

## MARKET LEADER REPORT

March 2025

# 2025 RESTAURANT TECHNOLOGY OUTLOOK

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## What's Next for Restaurant Tech

For the third annual Restaurant Technology Outlook, Nation's Restaurant News and Restaurant Business teamed up to learn how restaurant operators are leveraging tech to drive growth in their businesses — straight from the operators themselves.

We surveyed more than 550 restaurant operators of all sizes and segments to understand what technology they're embracing (or not), as well as their business goals and, most importantly, where they'll be directing their budgets and attention this year.

The results reveal a restaurant industry that is still all-in on technology updates — nearly all respondents plan to make tech moves this year — with a greater understanding of how a digital-first business can drive results.

But with that digital maturity comes more scrutiny on ROI and, in some cases, a clearer awareness of their growing pains. Operators in this year's survey pointed to integration challenges, concerns about data management and pockets of discontent around certain areas of their tech stack. They're also embracing AI, even as they reveal knowledge gaps and lack of clarity on its real-world use cases.

Despite the challenges, operators in this year's study were full speed ahead on investment and eager to digitize, measure and optimize as much of their businesses as possible in the year ahead. Read on for a look at how they plan to do it.





# Key Findings



## Investments Target the Top Line

Efforts to drive sales and frequency shaped investment plans again this year, with digital marketing topping the list of investment targets, followed closely by investments in POS systems and ordering channels. Quick-service and fast-casual concepts led the pack here, with half of all limited-service respondents saying they would expand their digital-ordering channels in the next year.



## People Are a Critical Component

What's grown most as a perceived challenge is maintaining the staff to manage and implement new technology. As systems get more sophisticated, so should a restaurant's labor strategies, which likely will focus on productivity and efficiency above all.



## The Search Continues for Labor, Marketing Tech

Respondents identified digital marketing and labor management as top strategic priorities throughout this survey. Yet systems tailored for these areas elicit the most dissatisfaction among operators, and leaders are likely still evaluating potential partners and solutions.



## Limited-Service Brands Lead the Way

Operators from full-service and independent restaurants were less likely to invest in technology this year than their competitors, especially in adding digital-ordering channels. Low-hanging fruit like mobile apps, online ordering, and catering are ripe for adoption.



## Data Sets and Strategies Measure Up

When restaurants incorporate new sources of data, they find information easily but struggle to use it strategically. One place to start could be measuring how menu and marketing moves affect the sales and guest data that modern tech stacks can ingest.



## Seeking Clear Use Cases for AI

Most operators in our study were excited about the potential of artificial intelligence in their businesses, but many say they have yet to implement AI tools (even though AI is already embedded in many tech tools), revealing potential knowledge gaps about where and how AI fits into restaurant operations. The AI skeptics, meanwhile, said they were taking a wait and see approach until the ROI and use cases were clearer.



## Data Security and Integration Concerns Inch Up

Integration challenges and concerns about data management and security saw increased focus in this year's survey, with more operators, particularly limited-service operators, citing them as challenges and saying they'd invest in tech infrastructure in the year ahead. While still relatively low on the list of investment targets, they may be areas to watch as operators look to bring order to increasingly complex and data-rich operations.



## Flexibility Wins When Leaders Stretch Tech Budgets

While affordability and high-end features matter when operators consider where to spend limited IT budgets, respondents prioritized flexible solutions with an eye on integration when they vet front-of-house and back-of-house systems, which they expect to drive ROI.



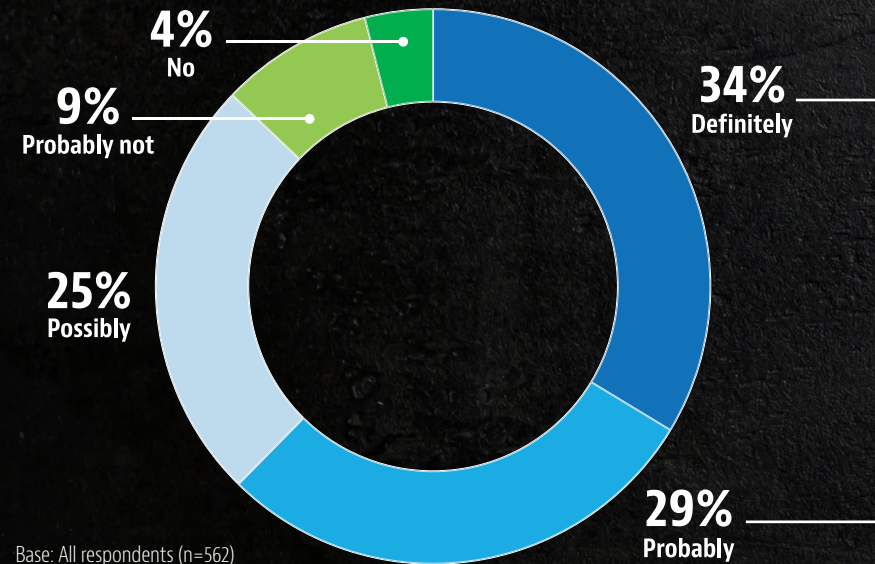
## Full Speed Ahead

As restaurant technology continues to rapidly evolve, the vast majority of restaurant operators in our study plan to keep pace, with nearly nine in 10 saying they would invest in technology this year.

That voracious appetite for tech has been a constant since our annual survey debuted in 2023, and this year was no exception. Asked if they would invest in new technology in the next 12 months, 88% of this year's respondents said they "definitely," "probably," or "possibly" would. That figure was essentially steady since last year's survey, when 87% of respondents said the same.

At the other end of the spectrum, 13% said "probably not" or "no," which was comparable to the share of operators who said the same last year.

### Will your operation invest in new technology in the next 12 months?



Likelihood to invest in tech held steady, but operators expressed greater certainty this year, with those saying "definitely" up 4 points from 30%.



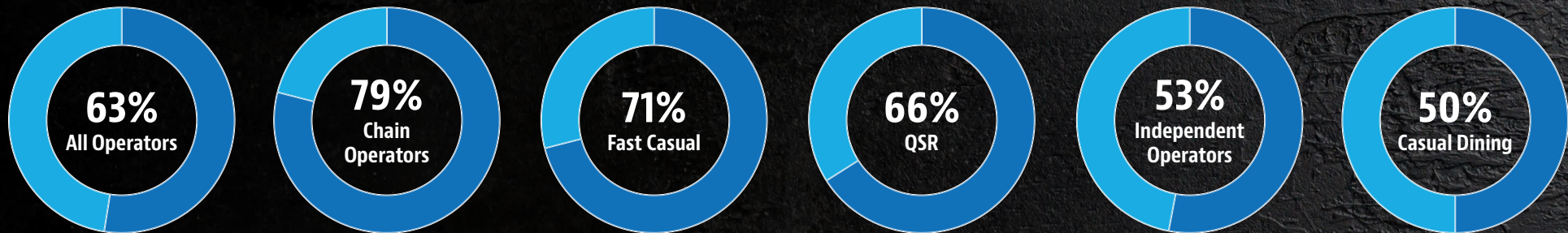
Among the most positive responses, there was a slight increase in certainty, with slightly more people saying “definitely,” 34% versus 30% a year ago. Likewise, the cohort that would “possibly” invest decreased slightly year over year from 33% to 29%.

Certain groups of respondents were even more committed to tech growth than others. Chains and limited-service operators were notably more likely to invest in tech than their full-service or independent peers. Perhaps not surprisingly, operators who reported being more data-savvy, referred to later in the report as Data Enthusiasts, were also out ahead.

Full-service operators were more cautious on investment plans, with 15% of casual-dining operators saying they likely would not invest this year, compared with only 8% of QSR and fast-casual respondents who said the same.

### Limited Service Leads Tech Investment Intent

% of respondents saying “definitely” or “probably”





## A 'Critical' Component

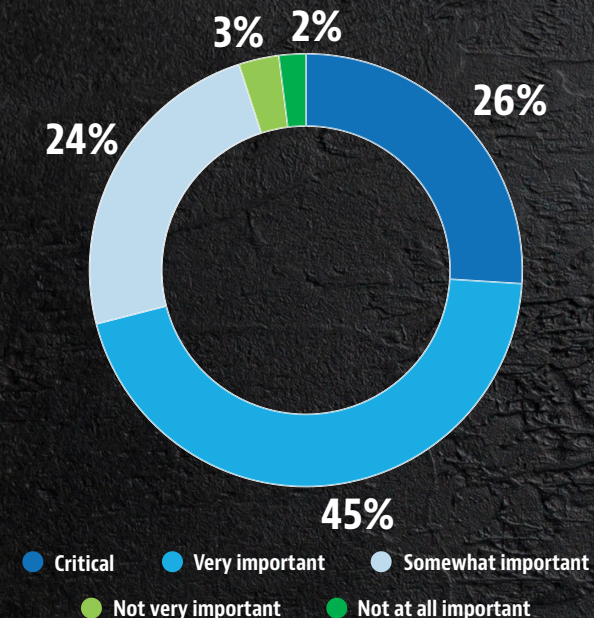
Investment intent wasn't the only thing that held steady in the last year. The value restaurant operators placed on technology remained high year over year as well. More than seven in 10 respondents said technology would be either critical or very important to achieving their business goals this year.

Chains and limited-service brands were more likely to tie their future success to technology, with 88% of chains saying they see technology as "critical" or "very important," compared with just 60% of independent operators who said the same.

Broadly speaking, operators across segments placed high value on the importance of technology, but limited-service operators were significantly more likely to call tech "critical." In fact, nearly a third of quick-service and fast-casual operators said technology would be essential to their businesses in the next year, compared with 22% of casual-dining operators. Among respondents who self-reported as data-savvy, referred to in the report as Data Enthusiasts, that number was even higher, at 80%.



## How important will technology be in your ability to meet key business objectives in 2025?



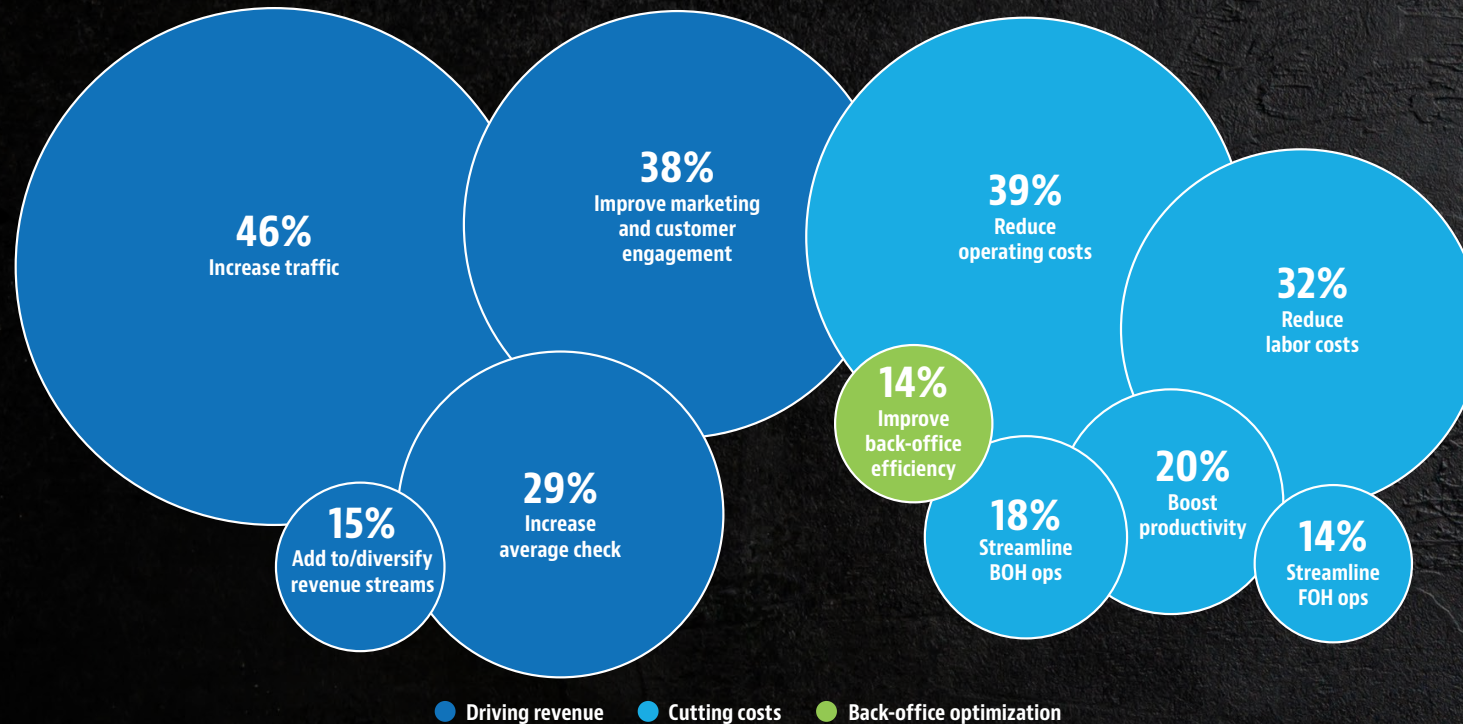
Base: All respondents (n=560)



## Tech Fuels Business Objectives

Restaurant operators' top area of focus for the year ahead was driving traffic, and their planned investments in tech — in marketing, digital-ordering channels and customer experience — naturally followed. Cost management was strong as well, echoed by interest in digital tools that can help manage food waste and labor inefficiencies. Improving back-office efficiencies was a lesser goal, but one that was up a few points year over year and dovetails with growing interest in data management, data security, and forecasting seen elsewhere in the survey.

### What are your top objectives as you look to improve profitability in the next 12 months?



Base: All respondents (n=562)



## Investment Targets

Where exactly are restaurant operators focusing their tech investments this year? Digital-marketing tools, including loyalty programs, once again topped the list, with 46% of respondents saying they were likely to add tech to support marketing efforts, the same percentage who chose that top option a year ago.

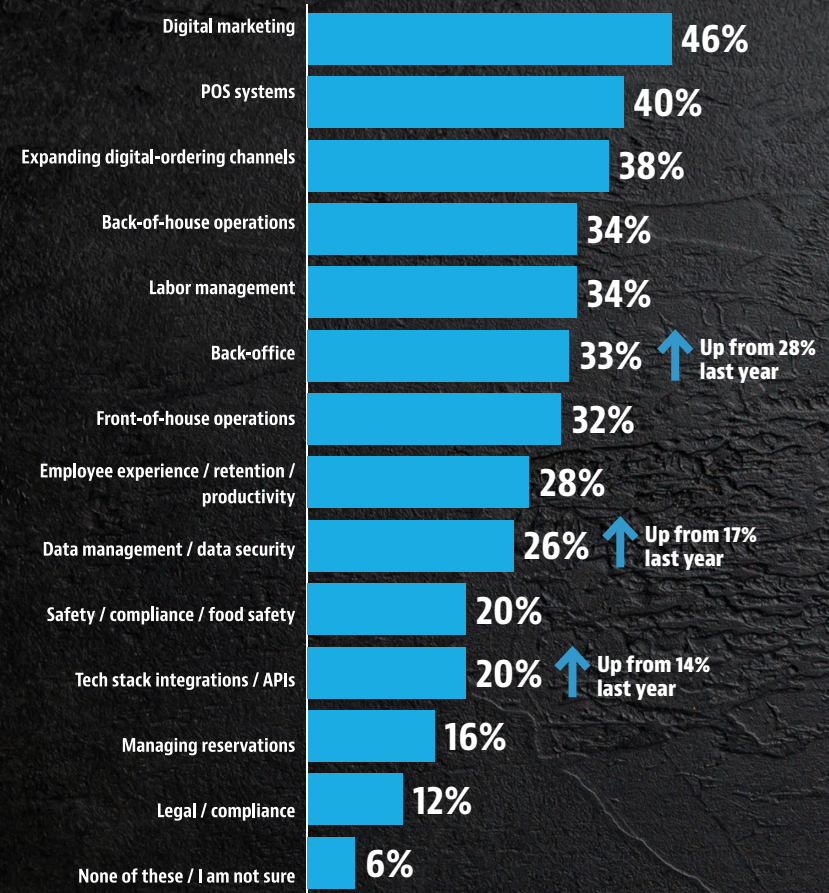
In fact, top areas of investment largely remained the same year over year, with only minor swaps in ranking and shifts of just a few percentage points. After digital marketing, the next most cited areas of investment were POS systems and digital-ordering channels, including mobile/online ordering, delivery, and kiosks. All three aligned with respondents' stated top business goal of driving customer frequency, to the extent that they engage customers, facilitate seamless ordering experiences and capture valuable customer data to continue the cycle.

The next tier of tech targets tended to focus on operational efficiency via enhanced productivity and profitability in the restaurant: back-of-house tech, labor management tools, back-office software, front-of-house tech, and employee engagement and retention platforms.

Outside of marketing, which was a top-tier concern for all segments, there were a few logical divergences by segment and service style. Quick-service and fast-casual brands were more likely than their full-service counterparts to prioritize expanding digital point-of-sale touchpoints — such as online and mobile ordering, delivery platforms, kiosks, or drive-thru tech — with half of LSR brands saying expanding digital channels was a 2025 priority, versus less than a third (31%) of full-service operators. On the flip side, full-service brands, understandably, were more likely than LSRs to focus on front-of-house technology (39% versus 25% of LSRs) and labor management tools (37% compared with 32% of LSRs).

Independent restaurants lagged chains on investment intent in nearly every area, likely a reflection of smaller budgets and implementation teams than their larger counterparts.

## What areas of your business are you most likely to support with tech investments in the next 12 months?



Base: All respondents (n=561)



## Top Investment Areas by Segment

Quick service	Fast casual	Casual dining
Digital ordering channels <b>51%</b>	Digital marketing <b>60%</b>	Digital marketing <b>52%</b>
POS systems <b>45%</b>	Digital ordering channels <b>49%</b>	Front-of-house tech <b>43%</b>
Digital marketing <b>44%</b>	POS systems Data management (tie) <b>44%</b>	Labor management <b>38%</b>

## Growing focus on data and integrations

Though the top investment targets were little changed since the 2024 report, there were a few notable increases among minor priorities that could indicate growing pain points or shifting priorities. Specifically, this year's survey saw a 9 percentage point increase in operators planning investments in data management and data security at 26%, up from 17% a year earlier. Plans to invest in integrations and APIs rose 6 points to 20% of all respondents, up from 14% a year earlier, and back-office tech saw a 5 point gain to 33%, from 28% a year ago.

Quick-service and fast-casual operators were more likely to zero in on these concerns, with 34% of LSR respondents indicating a focus on data security, versus 23% of FSR respondents. Likewise, they were more likely to say they would invest in tools to smooth tech integrations, at 26%, versus 17% of full-service respondents.

Taken together, they hint at a growing focus on shoring up the more "under the hood" elements of their tech stack that are invisible to the customer but create smooth, secure transactions when they work and inefficiency — or worse, security risks — when they don't.

Concerns about integration and data management emerged elsewhere in the survey as well, with more respondents citing challenges with data silos and functionality issues between tech partners (21%, up from 17% a year earlier). More than a quarter of respondents also said they were unsatisfied with current integrations and APIs. Separately, data security emerged as a reason for hesitation around AI adoption among some operators.

## Operators Look to Ease Integration Issues



**27%**

are **unsatisfied** with current integrations / APIs



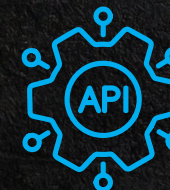
**26%**

Plan to invest in **data management** and **security** this year, up 9 percentage points YOY



**21%**

said they **struggle** with integration / data silos



**20%**

plan to invest in **integrations / APIs**, up 6 percentage points YOY



# Valuing Versatility for Long-Term Viability

An industry leader in kitchen display systems advocates for flexibility when approaching tech stack architecture



**Brian Wayne, Vice President of Customer Success  
QSR Automations**

Brian Wayne, who leads technology deployments and customer success for QSR Automations, lays out best practices for building and refining a restaurant's capabilities.

### Since the last time we spoke, have any operator challenges or pain points intensified over the past 12 months?

A lot of it is keeping costs down. It used to be that labor was hard to find, and now it's that labor costs so much and profit margins are smaller. But another thing is operators are reiterating the importance of the guest experience. Based on how much competition there is out there, getting the guest experience right is probably more important than ever.

The other one I would point out is increasing throughput for takeout and elevating that experience as well. It's continued to be a big issue post-COVID. Our partners want to improve and increase their communications to their guests and are wondering how they get the quoting of pickup times right and how they improve order accuracy.

### Operators want digital solutions that solve for prime costs, but technology has its own costs and ROI too. How should brands balance that as they design a tech stack?

Of course, we're biased toward the "best of breed" model with a focus on kitchen display systems, but we really believe getting that right is the most important thing, and then you can solve from there. If you switch other components, our solution continues to integrate with whatever you switch to. We have over 80 different point of sale integrations, so if you decide in two years that you want to switch to a different POS, you've protected your investment without having to repurchase other hardware.

From an ROI perspective, we always point to several major benefits that come from the kitchen display. Training becomes much easier with the kitchen display in place. Staff retention improves because it's much easier to on-board people. The speed of service improvements can then increase throughput, which is critical to a table service restaurant. The third benefit, which I'd say is more tied to takeout, is order accuracy. You're reducing remakes and waste just by getting the order correct. That and food quality are really tied to the guest experience. Even aside from those four benefits, the paper savings alone can help pay for a kitchen display system itself when it's less than the cost of the subscription to use it.

### At this point, consumers appear to be sticking with delivery and off-premises ordering. What's the right way to set up a tech stack to meet that demand?

It comes back to the kitchen display being that source of truth in the restaurant, having all the orders in one place. You have these horror stories of restaurants using five different tablets from all the different delivery providers, all while dealing with orders coming through their website and their dining room. Each channel can show its own orders but knows nothing of the other channels' orders. You can't build an accurate quote time for the guest.

We've seen operators pivot to order-ready screens. It used to be something you'd see at certain quick-service places, and now it's dipped more into fast casual and even some table



service restaurants. We have customers who break up that order-ready board into all the different delivery providers, and they can have every part of the "order in progress" status displayed to show customers the progression.

Guest notifications have become table stakes. We've developed different apps that communicate back to the kitchen, so that when a guest has arrived to pick up a takeout order, they mark themselves as arrived at the host stand, and it moves their order up to the top of the kitchen display. It's important that all these solutions tie together. It saves the staff extra steps in communication.

**"By having a solution in place that you like for kitchen display, POS, or whatever else, it doesn't matter what you switch to elsewhere in the tech stack if the solutions you retain are flexible enough to integrate the new ones."**

**— BRIAN WAYNE, VICE PRESIDENT OF CUSTOMER SUCCESS, QSR AUTOMATIONS**

### **How should restaurants set up a tech stack to keep up with an aggressive marketing calendar and a heavy discounting environment?**

Operators can reconfigure solutions, sometimes without buying any new hardware or software. You can repurpose a screen on your kitchen display that was working one way to deal with a special or promotion another way.

If you have an all-you-can-eat promotion that has to flow a different way through the kitchen, or if you're adding a ghost kitchen brand or just supporting incremental takeout business,

you can use a dedicated screen. From a table management standpoint, we've worked with restaurants who've expanded their customers' abilities to add their name to a virtual waitlist or to make reservations from search platforms like Google.

It all comes back to having solutions that integrate into a bunch of different platforms, so that it gives the operator flexibility to choreograph everything. The dynamic ability to reconfigure everything, no matter what the marketing promotion is, puts a system in place that will always be able to roll with it.

### **If operators take this open, "best of breed" approach, how should they think about right-sizing their tech stack if they start to feel like it's growing too big to control?**

We've always been on the side of best in breed, rather than "one throat to choke," because we often see — at least with the customers we work with — the POS and other solutions are getting switched out every few years. By having a solution in place that you like for kitchen display, POS, or whatever else, it doesn't matter what you switch to elsewhere in the tech stack if the solutions you retain are flexible enough to integrate the new ones.

So many more solutions now have more open APIs, web hooks, and the ability to write these integrations. I think 10 to 15 years ago, tying all these different solutions together was a pipe dream. Now it's much easier to take a piece of data and get it into my data warehouse or build it into another third-party tool, for whatever the end goal is.

It's interesting to see where everything is going. It's opened the door for robotics integration, computer vision on the make line, and all these different things that were a lot more difficult a few years ago that now are becoming more real.





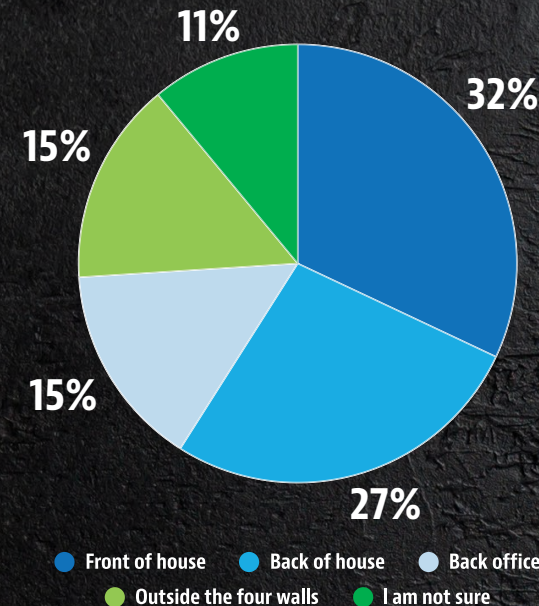
# Operators Seek Flexibility When Vetting Investments

Compared with how they answered last year, respondents were just as likely this year to target their technology spending in the front and back of house in search of the best return on investment, more often than they focus on solutions for back-office administration or for digital marketing (see sidebar). This year's group of operators also shared how they have different considerations for different kinds of technology when they're vetting potential upgrades to systems for the dining room, kitchen, or other areas of the restaurant.

Overall, respondents tend to evaluate new technology for the front of house and back of house the same way, prioritizing solutions that are "flexible," defined in this study as technology that can quickly add or change features and integrate easily with other tools operators can buy from new vendors. More than one in three participants said flexibility is most important for front-of-house and back-of-house technology.



Which area of your operation sees the greatest return on investment when you implement new technology?



Like last year, operators ranked the front of house and back of house as the areas of a restaurant where upgrading the tech stack would produce the greatest potential ROI.

Base: All respondents (n=558)



## When you vet potential technologies, which consideration is most important for each?

	Affordability	Best in Class	Flexibility	Comprehensive
Front-of-house tech	27%	23%	36%	14%
Back-of-house tech	27%	22%	36%	15%
Back-office tech	29%	24%	29%	18%
Marketing tech	32%	29%	25%	15%

Operators were also asked where it was most important to have solutions they consider to be “affordable,” with the lowest total cost of ownership, and “best in class,” meaning that system or software has the most effective features currently available in the market. These attributes were secondary for front-of-house and back-of-house tech, but a plurality of respondents chose them to describe what they value most in their digital-marketing tools. Nearly one in three participants called affordability most important for marketing tech, and nearly three in 10 said best-in-class features mattered most for marketing.

A fourth potential consideration was whether a potential tech investment was “comprehensive,” meaning it consolidated solutions and systems to one or only a few end-to-end solutions from the fewest number of vendors, ideally enabling better support. Fewer respondents, typically fewer than one in five per option, called comprehensive solutions their most important factor, and most often they applied that when vetting back-office systems.

Operators from limited-service and full-service chains tended to match the responses from the full sample in this study, but interesting differences arose by business size. For each area of the business, Data Enthusiasts and chain respondents over-indexed for seeking best-in-class features, while independents were more likely to prioritize affordability.





## Optimizing operations with artificial intelligence

How AI tools can boost sales, cut costs and support restaurant staff



**Jeff Loukas, VP of Product, AI for Restaurants,  
SoundHound AI**

Jeff Loukas, VP of Product at SoundHound AI outlines real-world applications of AI and shares how restaurants can find the right fit for their brand.

### **How would you advise a restaurant operator interested in incorporating artificial intelligence tools into their business?**

Restaurants are increasingly asking "What's the use case for AI?" and "How should I use it?" But the real question should be: "What problem am I trying to solve, and what tool can actually address it?"

For us, identifying the right fit for our products is key. From our Smart Ordering product which automates food ordering to our Employee Assist product which provides hand-free employee training and Voice Insights which is a new product that provides real-time feedback to employees as they engage with customers, there are many channels where our solutions can act as force multipliers for brands.

### **What are some specific ways that artificial intelligence can positively impact restaurant operations?**

One large restaurant chain that we work with wanted to increase speed in the drive-thru. Prior to implementation of our solution, orders were taking around 65 seconds to complete, but our automated platform improved that by upwards of 10 seconds. So for every six cars, we can now put an extra one through — and in the drive-thru, speed equals revenue.

Phone ordering is another great example. Many brands

don't have staff available to answer calls because they're busy serving customers or preparing food — which is exactly what they should be doing. For another brand we work with, following implementation of our Smart Ordering phone solution, phone orders now account for 10% of total revenue. With voice AI, restaurants can open up new ordering channels without additional labor costs or training investments.

Our Employee Assist solution is another game-changer. It basically puts all of the knowledge that a long-tenured manager or employee would have into a simplified, and easy-to-use interface accessible via tablet or headset. So if you have a new employee and the ice cream machine is broken, they're able to say, "How do I fix the ice cream machine?" and receive step-by-step guidance instantly via our AI-powered solution.

### **What successes have you seen in restaurants that have adopted AI? How has the experience improved for customers and staff?**

Customers are often pleasantly surprised by AI because it enhances their experience. We answer the phone on the first ring, never put them on hold, and always provide a friendly, consistent interaction.

I also think a lot of brands look at AI as a competition to labor, whereas the way that we look at it — and the brands using our systems look at it — is as a tool to augment labor.



For example, crew members in the drive-thru can hear interactions between the AI and the customer, while also monitoring the KDS, allowing them to start prepping orders long before the customer finishes. This reduces bottlenecks, improves accuracy, and lets staff focus on speed and efficiency. Instead of juggling multiple tasks, employees can concentrate on getting orders out the window and processing payments as quickly as possible.

Ultimately, our AI agents are designed to optimize restaurant operations, support staff, and ensure customers receive their food as hot, fresh, and fast as possible.

**"By strategically automating and delegating responsibilities to AI agents, operators can maximize productivity, improve customer and employee experiences, and ensure consistency across all levels of organizations."**

— JEFF LOUKAS, SOUNDHOUND AI

**How does the rapid growth of AI — not just in the restaurant industry but everywhere — change how restaurants approach building the right tech stack for their business?**

There has been tremendous growth all around for AI and many restaurant operators recognize the need to implement AI technology in order to streamline operations. However, there is a layer of complexity that is often missed, causing operators to think all of the solutions are created equal. They may decide to

go with the cheapest and fastest option available, which may not provide the long-term value they're looking for.

It is essential to select the right partner. Operators should look for a trusted partner with deep expertise in the restaurant industry and an independent platform that can seamlessly integrate a tech stack, allowing them to focus on food and service.

When we speak with restaurant operators about selecting the right solution, we recommend asking a few key questions: Is the technology built on third party LLMs or an in-house tech stack? How customizable is the solution? Are there any latency issues that can impact customer experience? These factors can significantly impact the quality of the solution, the customer experience, and ultimately, the success of the business.

At SoundHound, we pride ourselves in owning our full tech stack and offering an independent platform. This means we can provide robust data and actionable insights that drive strategic business decisions, making us an ideal partner to help restaurants navigate the complexities of AI adoption.

**How should restaurant operators think about the tasks that employees own and focus on, versus the tasks they should automate or delegate to an AI tool?**

AI is not just for ordering or one segment of a business, it can support a range of functions and channels depending on what a brand needs most.

For day-to-day operations, automation can handle repetitive tasks like managing orders, reservations, and FAQs, freeing employees to focus on customer experiences and preparing food. Across multiple locations, AI ensures consistency, improves efficiency,

and even helps with employee training and onboarding, leading to higher productivity and retention.

At a corporate level, AI extends beyond customer-facing and on location tasks. It can manage customer service, streamline HR processes, help manage payroll, timesheets, insurance and other internal operations. AI-powered operational tools can also be used to automate IT operations, minimizing IT and supply chain disruptions.

By strategically automating and delegating responsibilities to AI agents, operators can maximize productivity, improve customer and employee experiences, and ensure consistency across all levels of organizations.





## Seeking Real-World Applications for AI

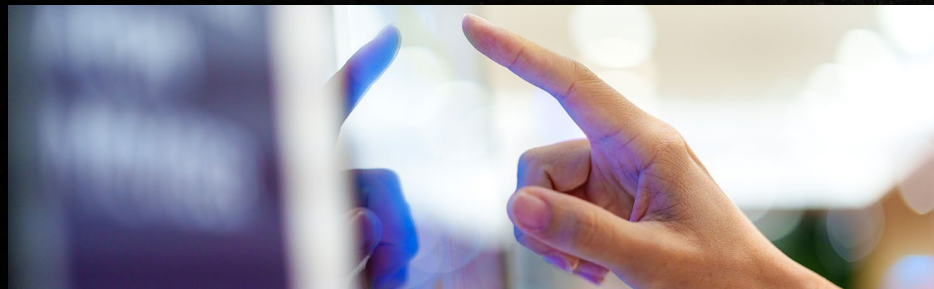
Given the explosion of artificial intelligence into the mainstream consciousness in the past few years, this year's survey set out to gain a deeper understand of if, where and how much AI-powered tools had penetrated the business of the average restaurant operator. We asked a series of questions designed to explore who is currently using AI, where operators are interested in adopting AI and, for those still on the fence, what's behind their hesitation.

The responses revealed three personas: the AI Adopters, the AI Curious, and the AI Cautious. When asked if they currently use AI in their businesses: 21% said yes; 51% said no, but they were interested in adding it; and 28% said no, and they had no plans to start.

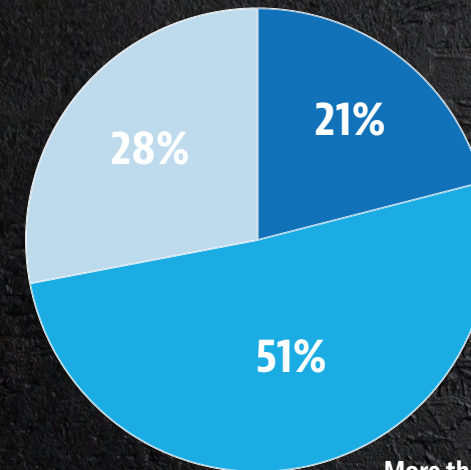
Interestingly, operators who said they are not currently using artificial intelligence in their business, but would like to — at just over half of this year's operators — was noticeably larger than the 35% who said the same a year ago, or the 41% who said so in the 2023 study, revealing a lack of clarity among operators about where and how AI could fit into their businesses.

The percentage of people who said they were not interested in adopting artificial intelligence at all (28%) has held steady for the past two years.

There was little difference among the segments when it comes to AI adoption, though chains were significantly more likely than independent restaurant operators to be using AI. Here's a closer look at the mindset and goals of each of these groups.



### Does your operation currently use artificial intelligence (AI) for any business objectives?



- Yes
- No but interested
- No and not interested

More than half of operators said they are not currently using AI but would like to, up from 35% who said the same a year ago.

Base: All respondents (n=557)



## AI Adopters

About one in five operators in our survey said they currently use artificial intelligence in their business, and we asked this group a series of questions to understand not only where in their businesses they're using AI now, but also where they're interested in using it in the future.

Currently, the majority are using generative AI for marketing and social media copywriting, the most common response by a wide margin. But there were several other applications for AI, all with at least a quarter of this group currently using, including: resolving customer service issues (29%), forecasting traffic and sales (28%), automated order taking (27%), answering phones and taking orders (26%) and customer segmentation (26%).

Asked where else they planned to adopt AI in the near future, there was broad interest across a wide variety of use cases, all with a majority of operators interested. The top five areas of interest were: using customer orders and visit history to personalize the guest experience (72%), inventory management (71%), data analysis and sharing (67%), and menu strategy and pricing (65%).

### TOP AREAS WHERE THEY'RE USING AI

Marketing and social media  
Customer Service  
Sales and Traffic Forecasting  
Order taking at point of sale  
Phone orders / answering calls

### TOP AREAS THEY'D LIKE TO ADD AI

Personalized Guest Experiences  
Inventory Management  
Data analysis  
Menu strategy / pricing  
Forecasting kitchen prep





## AI Curious

The largest group of respondents in this year's survey, at just over half of all participants, was the AI Curious, or those who say they are not currently using AI but would like to. For this group, we asked what use cases they were most interested in adopting in their businesses.

While it's possible that some operators in this group are in fact using artificial intelligence in their existing tech — AI functionality has been baked into many software systems for years, after all — the fact that they responded this way could indicate an interesting potential gap in knowledge or awareness, and a potential education opportunity for solutions providers in the space.

This group showed strong interest in using AI for sales and traffic forecasting, with an eye toward reducing waste and optimizing both their menus and their staffs.

Interestingly, generative AI for marketing and social media, which had strong penetration among the AI Adopter group, was a relatively low priority for this group.



## Which potential use cases for AI are you most interested in adopting?



Base: Respondents who don't currently use AI but are interested (n=277)



## AI Cautious

The final group revealed in this line of questioning, those who are not currently using AI and are not interested in adding it, offer a glimpse into some of the issues that could slow adoption among certain restaurant operators. The bottom line: They're not convinced of the ROI — at least not yet.

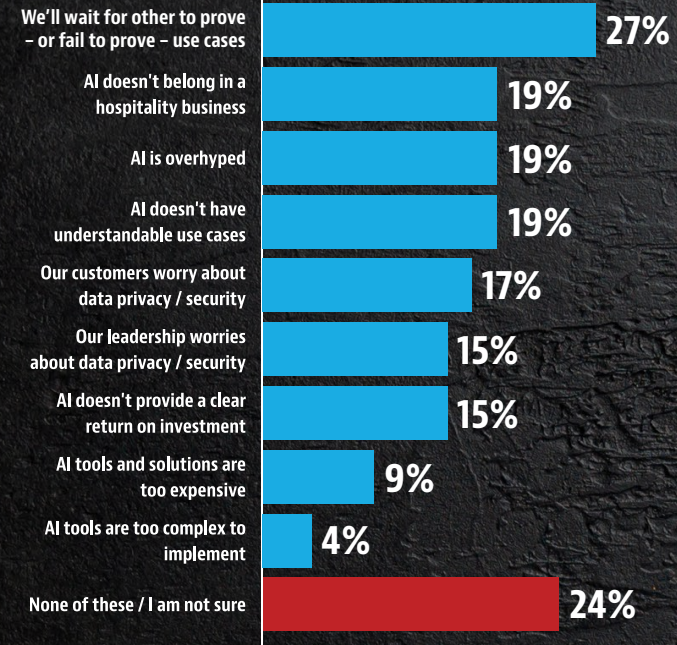
Top answers from this group tended to echo the sentiment that they are not seeing clear use cases for AI for their business or don't see a clear fit for their concepts. In the most frequently cited response, 27% of operators said they'd or prefer to take a wait and see approach, letting other restaurant operators work through AI growing pains. Concerns about AI not fitting into a hospitality business, being overhyped and not having understandable applications, all garnered 19% of respondents.

Cost and functionality were not significant hurdles, with just 9% saying AI tools are too expensive and only 4% saying they are too complex to implement.

Interestingly, when asked why they weren't interested in AI, nearly a quarter of respondents simply said, "I'm not sure," indicating that there was still some lack of clarity among this group about the best path forward.



## Why is your organization not interested in adopting AI?



Base: Respondents who are not interested in adopting AI (n=157)



## The Benefits of Combining, Not Just Compiling, Data Sets

Placer.ai's lead researcher explains how operators can ingest more information than ever to synthesize difference-making insights



**R.J. Hottovy, Head of Analytical Research, Placer.ai**

R.J. Hottovy, head of the research division of location analytics platform Placer.ai, shares best practices for incorporating new data sources into a technology stack.

### How should operators determine their data blind spots and look for data sets to fill in that picture?

It differs for every restaurant company. If you're early-stage, your data blind spot may be information on new markets and sites. If you're an established brand, it may be things like menu optimization, pricing analytics, or labor and staffing.

I think you work backward from what you're trying to accomplish. Is it growth? Is it optimizing some part of your business? At this point, there really is a data or technology provider for just about every function within a restaurant. Talk to as many people as possible, and don't just take one provider at face value. Restaurant technology was evolving before the pandemic, but in the period since, we've seen a lot of consolidation, evolution, and new data. That's only accelerated in the past 12 to 18 months with the rise of AI, which added another layer of complexity.

As you go through due diligence with data providers, make sure you walk through that specific use case: "This is the way we've done things in the past. Will your data be able to communicate with our existing data?" Have them walk you through exactly how it's going to work. If it takes multiple discussions before you sign with a provider, that's fine. It's a big investment, and you want to get it right.

Ask a lot of questions, take your time, and continuously

review your providers. Every six to nine months, go through your tech stack to understand, am I getting the value I need out of this data? Is there another data set that might be more important to us as our business evolves?

### It sounds like the work to shorten the learning curve with a new data set happens before an operator incorporates it.

Being as prepared as possible during due diligence helps everybody in this relationship. You have to clearly tell the provider what you're looking to accomplish so both sides can align around that. The other thing is to build comfort with the data itself, so ask the data provider for additional back testing or other ways to build credibility. That way, when you get access to that data, you're ready to go on day one and not questioning whether it's accurate.

### How do operators reach a point where data overwhelms them? Is that preventable, and how does somebody deal with that situation?

Typically, when you're at that 25-to-50-unit level, when we start to see companies embrace data, build an infrastructure around it and really start to scale, that's when those technology providers really come after them, and honestly, it can be a bit much. When you're in growth mode, everything sounds great.



But as I mentioned, a technology audit every six to nine months is absolutely critical. There's probably no realistic way to prevent too much data coming in, but there's always room for evolution. Make sure the data provider understands exactly what you're trying to accomplish, and if that's something their data isn't solving for, it's OK to pass on that and move on.

**"One data set on its own can be interesting, but the real unlock is when you start to piece it together and pair it with other data sets. That's where it really generates more meaningful insights."**

— R.J. HOTTOVY, HEAD OF ANALYTICAL RESEARCH, PLACER.AI

**Your company works with many other retail businesses besides restaurants. Are there best practices from other verticals that the foodservice industry could learn from?**

With geolocation analytics like ours, people might think the only insights happen at the level of some perimeter drawn around one store. They assume all you can learn is how long people visit or where they go after visiting. But there are so many interesting ways to put other data sets on top of that, like macroeconomic, demographic, or psychographic data to get more involved insights on that second or third derivative of visitation data. It gets unlocked when you partner with other providers and layer their data sets on top.

For retailers, that's how you know how your trade area is evolving or how visits to your store are evolving. It's not just the number

of people coming through the door, it's the bigger picture. Where it gets super interesting is when you think outside the box, beyond just retail stores. What else can people visit? You can look at migration data and understand where people are moving from and where they're moving to, which plays a critical part in a lot of functions within restaurants. That's going to dictate your expansion strategy in a lot of cases. It will inform your marketing, and maybe your menu assortment and menu pricing.

No matter where you live in the United States, your trade area of the last five years has changed dramatically. Just chasing more population is not always the right answer. You've got to chase where your target customer and where your ideal-profile customer is moving to.

Another application is understanding how many visitations are taking place at fulfillment centers or distribution areas. If you're a large organization, particularly one that has manufacturing facilities for supplying your franchisees, you can understand the potential efficiency of where you put those locations. Any businesses with physical assets can apply geolocation data.

**"Derivative" often has a negative context, but here it seems to show the value in data comes from using it in combination, not just in isolation. Do I have that right?**

One data set on its own can be interesting and meaningful, but the real unlock is when you start to piece together and pair it with other data sets. That's where it really generates more meaningful insights.

For instance, most restaurants know sales per labor hour. Sales data on its own can tell you a lot, but when you pair it with labor

hours and other data, that's where you really get the takeaways. The same is true of location data. Take visits compared to transactions: How many of those people coming in am I converting? Am I seeing a change when I launch a new product? Or take sales per visit. We see a real impact there, particularly when we measure restaurants versus grocery stores, and what pricing does to consumer behavior.





## People, Platforms, and Other Predicaments

Knowledge gaps and cost concerns persist as key obstacles restaurant leaders face as they build out their technology stacks, yet respondents in this year's study indicated that HR challenges are more salient than ever regarding their tech strategies.

More than one in three operators named a lack of staff to manage and implement new technology as a top challenge. This option showed the biggest gain from responses to the same question a year earlier, leap-frogging considerations like high costs for hardware and software, a lack of knowledge about all potential investments, or a lack of functionality in systems operators currently use.

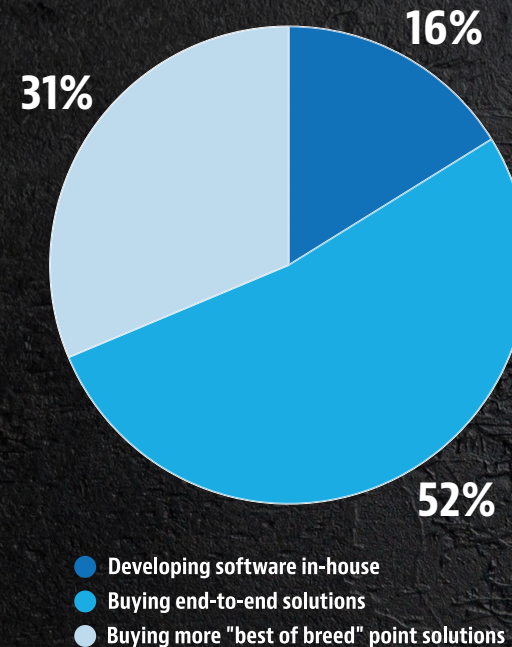
Atop a secondary tier of obstacles, another option to grow in response from year to year was the challenge of different vendors lacking integrations or compatible APIs for their solutions, which now vexes slightly more than one in five respondents. Limited-service and especially chain operators were more likely to cite these data silos among technology suppliers as a major challenge, and they led their peers in pointing out a lack of functionality in their current systems as well.

The difficulty in finding the right people to manage technology, either in-house or among their vendor partners, fits with the restaurant industry's approach to technology architecture, which has remained consistent over the past few years of this research study. Few operators are up for the challenge of building their own technology, leaving most content with work with a limited number of partners who supply more comprehensive solutions (see sidebar).

Relatively few operators admitted to being overwhelmed by the number of potential technology investments, which fits with high rates of adoption for many customer-facing platforms meant to digitize the ordering process and make the dining out experience more convenient. The most popular digital-ordering touchpoint, in place for more than half of this study's respondents, requires operators to partner with giant, consolidated tech firms: third-party delivery.

The potential drawbacks to working with delivery aggregators, including commission fees that come out of the bottom line and disagreements over how much customer data restaurants can get from the delivery platforms, remain. Yet this off-premises ordering channel appears firmly entrenched with consumers and with operators, evident from the wide gap in adoption with the digital-ordering

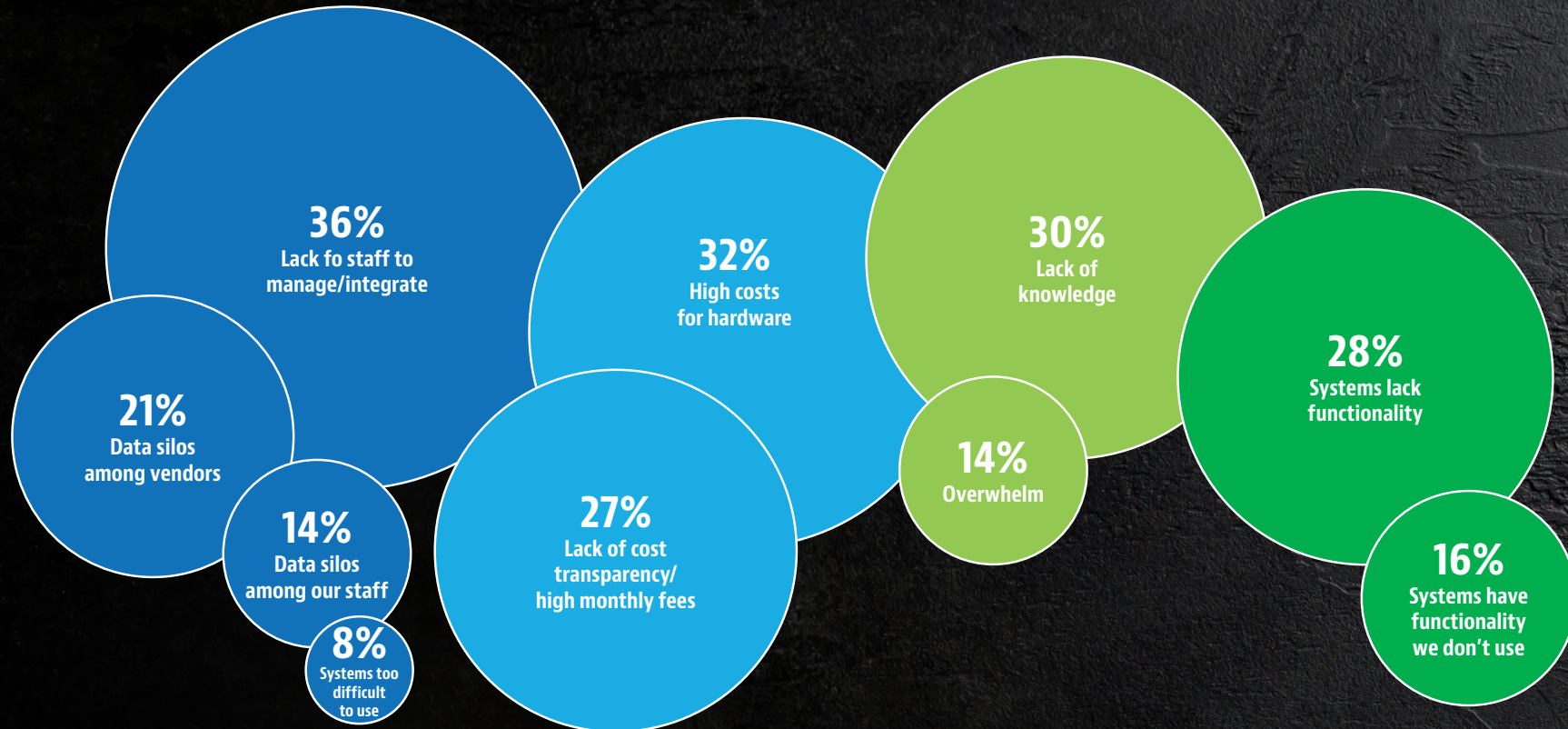
**Which setup for your technology stack is best for your organization?**



Base: All respondents (n=543)



**What are the biggest challenges your operation faces in building its technology stack?**



Base: All respondents (n=558)



tools in the second tier. Approximately one in three operators offer their own, self-operated delivery program, which matches the level of adoption for branded mobile apps, online ordering for rapid pickup and takeout, and catering.

The segment differences for smartphone apps and digital order-ahead for takeout are stark. In general, about half of respondents from limited-service and chain restaurants offer these ordering channels, compared with only about a quarter of their peers from full-service and independent locations. Arguably, FSR and independent operators — who typically overlap in industry market research — should be closing the gap in adoption on these methods.

Other ordering touchpoints show segment differences that align to the inherent strengths of limited service or full service, which is likely why they rank lower for overall adoption. Far more FSR respondents employ self-service online reservation systems and self-service tablets for ordering and paying at the table, while LSR operators are much more likely to have self-service kiosks in their lobbies.

The industry appears to still be in early stages of adopting voice AI systems that automate the answering of phone calls or taking orders over the phone or at the drive-thru.

### Restaurants Mostly Pleased with Most Platforms

Differences in satisfaction with technology dissipate across industry segments, with the predictable exception that self-described Data Enthusiasts, confident that they optimize their tech stacks to form helpful data strategies, report greater rates of contentment with all their solutions.

Operators rated their highest levels of satisfaction for workhorse platforms that most restaurants would struggle to operate without. Approximately three quarters of all respondents who have a point of sale system or an online-ordering platform said they were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with them. Nearly four in five operators (78%) who employ a kitchen display system were happy with that platform's performance, though it's worth mentioning that 30% of the study's entire sample doesn't currently use a KDS.

Nearly half of the full sample doesn't employ a reservation management system, yet three quarters of the respondents who do take reservations are satisfied with how that solution performs.

### Which digital-ordering touchpoints does your location or brand offer?

Third-party delivery	53%
Branded mobile app	33%
Order ahead / rapid pickup	33%
First-party delivery	33%
Catering platform	31%
QR code menu / ordering	27%
Search / social ordering	24%
Reservation system	19%
Self-order kiosks	17%
Self-service tablets	12%
Voice AI for phone orders	7%
Voice AI for drive-thru orders	4%
None of these / I'm not sure	16%

Base: All respondents (n=558)



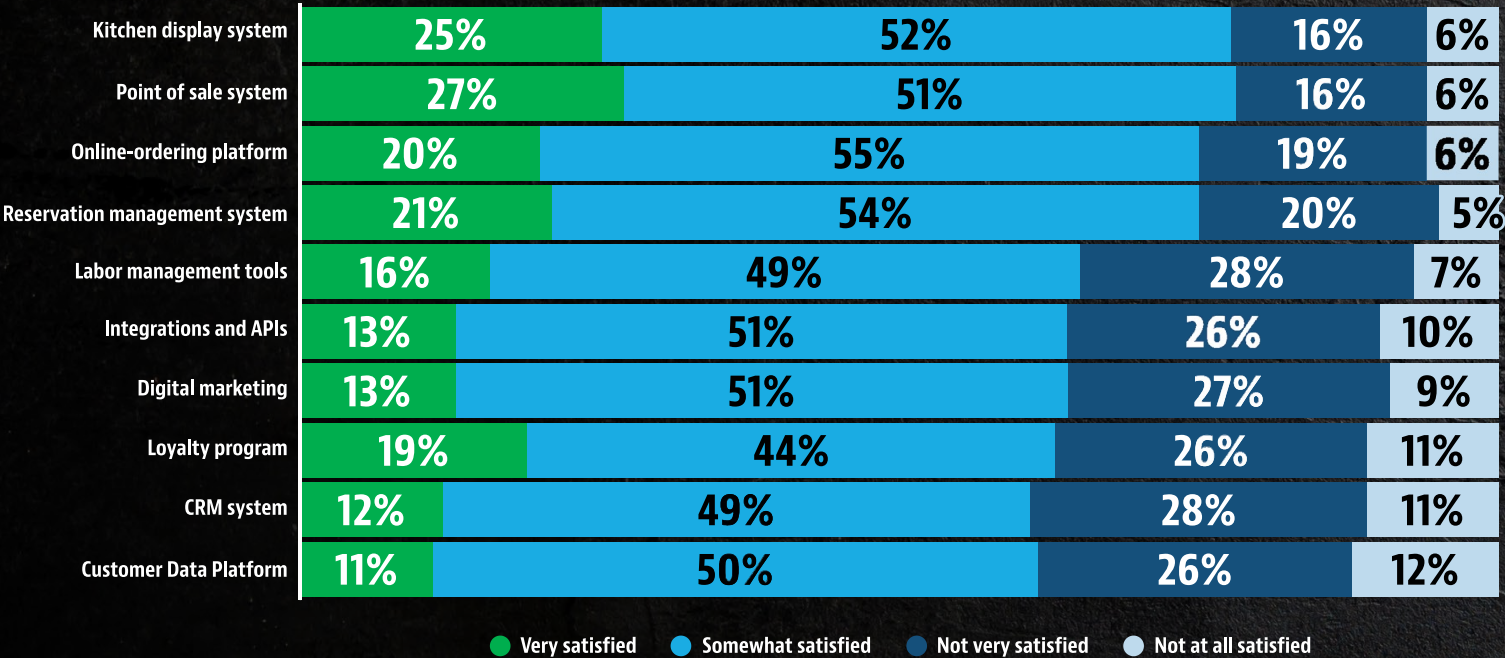
Satisfaction ratings for the rest of a restaurant's typical tech categories were positive on net, between 60% and 65%, showing that there is room for improvement around systems meant to digitize and automate strategies that operators deemed earlier in the survey to be important.

Of all the areas of their business they're likely to support with technology investments in the coming year, respondents most often pointed to digital marketing in a prior survey question. Yet platforms that directly manage or that support a restaurant's marketing function ranked lowest on operators'

satisfaction ratings. More than one in three respondents said they were "not very satisfied" or "not at all satisfied" with their digital-marketing solutions, their loyalty program, or hardware used to track and segment their audience: the CRM system and the customer data platform.

Participants also identified elsewhere in this survey that labor management would be a key strategy for them, yet more than a third of respondents found their labor management tools dissatisfying. The same number of operators expressed similar displeasure at the state of their tech stacks' integrations.

**How satisfied are you with the following elements of your technology stack?**



Base: Varies



## Integrating Teams and Technology to Enhance Hospitality

OpenTable vice president defines the balance between human connection and technology in delivering personalized hospitality.



**Scott Hudson, VP of Global Sales and Services, OpenTable**

Scott Hudson, VP of Global Sales and Services for OpenTable, explains how front-of-house employees can tailor memorable dining experiences for guests by leveraging preferences, reviews, spending, and many more data sets.

### Which obstacles with front-of-house operations are most salient today, and how might that have changed from five years ago?

One of the most pressing challenges today is staffing volatility, and that's only intensified over the past five years. The current labor shortages are placing additional strain on independent restaurants and enterprise groups. With profit margins tighter than ever, restaurants are being pushed to find innovative ways to optimize operations without sacrificing the great hospitality that makes them special.

We're seeing restaurants adapt today in a few ways. One is smarter table management. Advanced seat assignment algorithms help hosts make the most of available space, analyzing years of historical data to predict demand patterns, optimize table turns, and ensure restaurants seat as many guests as possible. That helps keep front-of-house teams focused on the guest experience, rather than manually updating seating assignments.

Next is using data to personalize hospitality. Point of sale and reservation system integrations allow restaurants to easily recognize and reward their regulars — even if a server has never met them before. By tracking guest history and preferences, staff can craft a more tailored dining experience, even with a lean team. Seamless tech integration is key: OpenTable APIs connect POS systems to payments, loyalty

platforms, and more, giving restaurants a full view of each guest in one central place. This enables staff to offer more personalized service to guests and run a smoother operation.

Looking ahead, those labor challenges are unlikely to disappear, but the right technology will help restaurants work smarter so they can maintain their exceptional hospitality. The key is using tech and data-driven tools to empower staff, not replace them. By striking this balance, restaurants can continue to maintain brand standards, elevate hospitality, and optimize operational efficiency, while navigating the evolving demands of the industry.

### Bearing that in mind, how do you think restaurant management software will evolve in the next few years?

The way restaurants engage with their diners is changing, and data is at the heart of that transformation.

One of our biggest priorities is making sure our restaurant partners can access and act on their diner information in meaningful ways. We're enhancing our CRM and API capabilities to centralize guest data, making it easier for front-of-house teams to quickly personalize service. Whether a guest has visited three times or 30, restaurants can recognize them, anticipate their needs, and tailor their dining experience.

Our platform consolidates diner reviews, preferences, visit



frequency, and many more details into a guest profile. For example, if someone frequently orders a specific dish or prefers outdoor seating, that information is easily available to the restaurant team. This isn't just about remembering a name. It's about creating consistent, personalized hospitality.

We're also focusing on seamless integrations with nearly 25 POS systems and other restaurant tech to ensure that the information is actionable in real time. Whether a guest booked their last five visits through OpenTable, is typically a big spender, or left a review mentioning their favorite dish, restaurants should have one central place to access that information and use it to enhance service.

Of course, with greater tech adoption comes the need for security and compliance, and we're working hard to make sure these advancements meet the highest security standards. As restaurants handle more guest data, we want to ensure they can trust our platform to protect it, while still leveraging it to improve hospitality.

#### **How does a typical consumer's willingness to interact with technology change before, during, and after a visit?**

It varies across those stages. Before a visit, diners are quite comfortable using digital tools to research restaurants, view menus, read reviews, and make reservations online. This pre-dining phase is heavily tech-centric, as consumers seek convenience and information to make informed choices.

During the meal, preferences can vary. Many guests, especially in full-service restaurants, still see human interaction as the core of great hospitality. However, there's growing acceptance

of technology that enhances service without detracting from it. For example, tableside tablets or mobile apps for ordering and payment can streamline operations while giving guests more control over their experience.

After the visit, consumers are generally open to digital interactions, such as receiving follow-up emails, participating in loyalty programs, or providing feedback through online reviews. These post-dining engagements are a valuable opportunity for restaurants to gain insights into guest satisfaction and preferences, which can be used to personalize future experiences and foster loyalty.

It's important to note that technology should enhance, not replace, the human touch. Finding the right balance will ensure that guests enjoy both the efficiency of technology and the warmth of personalized service.

#### **What can restaurant teams anticipate, based on customer data they get from reservations and guest profiles? How can they put those insights into action?**

Reservation data is one of the most powerful tools a restaurant has. It helps teams anticipate demand, personalize service, and optimize operations so they can deliver the best possible experience.

One of the biggest advantages is preparing for VIPs or returning guests. If a high spender or repeat diner is on the books, the team can tailor the experience accordingly. That might mean greeting them by name, offering their favorite table, or suggesting a wine they've enjoyed before. These small but meaningful touches go a long way toward building guest loyalty and ensuring they return.

**"Technology should enhance, not replace, the human touch. Finding the right balance will ensure that guests enjoy both the efficiency of technology and the warmth of personalized service."**

**— SCOTT HUDSON, VP OF GLOBAL SALES AND SERVICES, OPENTABLE**

Reservation data also helps optimize staffing and table turnover, ensuring restaurants have the right number of team members on hand to serve guests efficiently without making them feel rushed.

Then there's predicting demand. By analyzing historical reservation data, restaurants can anticipate peak times, adjust prep schedules, and even tweak the menu based on expected diner preferences. This helps maximize revenue while minimizing waste. We offer our restaurant partners a pre-shift report, which provides critical insights at their fingertips before service begins, and access to hundreds of key metrics, including covers, turn times, no-show rates, and neighborhood benchmark data.

At the end of the day, it's about balancing efficiency with hospitality, using data to streamline operations while still delivering a warm, personalized dining experience through effective guest relationship management.



# Data Strategy Evolves

Restaurant operators in this year's survey showed a dip in confidence around data for the first time since the Restaurant Technology Outlook debuted in early 2023. After notable year-over-year gains in the 2024 survey, this year's data reveal that confidence around how effectively operators use data has softened.

Asked if they optimize the customer data they collect, 36% of operators in this year's survey said they "definitely" or "probably" do. That figure was down from 45% who said the same in the 2024 survey.

The most confident group — the Data Enthusiasts who said they "definitely" optimize the data they collect — slipped as well, down from 20% a year ago to 16% in this year's survey. That's still a significant improvement over the 8% who said so in the inaugural 2023 report. But it indicates operators may be encountering friction as they attempt to analyze and apply the customer and operational data they collect.

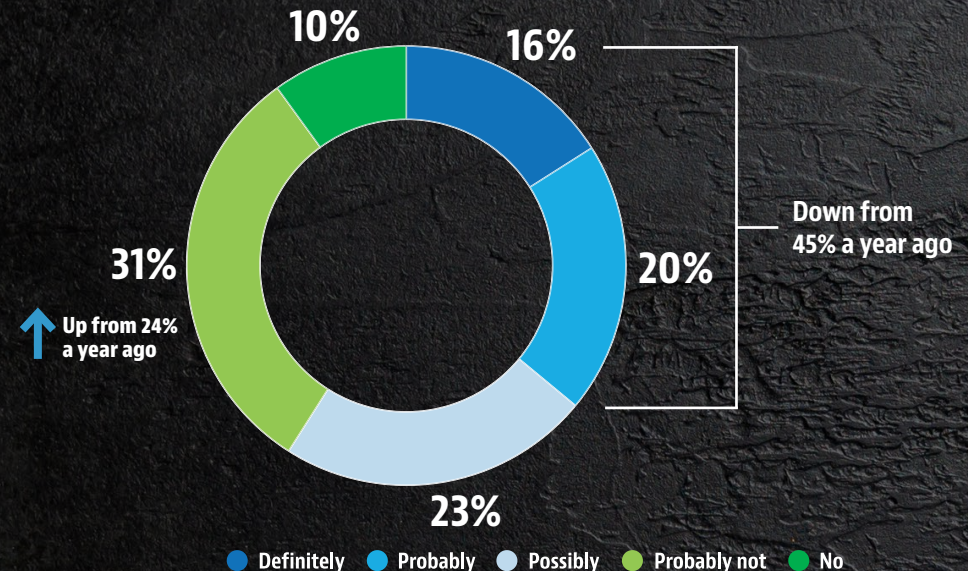
Nearly two-thirds (64%) reported some uncertainty about effective data usage — saying "possibly," "probably not" or "no" — up from 55% a year ago and closer to the 70% observed in the 2023 survey.

The biggest year-over-year increase came among the operators saying "probably not" at 31%, up 7 percentage points from 24% a year ago, indicating a growing skepticism among restaurant operators that they're leveraging data effectively.

This cooling confidence could stem from a few places. It could simply reflect evolution from moving from "unknown unknowns" to "known unknowns" as restaurant operators gained greater data literacy over the last year and grappled with the growing complexity of their data sets. It is also likely correlated with the challenges seen elsewhere in the study around data management, data security, systems integration and dissatisfaction with marketing tech.

Even as operators have access to more data sets and tech tools than ever before, making that information understandable and actionable is no easy feat. Asked about the biggest challenge they face when incorporating new data into their business, more than a third of respondents (35%) said making data sets actionable, followed by integration into existing tech stack (27%), choosing the best available data (24%) and ensuring data quality (14%).

## Does your organization optimize the customer data it collects?



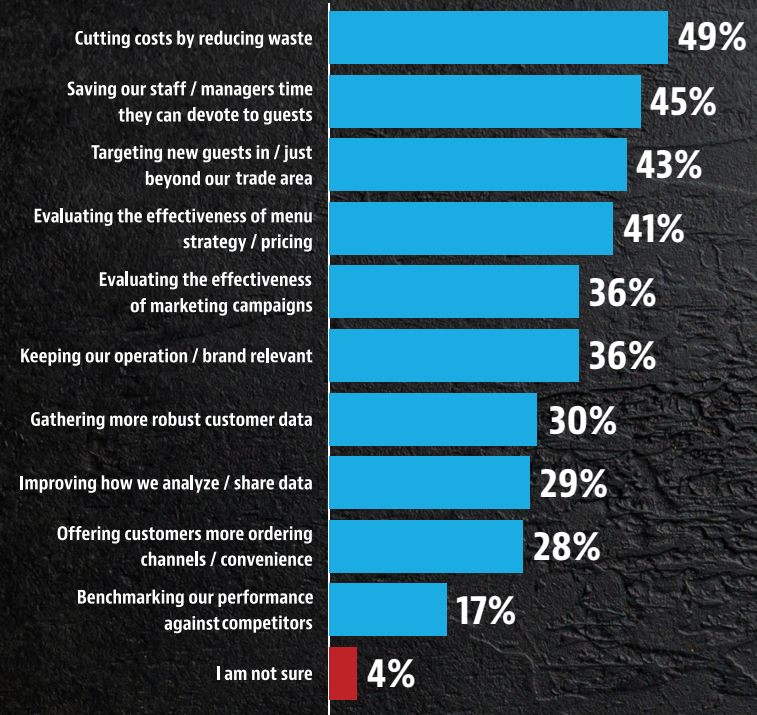
Base: All respondents (n=557)



Despite those growing pains, restaurant operators in this study showed strong interest in using data to improve their operations, reporting interest in adopting additional metrics throughout their operations to measure success. In fact, the ability to quantitatively assess operations — by tracking employee productivity, targeting new customers, and assessing menu and marketing efforts — factored heavily into the tech outcomes operators said they were most excited about now. When asked what capabilities they were most excited to unlock with technology in the next 12 months, top answers tended to coalesce around data-driven outcomes, including:

- **Waste reduction:** Reducing waste and inefficiency, for both food and labor, topped the list, with nearly half focused on reducing food and labor waste, and another 45% saying saving employees time was a primary goal of near-term tech moves.
- **Targeted marketing:** More than four in 10 said they were optimistic about the ability of data-driven tools to reach new customers beyond their trade area. Another 36% cited evaluating the effectiveness of marketing campaigns, and 30% said they planned to gather more robust information about customers for better targeting.
- **Menu analysis:** Evaluating menu and pricing strategies was cited by 41% of respondents, a goal that has emerged in past surveys as well as an accessible first step for operators looking to apply data.
- **Back-office efficiencies:** Nearly a third of all respondents (29%) said they would likely look to root out internal inefficiencies in how information is shared and analyzed across their organization. An additional 17% said better benchmarking data would be a focus in the year ahead.

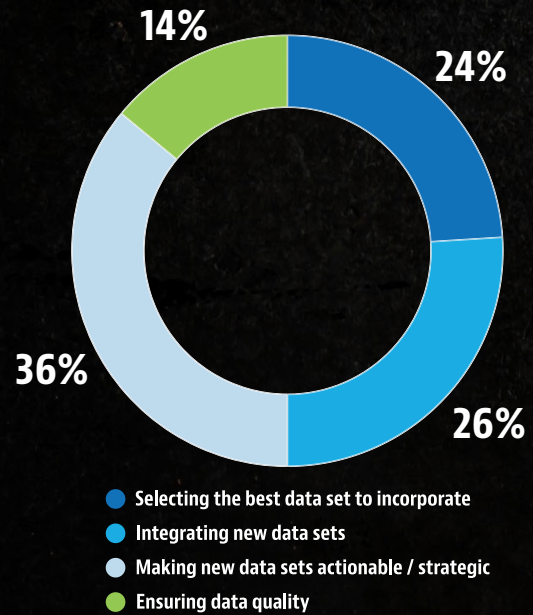
## Which capabilities and uses for technology are you most excited to adopt or expand upon in the coming year?



Base: All respondents (n=557)



**What is your greatest challenge with adding a new source of data to use in your organization?**



Base: All respondents (n=557)





## The Strategy for Security and Scalability

Esper's chief evangelist spreads the word about the restaurant industry's need for mobile device management



**Keith Szot, Chief Evangelist, Esper**

Keith Szot, industry veteran and senior leader at Esper, wants restaurant leaders to manage their self-service and digital-ordering platforms strategically, to maximize security while still creating memorable dining experiences for guests.

**Operators will probably recognize this, but what's the scenario they'd face if they're using more devices to take orders and provide hospitality but lack a mobile device management (MDM) strategy?**

The typical use case of PCs connecting with a point of sale system was fine for many years. But today, self-serve and self-ordering devices and kiosks are proliferating. With a POS system, the employees use an application-level login method, and IT can handle that just fine. The device is relatively protected. But now you have kiosks placed within the same restaurant environment that are not monitored.

They're out there in the wild, along with digital signage or other Internet of Things (IoT) devices. Because they're not properly managed, they're more exposed to people trying to break into them or modify them. So, that part of MDM software is just for providing base-level security.

Then I think about the positive side: using these dedicated devices to create customer experiences and generate revenue. These things change over time. You can do a lot of experimentation, optimization, and A/B testing, but you'll need good application management on these devices themselves. You can't do that without MDM.

As an infrastructure provider, we aim to secure these devices within your restaurant, no matter where they are, so you can

manage them and have the agility to tie it back to customer data. That's an increasing area of focus to create that right kind of experience and optimize the transaction and what you deliver for your customer.

Remote troubleshooting is a very important part of MDM because, in an extreme case, you can go to remote control on the device to get logs out of it or to try different configurations. You can change the software on the device from the IT operator's home base rather than having to be in the store.

**What should operators track and measure to evaluate their MDM strategy?**

One example is when franchisees move equipment around without using device management. As an IT operator with MDM software, you gain the missing visibility into what's happening with the fleet and can work better with your franchisees.

Then there's the business side — experimenting with a new use case and the agility to deploy and try things. That endpoint is now remotely malleable, where before it was a much tougher operation to achieve that. This lowers the cost for you to operate devices and roll out those changes.

The right MDM provider provides insight into important



questions across the organization. When you have an issue, what's your time to resolution? How do you reduce your downtime? How do you increase visibility into the specifics of your device fleet? How do you lower your security risks by staying up to date on the latest security patches?

Then there's reducing unauthorized usage of these devices and improving your network utilization. You can also measure your employee efficiency by using these tools to get more out of your employee-use devices. It's a twofold approach.

**"All these dedicated devices create customer experiences and generate revenue, and they change over time. There's a lot of optimization that you can do, and you can't do it without mobile device management (MDM) software."**

— KEITH SZOT, CHIEF EVANGELIST, ESPEr

### **Compliance and security sound intrinsic to MDM. What's the security return on investment an operator could realize quickly?**

What's really important, from a corporate policy perspective, is being able to define what you allow and the behavior of these devices. When you install an app on an Android device, the user is typically asked to grant permissions for what that app can do. When you're an IT provider, you know exactly the software that you're putting on that piece of hardware, and you don't want anything to get in the way of that experience. Through an MDM framework, you can determine ahead of time which permissions

you want to grant, based on the application you're putting on the device, and that saves time and money deploying software.

Another one is understanding the actual operating system running these devices. For example, media players running on the Android 7 OS are common, but Android 7 has known security vulnerabilities. There's a trade-off here because those digital media players are affordable for menu boards and things like that.

Operating not only at the MDM level but also at the operating system level is important. You need to know the security stance of the OS on your devices and update it within the parameters provided by the original equipment manufacturer.

### **Of all the changes in hospitality technology right now, which ones make the case for restaurant operators needing MDM?**

Above all, right now, I'd say security. As device fleets grow more and more complex and businesses rely on the hardware for the day-to-day, attackers understand how valuable that data is. So they're getting really clever with how they go after these devices to steal the data that's on them. The attacks aren't outpacing modern security patches, but they're increasingly sophisticated and find fast ways around patches after they roll out. So staying on top of security patches and having MDM as that first line of defense plays a big role here.

That's why it's critical to have an MDM provider that understands the ins and outs of these kinds of devices — point of sale systems, kiosks, things like that — and how to protect them. At Esper, this is our specialty. We pioneered device management

for dedicated hardware like this.

Beyond security, though, it's important for restaurant operators to understand how to lean into heterogeneous device fleets and embrace mixed-OS environments. With different form factors and OS types like Android and iOS, managing all the hardware becomes tough. That's why it's super important to find an MDM vendor that not only supports all the hardware and OS types you need, but also does it in a seamless way. Most don't.

The truth is, there are dozens of different reasons why MDM software is crucial with restaurant technology. Your entire business relies on the in-house tech stack staying up and running, and without MDM, you're leaving it all up to chance. The MDM is the glue that binds it all together, letting you, the operator, focus on the actual business and trusting that things are operationally smooth on the tech front until your MDM shoots out a notification that says otherwise.





## Finding Functionality

As operators apparently indicated earlier in the study, their priorities for the coming year deal with growing sales while reducing labor costs. This elevates not only some strategies for streamlining operations in the front and back of house, but also certain functionality they're more likely to seek in their systems in the dining room and the kitchen.

Of all the capabilities they vet when evaluating back-of-house technology like a KDS, using those systems to improve how they train cooks and other kitchen staff rose the most in importance year over year, from just less than one in five respondents (19%) to nearly one in four (23%).

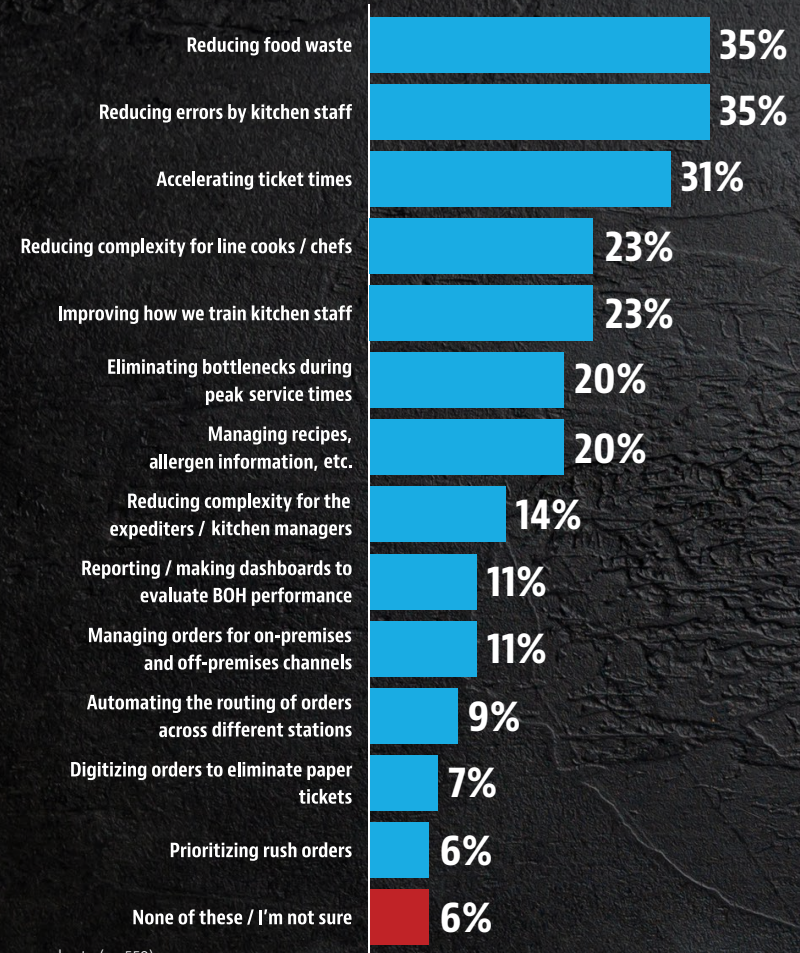
The top operational benefits respondents want to derive from their back-of-house technology remained focused on hourly kitchen staff and making them more productive. More than one in three operators consider the reduction of food waste and of order errors when deciding whether to upgrade their tech stack or to invest in new solutions. Slightly fewer respondents were focused on accelerating ticket times in the kitchen.

Segment differences in demand for back-of-house technology make sense in the context of a restaurant's service style. Full-service respondents were significantly more likely than limited-service peers (29% to 18%, respectively) to prioritize reducing the complexity for line cooks to do their jobs, which was unsurprising given how much more scratch cooking occurs in a full-service kitchen. LSR operators were nearly twice as likely as FSR operators to want their back-of-house tools to prioritize rush orders during peak periods.

Inherent differences between limited service and full service also affect the specs operators prefer for their technology in the front of the house. For the full sample of respondents, the top benefits sought from front-of-house solutions are the same as last year, including order accuracy, greater convenience for guests, and reduced complexity for the waitstaff.

Within those top-tier responses, LSR operators were more likely to seek digital solutions that increase convenience for the guest, while their FSR counterparts were much more focused on simplifying tasks and reducing complexity for servers. However, when it comes to making the job simpler for managers, operators from limited-service and chain restaurants were out in front.

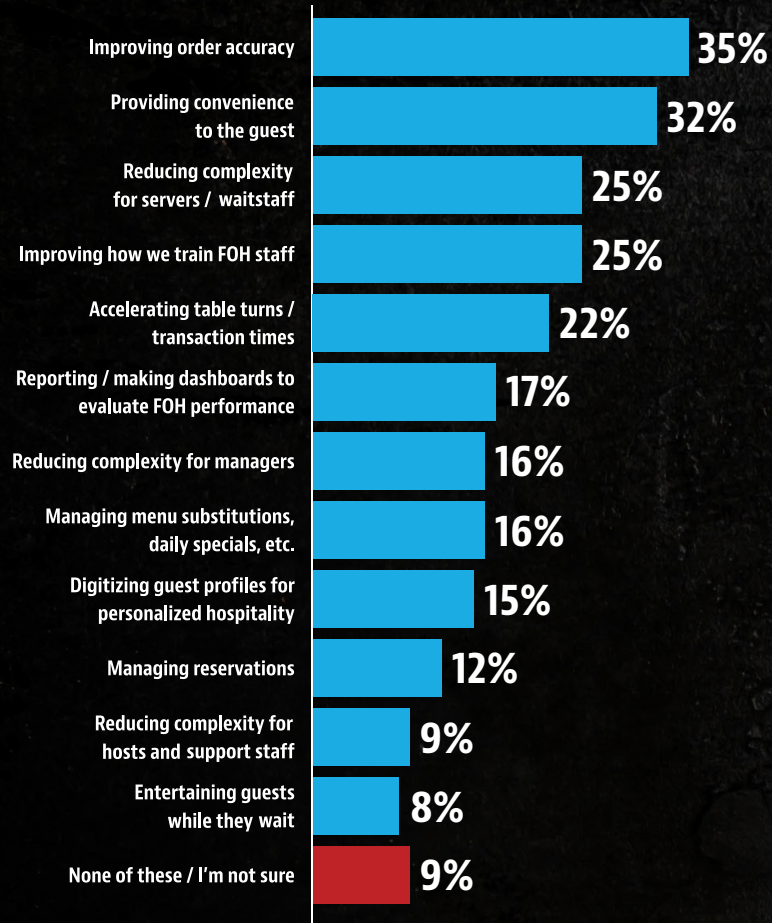
### Which features are most important when considering tech for the KITCHEN / BACK-OF-HOUSE?



Base: All respondents (n=559)



## Which features are most important when considering tech for the FRONT-OF-HOUSE?



Unsurprisingly, full-service respondents drove responses for better managing reservations and the duties of hosts and other front-of-house staff.

It also makes sense that FSR operators significantly lead their LSR counterparts (18% to 11%, respectively) on seeking to digitize guest data profiles to inform the front-of-house staff how they could deliver more personalized hospitality to known guests. From a service standpoint, hospitality is a bigger part of the sit-down restaurant experience, and waitstaff at a full-service restaurant can also draw upon co-workers at the host stand and guest data from the online reservation system to gain some insight into their guests' preferences.

For their part, limited-service respondents indicated elsewhere in this survey that they're more likely to use loyalty programs and digital-marketing tools for segmenting their audience, so perhaps personalized hospitality in limited service happens more often in the marketing stage, while full-service restaurateurs look to make that happen during the on-premises dining experience.



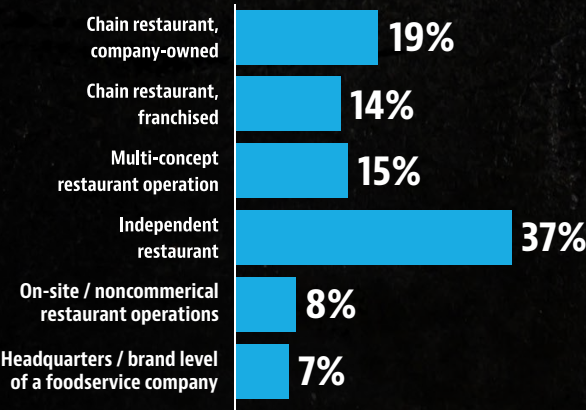


# Who We Surveyed

Nation’s Restaurant News and Restaurant Business surveyed more than 550 foodservice operators online over a two-week period in January 2025. The custom survey was promoted to their combined audiences via email, editorial products and social media. Respondents provided select demographic information about their businesses, but individual results were anonymized. Respondents self-identified as foodservice operators and represent a diverse mix of industry segments.

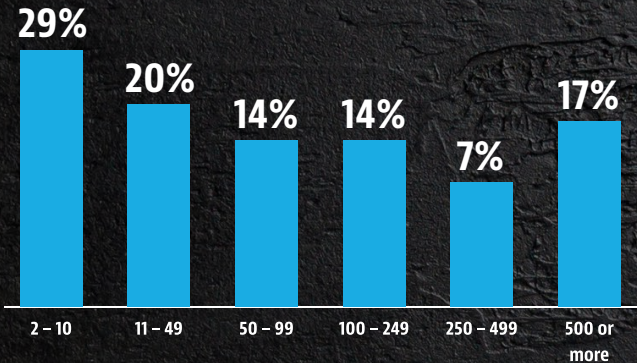
Key business decision makers were well represented in the sample, with most identifying as the owner-operator or as a director-level role. The sample was made up of 227 chain or multiconcept operators, 292 independent restaurateurs, and 43 on-site operators.

Which of the following best describes your restaurant operation?



Base: All respondents (n=562)

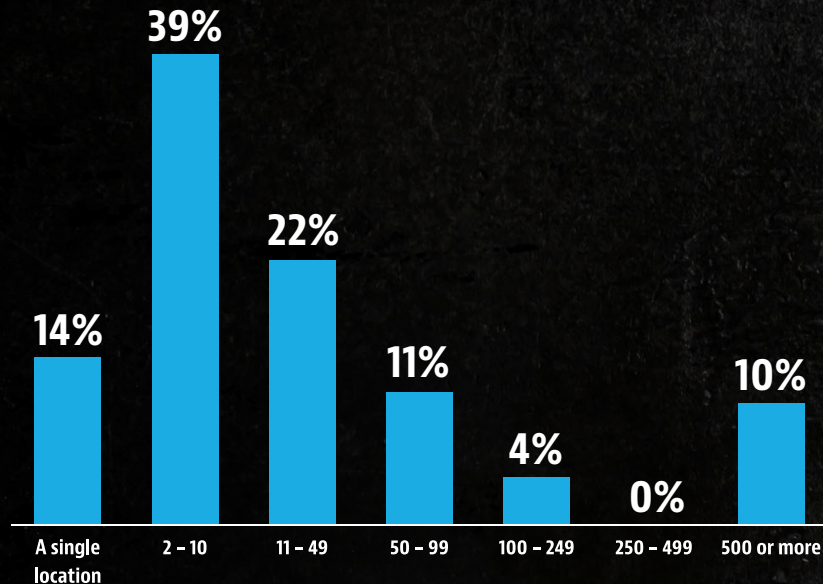
How many units are in your operation system wide?



Base: Chain restaurants, multiunit restaurants, brand / HQ employees (n=310)

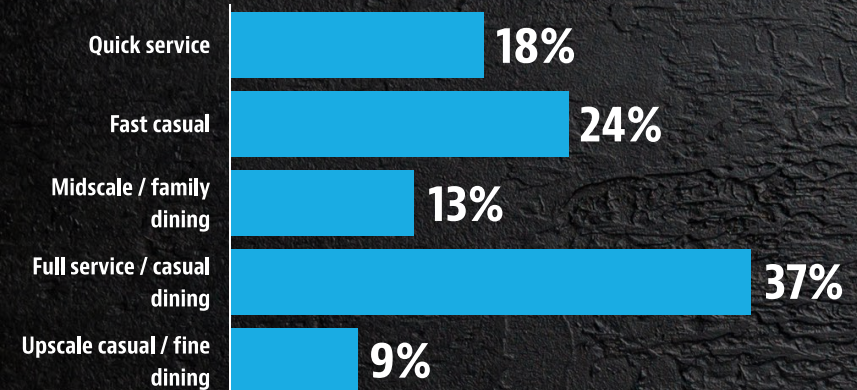


### How many locations do you operate as a franchisee?



Base: Chain restaurants, franchised (n=79)

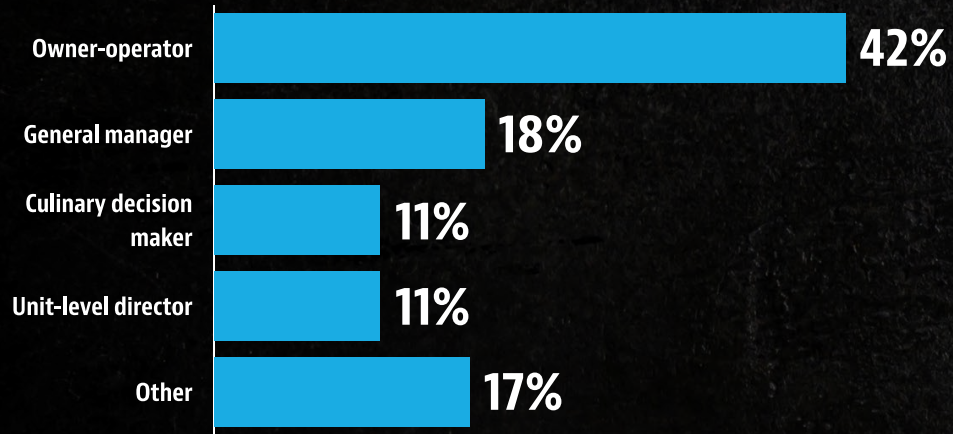
### Which best describes your restaurant concept?



Base: Chain restaurants and independent restaurants (n=477)

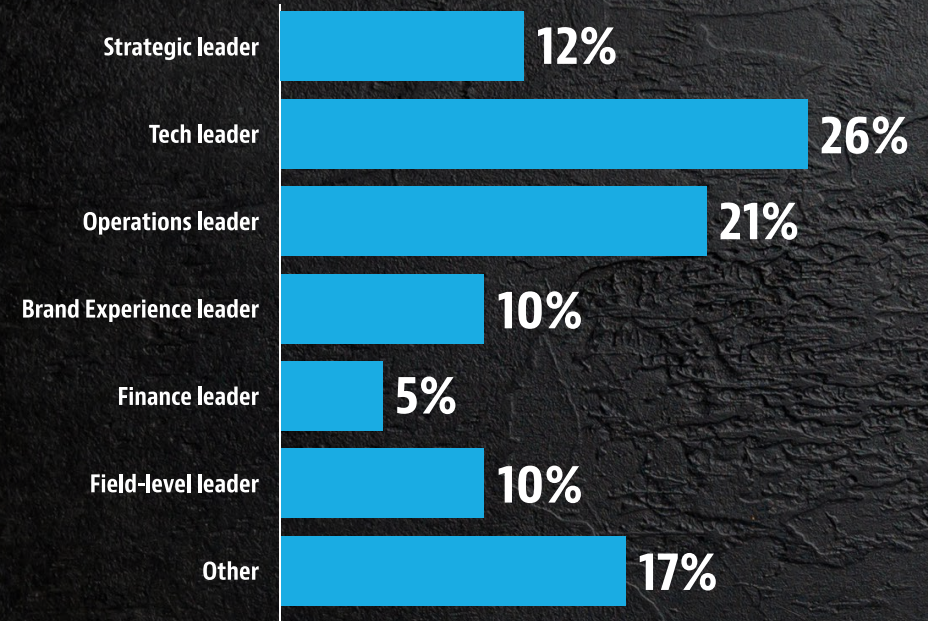


**Which of the following best describes your job function?**



Base: All operators but those at HQ / brand level (n=390)

**Which of the following best describes your job function?**



Base: HQ / brand level (n=42)



This report was developed and produced by the research and insights division of Nation's Restaurant News and Restaurant Business, with support from foodservice industry partners, as part of its ongoing series of Market Leader reports. For more information about upcoming research studies and sponsorship opportunities, please contact:

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