

Forbes: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/louisbiscotti/2023/07/10/restaurants-face-tech-backlash-as-qr-code-fatigue-technology-costs-and-complexity-increase/?sh=4fa6340b2552>

# Restaurants Face Tech Backlash As QR Code Fatigue, Technology Costs, And Complexity Increase

Louis Biscotti Contributor 

*National Leader, Food & Beverage Services Group,  
Marcum*

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Amidst a tech backlash in the post-pandemic era, QR code menus in restaurants are on the decline. At ... [+] GETTY

Eat, drink — and order on your cell phone. That was the game plan at restaurants during the pandemic. Sure, nothing annoys people more than a cell phone at the table at home or a restaurant, especially when the diner next to you shines their cell phone light in your eyes. But even as diners try to ditch phones during meals, restaurants during the pandemic required them to take out their cells to read menus via QR codes. Now QR (Quick Response) codes are often tossed out or supplemented — while old-fashioned menus return.

Many forms of technology caught on during the pandemic, such as ordering food online, Uber Eats, ghost kitchens, artificial intelligence, and virtual brands. And some of that is here to stay. Still, a tech backlash has begun as diners often return to what they loved about restaurants. Eating out was and is an experience. High tech sometimes was taking the hospitality out of the hospitality industry.

Tech, as it turns out, can sometimes be a momentary or a lasting solution. We're seeing the marketplace sort out which is which. RIP QR codes may be too strong, but they are losing some of their shine. Delivery apps are still big but, on the decline, and ghost kitchens aren't as hot as they were. As the pandemic retreats, it's a pretty good time to take the temperature of F&B technology. Some tech is going gangbusters; other examples, if not going bust, are certainly not on the rise. More than 40% of food service operators plan to invest in technology or equipment to boost productivity, according to National Restaurant Association data as quoted by the Food Institute. There is a cost, but there can be savings. Picking the wrong solution and not having the right advisors can be disastrous. So, what's in and what's in decline?

## Cracking the QR Code

High tech continues to be a tool that, done right, can save money and boost revenue. QR Codes, devised in Japan in the 1990s, can save money but also can come with a cost. Some diners find it easier to look at whole

paper menus rather than scroll or feel their experience is interrupted by staring at screens. "Have you ever tried bringing your grandmother to a restaurant and having her order off of an iPhone menu?" one respondent wrote in a poll on QR codes that Axios conducted. "It is not a pleasant experience." Many diners feel uncomfortable taking out their phone, so they don't properly peruse the menu. "As it turns out, diners dislike the process so much that it was actually costing the restaurants money," Mashed.com wrote about the quick rise and current decline of QR Code menus. "Perhaps people like the physical interaction with the server," Mashed mused in a piece about QR code backlash.

A recent story on RestaurantBusinessOnline was headlined "Customers really don't like QR code menus," Mashed ran a piece about "Why restaurants are beginning to axe QR Codes," while The New York Times NYT +1.8% wrote, "The restaurant QR-Code menu is being shown the door." Still, Restaurantbusiness.com said even if some diners dislike digital menus, they might have to get used to them. Some restaurants offer choices: QR Codes, single-use paper, or standard menus, depending on preference. That seems like the way to go.



As the restaurant industry grapples with labor shortages, robotic technology, from interactive ...

## I, robot

While there is a backlash against some tech, new options can help with ordering, making, or serving food at tables. Kiosks are common at fast food restaurants. Automats (remember them?) are making a comeback.

Faced with labor shortages, restaurants are turning to automation, according to Restaurantbusiness.com. The Food Institute reported at the 2023 National Restaurant Association Show robotic technology was on a roll, or at least available. And robots, from self-driving delivery vehicles to drones, remain squarely perched between sci-fi and tests being done today.

Robots can take care of many tasks and even talk a bit. GKI Group's Cecilia.ai is an interactive robotic bartender that uses a 3D avatar and artificial intelligence to power conversation. Will mechanical mixologists replace bartenders? Maybe not, but Cecilia can mix more than 100 drinks an hour, tell jokes, customize drinks, and possibly even sing Piano Man. Meanwhile, Atosa USA's robotic French Fry maker won the

National Restaurant Association's 2023 Kitchen Innovations Award. And Bear Robotics' robotic servers, known as Servi+ hospitality robots, can transport more than a dozen dishes at once. AUTECH's sushi-making robot, the ASM865A Maki Maker MKR 0.0%, can produce rice sheets, sushi rolls, and burritos. AUTECH says they're very popular at colleges and universities. Will this tech replace tradition, or will the consumer demand the human touch? It remains to be seen!

## **POS Progress!**

While QR code menus may be facing a backlash, POS (point-of-sale) systems are only getting better, driving a hidden revolution. POS systems are shifting to the cloud, providing more information and innovation, according to the Food Institute. SpotOn Handheld devices help servers provide bills and speed payment. And the SpotOn Reserve restaurant reservation system lets hosts know table status, including drinks, main courses, and check status. Screens are going up in kitchens showing and tracking orders, making operations more efficient.

## **Delivery dilemma**

The fact is the pandemic drove innovation that is only continuing to appear, driving the delivery business. Following a pandemic boom, "delivery-only restaurant concepts are starting to crack," according to Restaurantbusiness.com. Ghost kitchens are not on fire the way they once were. Tech remains one differentiator between restaurants, potentially providing convenience and cutting costs. But other factors, including experience, also count.



Balancing high-tech tools and the human touch is essential for success in the evolving restaurant ... [+] GETTY

## Tech of tomorrow, today

The International Franchise Association says, “Technology fees have become the standard for ensuring a franchising organization can keep up with a rapidly evolving competitive environment.” About 62 percent of franchisors collect tech fees. More important, according to the association, half of franchisees said tech tools are among the top values franchisors provide. New technology will continue to appear on the menu of options for restaurant operators. Still, this is the hospitality business. And high touch, as well as high tech, is likely to remain an important ingredient to success. Whoever finds the best blend likely will do the best, although balance is key. Expect F&B to continue to adapt tech to increase efficiency. Still, it’s also important to keep an eye on the human element and human experience, which along with food, helps drive the business.

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**Louis Biscotti**

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I am the national leader of Marcum's Food and Beverage Services group. I've been an entrepreneurial leader in accounting for over 40 years, and am a frequent lecturer and published author...