



Whitepaper:

Restaurants

Reimagining the QSR and
casual dining experience

2025

This paper is prepared by @saturn

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Executive summary

The UK restaurant industry is dealing with rising operating costs, and staff shortages. Demand is also fluctuating, as the cost of living is leading people to try and save money, where they can. To survive and thrive, QSRs (quick service restaurants) and casual dining restaurants need to draw consumers in, and deliver a great and profitable customer experience that encourages return visits.

A new study commissioned by Saturn Visual Solutions surveyed 2,000 UK-based, adult full-time and part-time workers on how they feel about spending time in restaurants.

It found that one in ten people thought restaurant visits were boring and avoided them. However, among 18-34 year olds, this figure rose to 17 per cent.

One in ten people thought restaurant visits were boring and avoided them

Statistically, men are less likely to enjoy visiting a restaurant, with 14 per cent saying they would avoid them. Whereas just six per cent of women said the same.

Nearly half of the people questioned (44%) felt uncomfortable making complaints in restaurants. However, 58 per cent said they would feel comfortable using a touchscreen digital device to give negative feedback.

The research suggests that people want a more fun, visually interesting restaurant experience, and the ability to give negative feedback in a less confrontational way.

Digital signage offers an obvious way to make dining areas feel more dynamic and interesting. Touchscreen displays could be used for diners to give feedback quickly and easily so that negative feedback can be acted upon in a timely way. It can also be used to track data trends which can help restaurant managers/franchises to identify any recurring problems.

This could help QSRs and casual dining businesses to improve their customers' experience, making people more likely to return, and increasing their average spend per visit, leading to increased profitability.

Introduction

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, QSRs and casual dining restaurants have struggled with forced closure, staff shortages, energy price hikes, tax increases and rising food costs.

From April 2025, the industry has also had to deal with rises in employer's National Insurance, the National Minimum Wage and business rates – another threat to their survival.

The high cost of living is affecting people's ability to eat out regularly. According to foodservice industry insights company, Meaningful Vision, restaurant footfall [dropped by 7.7% in early 2025](#).

RSM UK's January 2025 Consumer Outlook found that [35% of consumers](#) intend to cut back on spending for dining and drinking out during 2025.

Another key driver in success or failure in the restaurant industry is the importance of reviews. Research by Toast, found that [nearly half of diners \(46%\)](#) check Google Reviews before deciding where to eat. Just over a third of diners (34%) choose eateries based solely on information offered on review websites.

More than half ([53%](#)) of [18- to 34-year-olds](#) say online reviews play an important role in their dining decisions, according to research by Modern Restaurant Management.

These trends show that it is more important than ever for quick service and casual dining restaurants to pay attention to the quality of their diners' experiences to secure return visits and positive reviews that will drive a steady flow of people to their business.



Our research findings

Saturn Visual Solutions is a digital signage consultancy that specialises in delivering stand-out customer experiences for casual dining restaurants/food retail business. It has undertaken a piece of research involving 2000 UK-based, adult full-time and part-time workers to better understand restaurant customers' perspectives on dining out.

Boring restaurants

- Nearly one in five (17%) 18-35-year-olds said that restaurants are boring and that they avoid spending time in them. This breaks down to 12 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds and 18 per cent of 25 to 34-year-olds. Similarly, 16 per cent of those aged 65 and over said the same. However, in the 45 to 64-year-old age bracket, only around three per cent of the survey respondents said the same.
- Men are more likely to avoid restaurants than women, with 14 per cent of the sample group saying they found them boring. This compared to six per cent of women.
- Having more restaurants to choose from doesn't necessarily equate to happier customers, according to Saturn's findings. Surprisingly, people living in two of the UK's most densely populated areas were the most likely to say going to restaurants bored them, with nearly one in five (18%) in London and the West Midlands avoiding them. This compares to one in ten across the whole of the UK (10%).

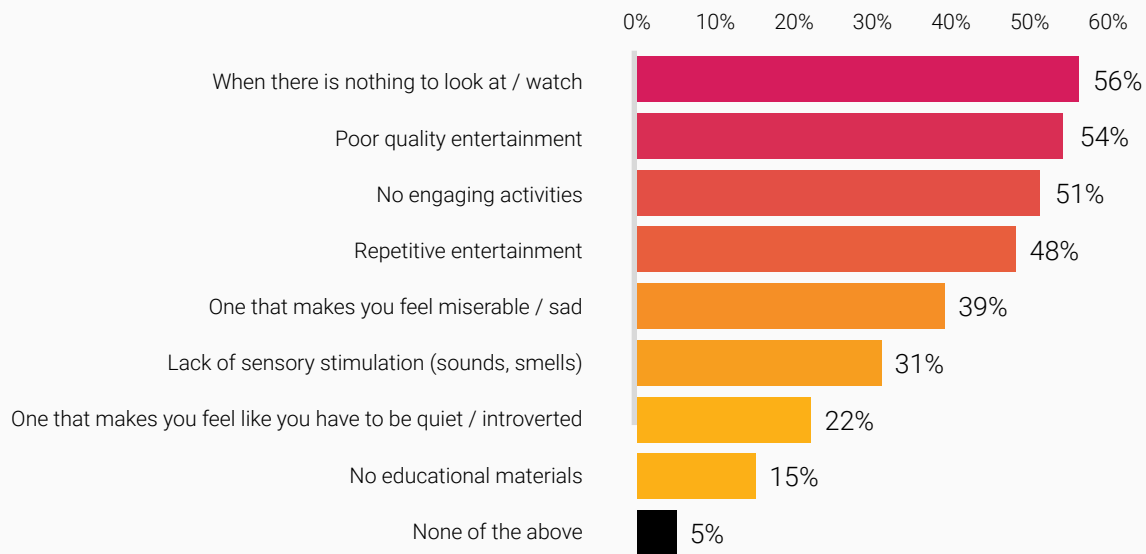
**Men are more likely to avoid restaurants than women, with
14 per cent of the sample group saying they found them boring.
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This indicates that a sizeable portion of people are dissatisfied with the standard QSR and casual dining experience, and are looking for something more fun.

The survey respondents were asked about what makes something feel like a boring experience.

- More than half (56%) said 'when there's nothing interesting to look at/watch'
- 51 per cent said 'No engaging activities'
- 39 per cent said it was an experience that 'makes you feel miserable/sad'
- Nearly a quarter (22%) said being made to 'feel like you have to be quiet/introverted'

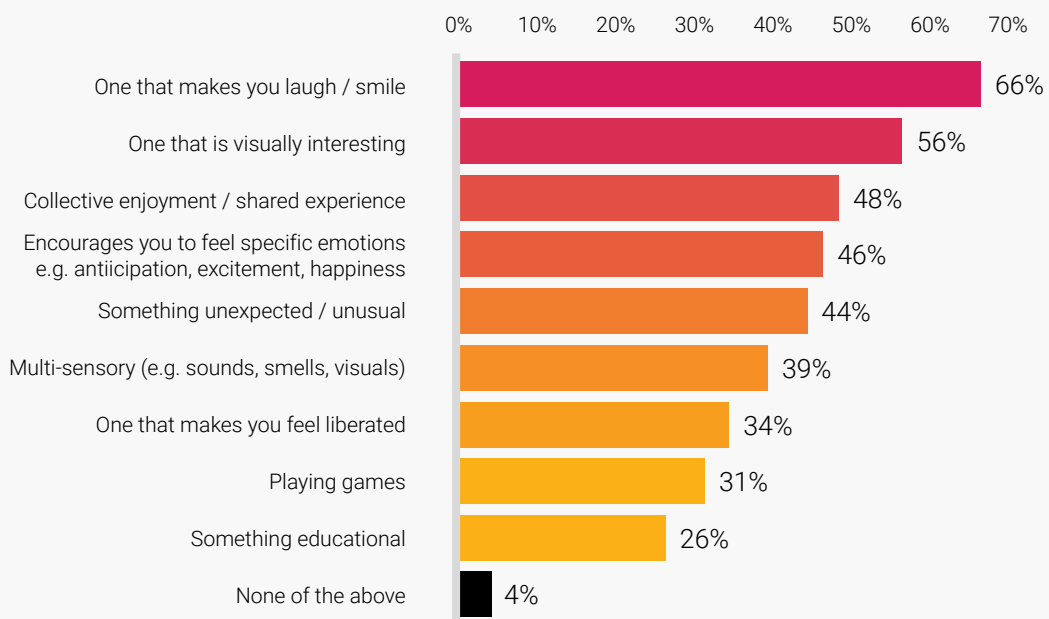
What makes something a boring experience? (Select all that apply)



The survey also asked the sample group what made an experience feel fun.

- Two thirds said something that made them laugh or smile
- Just over half (56%) said an experience that was 'visually interesting'
- 44 per cent said 'something unexpected/unusual'
- 39 per cent said something 'multi-sensory' involving sounds, smells and visuals

What makes an experience feel fun? (Select all that apply)



When asked how long it took them to feel bored, over half (52%) said it would take less than five minutes before they would feel bored and start using their mobile phone to entertain themselves if they were in a boring place.

When asked about making return visits, 85 per cent said that they would return to a restaurant at least three or four times a year if they thought it was a fun place to be.

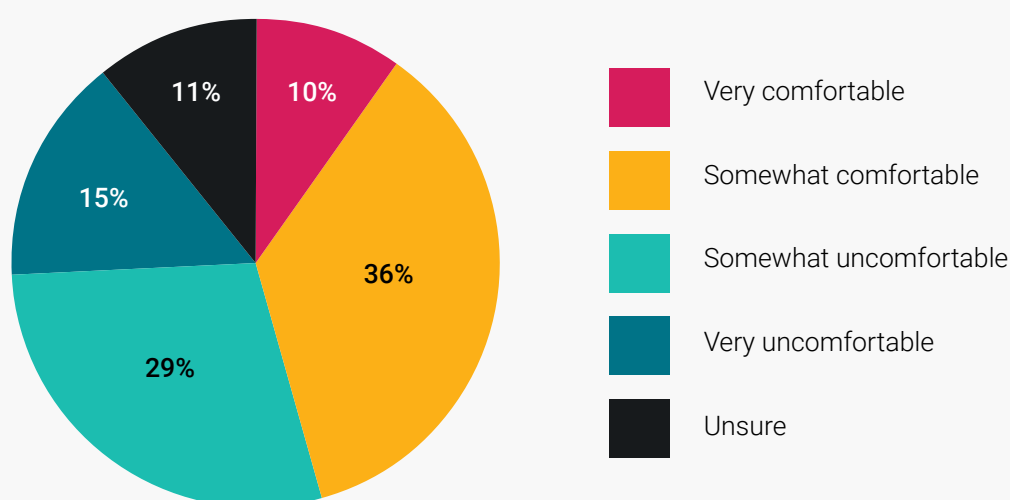
Almost half (44%) of the respondents said they felt uncomfortable making complaints in restaurants.

Making complaints

Saturn's research also explored the issue of negative customer feedback.

- Almost half (44%) of the respondents said they felt uncomfortable making complaints in restaurants. Of those, more than a quarter (29%) said they found it 'somewhat uncomfortable'. Fifteen per cent said they found it 'very uncomfortable'.
- Women are statistically less likely to want to complain about an issue, with nearly half (47%) finding it an uncomfortable experience, as opposed to 39 per cent of men.
- There was little difference across the age groups, in how awkward people felt complaining. However, 25 to 34-year-olds said they were the most comfortable with it, with 52 per cent saying they felt comfortable making complaints, and of those 14 per cent said they were 'very comfortable'. 18 to 24-year-olds were statistically the most likely to feel 'very uncomfortable' making a complaint (22%).

How do you feel about making complaints at leisure/hospitality venues (e.g., cinemas, restaurants etc.)? by Demographics Total

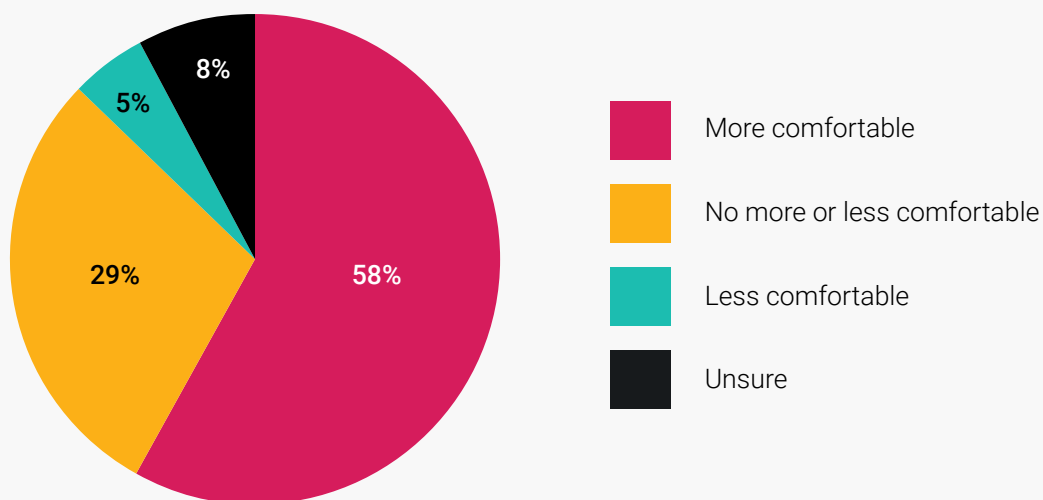


Respondents were asked if they would be more comfortable making complaints using a touch-screen device.

- More than half of the sample group (58%) said they would.
- Just four per cent said they would be less comfortable giving negative feedback using a touchscreen device.
- Nearly a third (29%) said they would be no more and no less comfortable using one to make a complaint.

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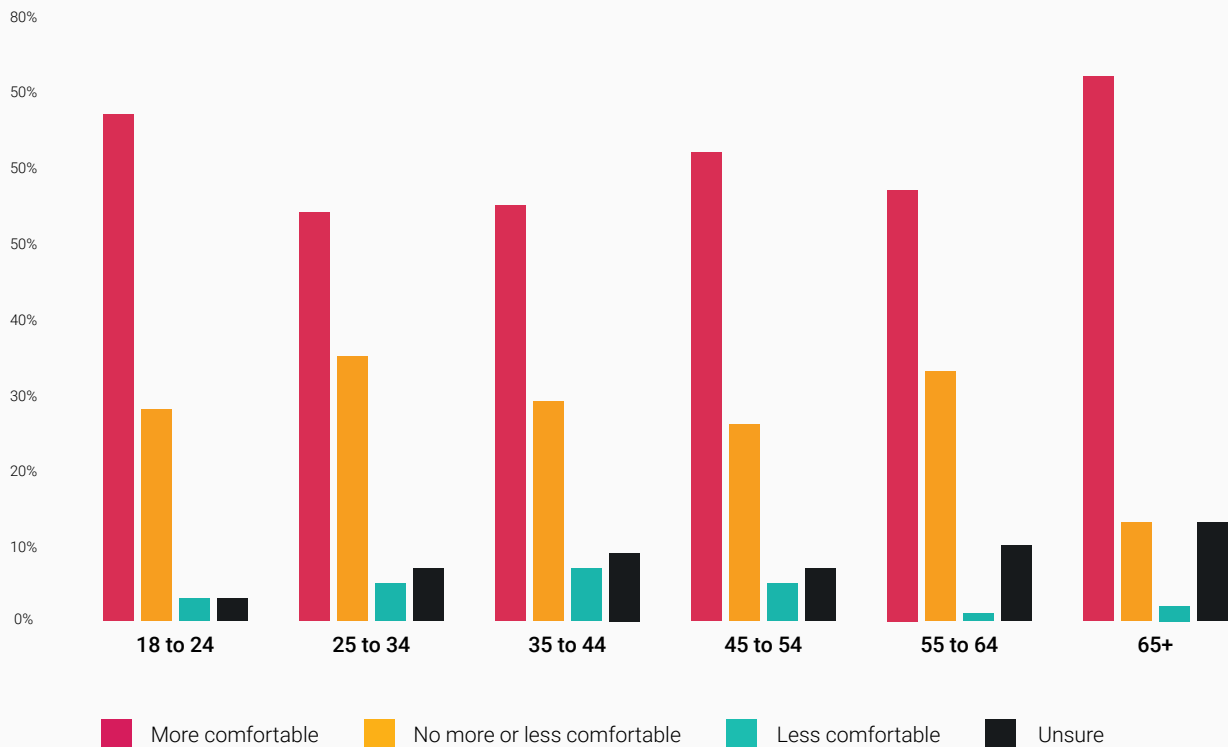
Would you feel more or less comfortable using a touch-screen device to give a restaurant negative feedback? Total



- There was a clear gender divide, with two thirds (66%) of women preferring to use a digital display to give a restaurant negative feedback, as opposed to less than half of men (46%).
- 'Baby boomers' were the most likely to want to complain using a digital device, with 72 per cent saying they would be more comfortable with it. Next was 'Generation Z' with 67 per cent saying they'd prefer it. Those least interested in complaining using a digital device were the 'Millennials' with just over half (54%) of 25 to 34-year-olds saying they would prefer to give a restaurant feedback using a touchscreen.

Two thirds (66%) of women would prefer to use a digital display to give a restaurant negative feedback, as opposed to less than half of men (46%)

Would you feel more or less comfortable using a touch-screen device to give a restaurant any negative feedback?



Almost half of people are uncomfortable making complaints in person

Saturn's research suggests that almost half of people are uncomfortable with making complaints in person. This suggests that they are more likely to post negative feedback online if they have a bad experience, rather than giving negative feedback to the restaurant directly.

Monitoring customer feedback allows QSRs and casual dining businesses to identify problems that affect customers' experience and fix them, making it easier to help keep their customer review scores high.

Solutions

Saturn's research has highlighted that what customers want from a restaurant is changing. Obviously, they want good food and service, but it should also feel like an 'experience'. Something interesting, fun and without conflict or confrontation.

Restaurant owners and managers can't be psychic, but they can make better use of digital tools to learn more about what their customers do and don't want, where they're being disappointed, and how much of an impact that has on their overall enjoyment. That way they can draw conclusions and make changes accordingly.

Touchscreen displays **Budget: ££**

Most QSRs rely on customers approaching servers to make a complaint, or with casual dining restaurants on servers to ask customers if they're happy. Any mild 'niggles' are unlikely to be mentioned.

If any negative feedback *is* given, it's down to the server to decide how much of the feedback to share with management and when they share it. There may be vital customer feedback that they fail to pass on. This practice also relies on customers feeling comfortable enough to give negative feedback, which the research indicates less than half feel comfortable doing.

Many quick service restaurants (QSRs) are already using touchscreen devices to take customers' orders, but very rarely use them to generate customer feedback.

Touchscreen displays not only make it easy for people to give feedback, they can be used to generate analytics. These can show when most complaints are made and what about, and how much of an issue the customer perceives it to be. The statistics can highlight whether food or service quality dips at specific times and days of the week. This can be particularly useful across franchises to ensure food quality is consistent across multiple sites. They can also be used to generate positive feedback, which can be used as part of marketing campaigns.

One in ten people thought restaurant visits were boring and avoided them

Touchscreen displays could ask questions like, "how was the service today?", "would you recommend us to friends?" and "what could we do better?" It could also request ratings on a basic scale, to give an overall snapshot of performance.

Customers could be asked if they wanted to provide anonymous feedback on their experience, or have it linked to an order or table number. This would enable those keen to avoid confrontation to give feedback but avoid awkward conversations. This feedback method should also be used alongside servers asking customers for feedback, where appropriate, so diners can be sure to get a timely response if their orders go missing or are incorrect.

Touchscreen displays can also be dual purpose, for example showing marketing materials (e.g. promoting new products added to the menu) alongside requesting feedback when not in use. When in use, they can be used to generate both positive and negative feedback and ask questions that might be helpful to management for improving the overall customer experience.

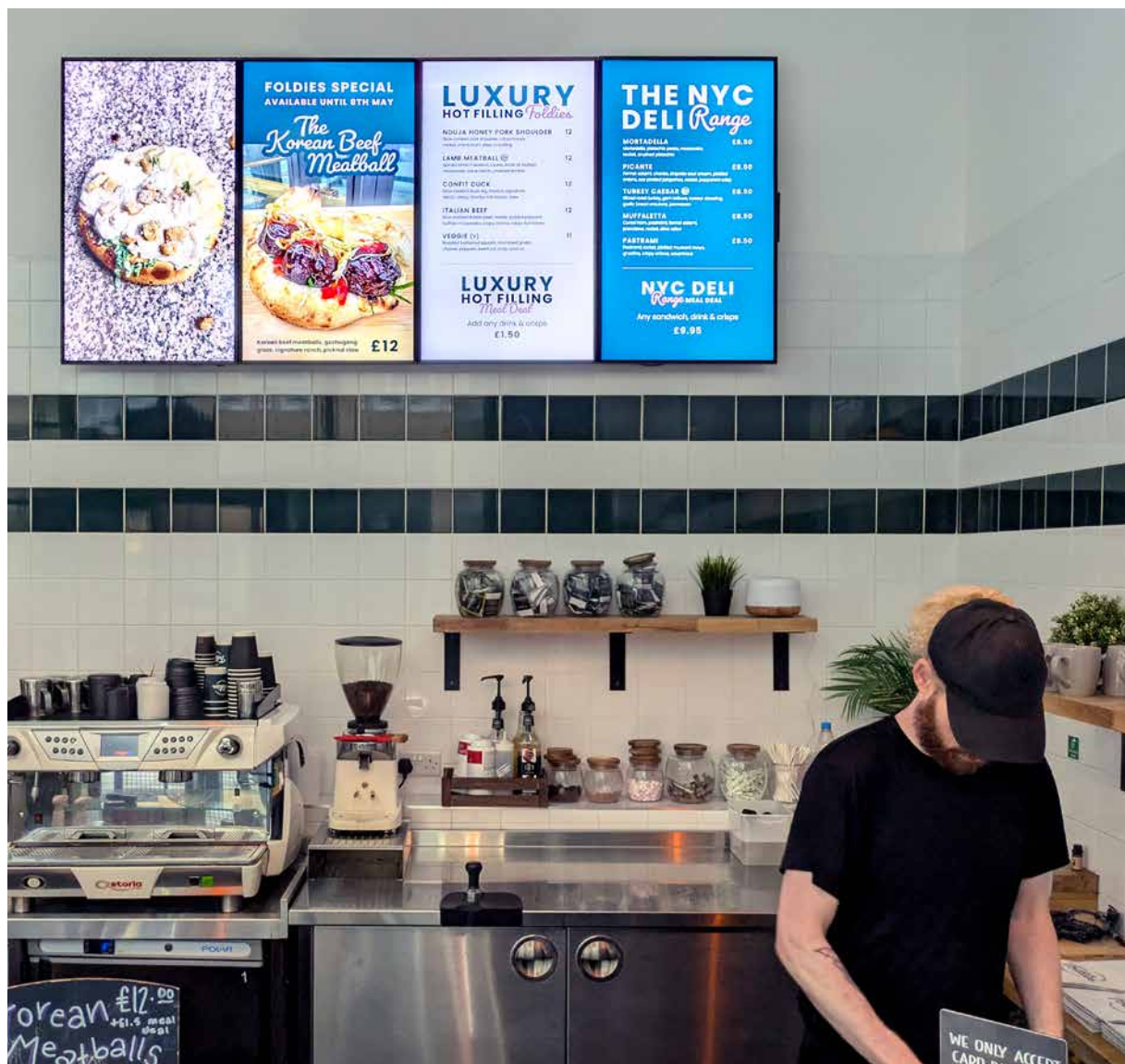
Digital menu boards Budget: ££

Digital menu boards allow QSRs and casual dining restaurants to show off their full menu — from signature classics to limited-time specials— in a clear and dynamic way that engages customers and reduces the risk of items being overlooked.

With vivid imagery and clever placement, they allow restaurants to shine a spotlight on high-margin dishes and promotional meal deals during peak and off-peak periods, steering customers toward higher-value selections.

With digital menu boards, you can A/B test layouts, pricing, and images to see what works best and tweak it over time to see which format maximises customer order value the most.

With appropriate software, they can showcase different menu items at different times of the day and highlight breakfast, lunch or evening meal options. Any updates (e.g. addition/removal of menu items) can be scheduled centrally and deployed instantly/automatically across multiple restaurant locations eliminating print costs, and maintaining brand consistency.



Wall-mounted displays Budget: £

Wall-mounted digital displays are a great way to not just promote new products, meal deal promotions and loyalty schemes, they can also be used to show engaging visuals that enhance and change the restaurant's overall atmosphere.

Displays could show videos or photos relating to the origins of the food it sells – e.g. videos of Tokyo for a noodle bar, or the Amalfi coast for a pizza restaurant – or imagery related to the food's quality, for example showing nearby farms where produce is grown/sourced.

They can be used to show new menu items, highlight competitions, social media feeds, user generated content and highlight partnerships with influencers.

By changing the visuals shown on the displays on a semi-regular basis, it will keep the look/feel of the restaurant fresh for repeat customers.

Wall-mounted displays can also be used to encourage customers to leave feedback via a QR code and their mobile phone. Again, this can be used to generate useful analytics and customer testimonials.



Window displays Budget: £££

Wall-mounted digital displays are a great way to not just promote new products, meal deal promotions and loyalty schemes, they can also be used to show engaging visuals that enhance and change the restaurant's overall atmosphere.

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Summary

In a turbulent operating climate, restaurants need to leverage every opportunity to differentiate themselves, boost customer visits, and increase average spend to maximise their profits.

Our research suggests that QSRs and casual dining restaurants could make much better use of digital displays to bring their menu to life, monitor and manage the quality of the customer experience they deliver, and generally make dining in their establishment more fun and enjoyable.

Getting feedback has never been smoother. With QR codes and on-screen 'tap-to-rate' buttons, guests can comment on dishes, service or atmosphere in seconds. No paper forms, no hassle. And because comments feed into a live dashboard, managers can spot issues straight away and fix them before they affect more of their customers.

Digital displays can also turn waiting time into part of the fun. Bright screens and playful content can grab attention, set the mood and get guests chatting before they've even placed an order. They can also provide a welcome distraction, reducing customers' perceived wait times if there are delays on food orders arriving.



Next steps

Saturn Visual Solutions is a digital signage consultancy with more than 25 years' experience in making food and drink menus/products look irresistible and helping to make customer experiences engaging and fun.

We have worked with a host of businesses, of varying types and size in the hospitality sector, but also in the leisure sector too. We use this collective experience to create fun, interactive visitor experiences, and to look for ways to help our clients to be more profitable.

To learn more about Saturn can help your restaurant business, contact [**sales@saturnvisual.com**](mailto:sales@saturnvisual.com)