Options: With **27.9%** of respondents seeking newer or better menu options, consider implementing a rotating seasonal menu or regular special items to keep the offering fresh and exciting.



27.9% want newer or better menu options.

Optimize Operations for Efficiency: Address the **26.3%** of respondents who want shorter wait times by reviewing and optimizing your operational processes. This could involve streamlining kitchen operations, improving table turnover strategies, or implementing technology solutions for more efficient ordering and payment processes.



26.3% of respondents want shorter wait times.



To reduce wait times, restaurants should focus on streamlining operations and adopting technology solutions to improve efficiency and enhance the customer experience.





Implement Holistic Feedback Systems: To gain a comprehensive understanding of your customers' experiences and operational effectiveness, employ a multi-faceted approach to gathering insights. This should include:

- Post-dining surveys to capture immediate customer impressions
- Focus groups to delve deeper into customer preferences and pain points
- Mystery shopping programs to assess the customer experience objectively
- Internal operational audits to identify areas for improvement
- Social media monitoring and online review analysis to learn public perception
- Employee feedback sessions to gather insights from those on the front lines

By combining these diverse feedback methods, you'll create a 360-degree view of your restaurant's performance. Use this rich, varied data to drive continuous improvement across all aspects of your operation, from food quality and service to ambiance and operational



A holistic feedback system helps restaurants continuously improve by gathering insights from multiple channels and building stronger customer connections.





Explore Home Cooking Tie-Ins: Given the trend towards increased home cooking, consider offering take-home versions of popular dishes, meal kits, or even cooking classes to engage with customers beyond the traditional dining experience.



Offer meal kits or take-home dishes to tap into the home cooking trend.

From Feedback to Emotional Connection: The Power of Customer Experience Measurement

This survey underscores the critical role of ongoing, systematic customer experience measurement in building emotional loyalty. While providing a broad overview, it emphasizes the need for restaurants to implement holistic feedback systems tailored to their specific customer base.

Multi-faceted approaches - including surveys, social media monitoring, mystery shopping, and review analysis - offer real-time insights into customer experiences. These tools help restaurants identify trends, address issues proactively, and refine offerings to meet evolving expectations.

The discrepancies between overall satisfaction ratings and specific concerns highlight the need for nuanced measurement. Aggregate ratings alone may not capture the full picture of customer satisfaction or emotional connection.



By implementing comprehensive experience measurement systems, restaurants can:

- Swiftly address issues before they impact loyalty
- Understand unique drivers of customer satisfaction and emotional connection
- Track improvements over time
- Tailor offerings to customer preferences
- Make data-driven decisions on menu, pricing, and operations

Restaurants committed to rigorous experience measurement and swift action will be best positioned to foster emotional loyalty and thrive in a competitive market.



Implementing comprehensive experience measurement systems enables restaurants to swiftly address issues and foster emotional loyalty, ultimately enhancing customer satisfaction.





The Path Forward: Cultivating Emotional Loyalty Through Value, Quality, and Experience

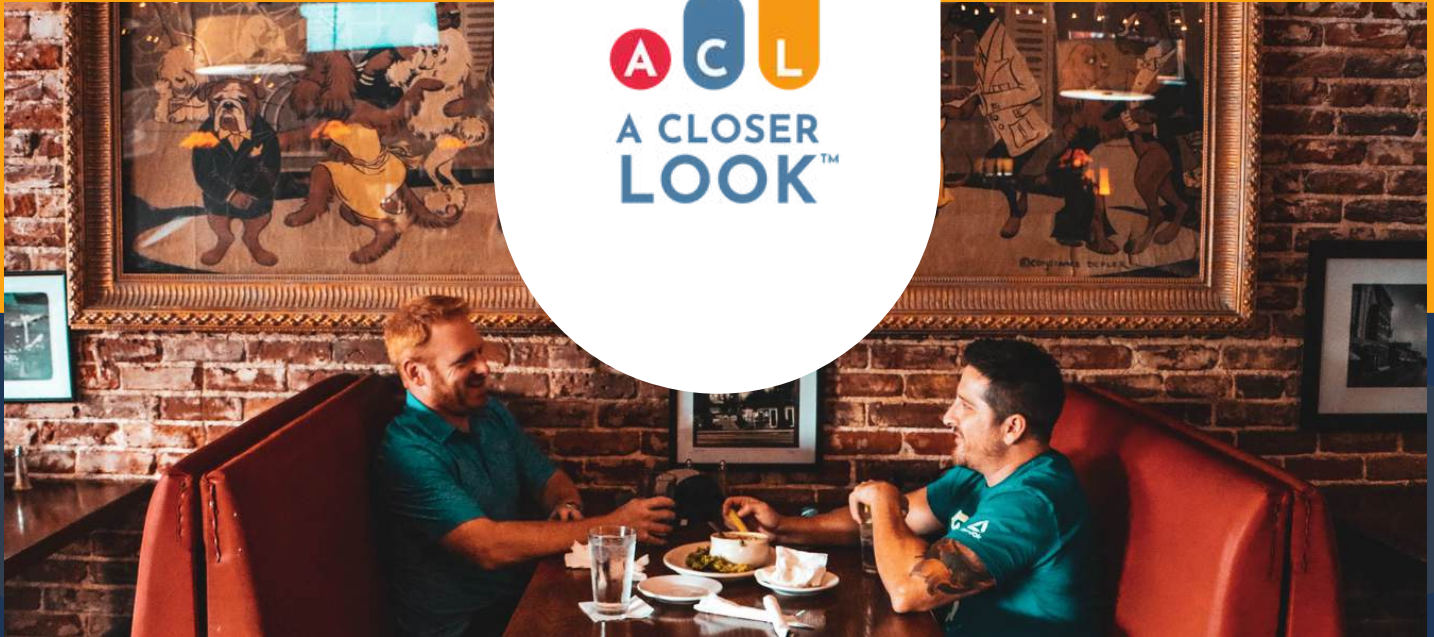
Success in the restaurant industry hinges on balancing value, quality, and overall dining experience to foster emotional connections with customers.

Our survey reveals consumers eager to dine out but discerning about their choices. They seek value without sacrificing quality, appreciate good service while exploring new options, and balance dining out with home cooking.

For restaurants, the key to success lies in understanding your specific customer base, consistently delivering high-quality food and service, effectively communicating value, and adapting to changing preferences. This approach builds emotional loyalty that transcends mere transactions.

By leveraging these insights and implementing robust feedback systems, restaurants can create experiences that exceed expectations and foster deep emotional connections. This cultivates the kind of loyalty and advocacy that drives long-term success in this dynamic industry.

The future of dining out is about more than just the menu - it's about creating emotional bonds through value, quality, and memorable experiences. By focusing on these elements and staying attuned to evolving customer needs, restaurants can build lasting emotional loyalty and thrive in an ever-changing market.



**Ready to revolutionize your menu
and exceed customer expectations?**

**A Closer Look delivers data-driven insights
to help you craft a menu that delights and
keeps customers coming back.**

Let's transform your guest experience today.