Is your hospitality network ready

for the connected customer?

Striking a balance

The hospitality industry is under mounting pressure, much of which is driven by the consumer. Today's hospitality customer tends to be a fickle element on the path to profit, often choosing to research and purchase through different channels, and demanding an increasingly convenient, transparent and fulfilling hospitality journey.

Today's consumer demands an increasingly convenient, transparent and fulfilling journey

Meeting these demands comes at a cost. From interactive tables to self-service order points, technology has become a vital component of modern hospitality venues, adding value and depth to a bricks-and-mortar offer. When visiting a hospitality venue – be it a hotel, café, restaurant, pub or bar – customers want the fluidity and clarity of experience they would enjoy through a website, but with added benefits such as associate expertise and exciting new forms of engagement.

We surveyed a sample of 1,000 UK adults to discover what they think of technology in the hospitality environment...

Our survey shows that most people are keen to encounter technology when they visit a hospitality destination.

Nearly two thirds (65%) of hotel guests are receptive to interactive tablets and information points, while **48%** of hotel and café customers are happy to use self-service ordering systems. This demand for technology means that the hospitality venue of the future is likely to look a good deal different to that of today; for example, **48%** of restaurant customers would like to see digital advertising screens employed.

All over the world, hospitality vendors are using devices like this to deliver improved levels of customer service – but it's not the only technology they need to worry about.

Today's customers are spending more time than ever on their own mobile devices while on location. It's not a new phenomenon, but it's here to stay.

To the hospitality vendor, this behaviour can appear to be a distraction from the ordering process – **more than half (56%)** of customers admit to using their smartphones in a hospitality venue for personal use – yet many are also using their mobiles to supplement their ordering journey.

Therefore, today's hospitality vendor must ensure their data network is strong enough to support both their own technology and that of the mobile consumer. It's impossible to ignore either of these demands for a technology-powered hospitality experience, but fulfilling them requires an infrastructure that can handle mounting pressure.
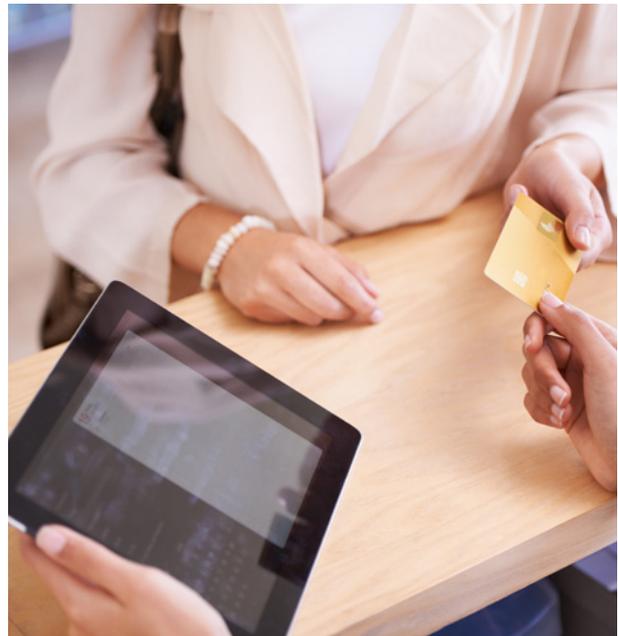
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The personal touch(point)

Technology may increasingly be an essential component of bricks-and-mortar hospitality, but it by no means replaces the demand for human interaction.

Service associates continue to play a valuable role in guiding customers' ordering journeys, and impact **more than half of those visiting restaurants (61%)** when it comes to making their final decision.

While on-location technology such as touchscreen displays cater for the **43%** of customers that prefer to find their own information, an equal proportion of them seek guidance from service staff enabled by technology such as tablets.

Associates equipped in this manner are granted greater access to the likes of menu information and availability, and are freed up from static service points to make closer, more valuable contact with customers, which is ideal for those waiting on tables.

CUSTOMERS LIKE STAFF TO BE EQUIPPED WITH TABLETS OR OTHER MOBILE DEVICES:

In restaurants
72%

In cafés
60%

In hotels
59%

In bars
55%

In pubs
54%
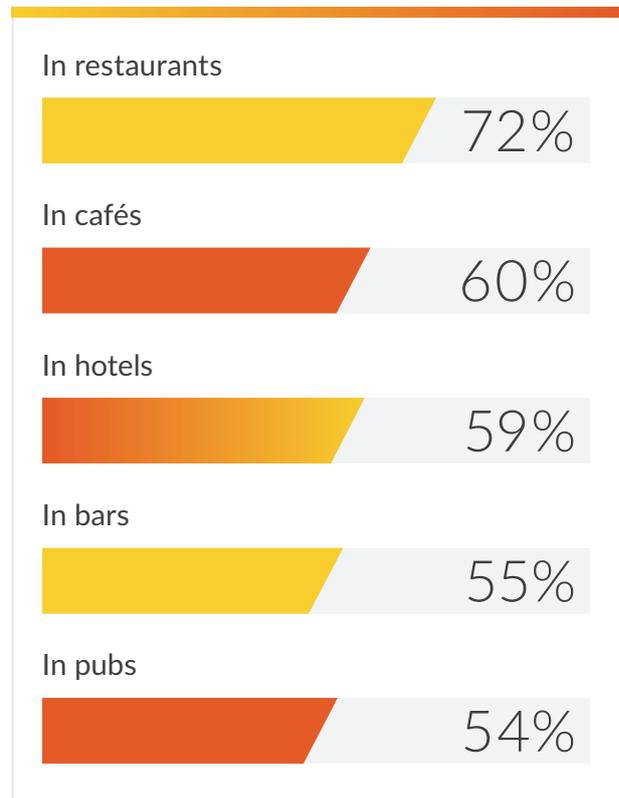
Customers visiting hospitality venues like staff to be equipped with tablets or other mobile devices so they can help wherever it is required – indeed, **49%** expect to encounter this approach in a restaurant as standard.

While the blend of human and technology might seem the best way to deliver good customer service, it's important to ensure the two work in tandem.

Associates that are poorly trained in the use of their tablets rank amongst the biggest customer turn-offs. Service staff that are not confident or slow in their use of tablets make **72% and 75%** of customers less likely to order, respectively.

Associates with technology should be able to deliver a more streamlined service; but sometimes they can hinder the process. **79%** of people said they would be less likely to order if a member of staff lost the information they had entered, or if the associate could not make their device communicate with another in the ordering process, while **77%** said their decision would be negatively affected if staff were unable to process and finalise an order on their tablet.

Hospitality associates with a window to their business' inventory should be able to deliver a clear picture of what is available, and what is not; **81%** would be less likely to order if a member of staff could not confirm the availability of a menu item on their tablet.

If consumers increasingly expect this approach, it's critical to ensure that the network supporting it doesn't slow or fall down at a crucial moment, as the results of such a failure can prove costly; both to associate morale and in terms of customer loyalty.

Ultimately, however, such caveats should not deter a hospitality vendor from putting technology in their associates' hands; the improved capacity to communicate, demonstrate other on-location technologies, offer specific order information and record customer preferences means they are better placed to meet a wide range of demands. Indeed, 45% of restaurant visitors and 43% of those visiting hotels expect staff enabled with technology to deliver a better service than those without it.

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Influential, and in your pocket

Whether a hospitality vendor likes it or not, their customers will use their own mobile devices while on location, so it makes more sense to facilitate and guide their behaviour than to resist it.

Indeed, there are plenty of revenue opportunities for those vendors willing to engage mobile customers on their own terms, and this approach is one of the most promising areas of growth in the bricks-and-mortar hospitality market.

Hospitality vendors are finding that offering free Wi-Fi connectivity to customers on location can be hugely beneficial, and the demand certainly exists; for **30%** of hotel visitors, mobile connectivity is essential to their experience. And it's not just younger customers who feel this way, as it is true of:

- → **27%** of hotel visitors aged 16-34
- → **32%** of those aged 35-54, and
- → **22%** of those aged 54 and over

Rather than being distracted from the ordering process, many of these customers are using their phones to engage more closely with it while in a hospitality venue; for example, **23%** have looked up order information such as calorie intake, and **26%** have used their phone to make payments.

Today's customer desires a seamless ordering journey

Mobile technology has disrupted traditional hospitality offers for some time, and this influence is only likely to intensify. Customers will continue to use their mobiles to compare prices or post unfavourable reviews; but vendors can counter such habits by ensuring their mobile strategy can exploit the opportunities inherent in this behaviour.

As well as seeking an experience that excites and informs, today's customer desires a seamless ordering journey; one that incorporates and brings across the best of a vendor's website, and that lets them move effortlessly move from channel to channel as they research, order, and beyond.

In practice, this might mean grouping a food or drink offer in the same way on location and online, or letting customers access their online accounts and finalise incomplete transactions through physical digital touchpoints.

A quarter (25%) of hotel visitors want their on-location experience to mirror a vendor's online offer; 18% say that technology forges greater consistency between the two channels.

Many customers' journeys begin before they have even set foot in the venue, lending greater weight to the need for a joined-up approach; the ability to bring data already entered online into an order affects 50% of people's decision to buy – and very much so, in the case of 15% of them.

As well as a joined-up approach, there is significant demand for a more personalised service, which can be delivered by gathering, analysing and responding to customer data.

65% of restaurant diners would like to receive personalised offers on their smartphones, while 29% of hotel guests expect a tailored experience based on learnings from a previous visit.

The presence of on-location technology leads to an expectation for this kind of experience, according to 36% of hotel guests, and 32% of restaurant visitors, and associate service is integral to this process – together with self-service technologies, hospitality vendors have everything they need in order to learn from their customers, and respond accordingly.

Yet disruption already exists in this arena, too. For example, while a vendor can deliver targeted email and SMS messages when a consumer is in their venue, it's also possible to target those visiting a competitor.

Mobile will continue to influence and disrupt bricks-and-mortar experiences, in ways that may be unavoidable; but savvy vendors will find ways to harness these opportunities and counter these disruptions by staying one step ahead of the curve. Those able to deliver customers joined-up, personalised service will find themselves better placed to meet the needs of the mobile consumer, now and in the future.
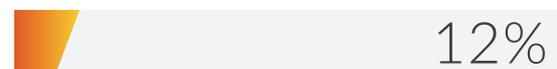
HOW TARGETED MESSAGES ARE DISRUPTING HOSPITALITY
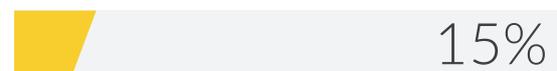
15%
Have received notifications from a venue whilst on location there
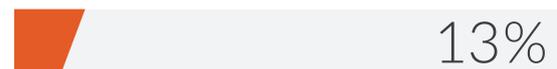
13%
Have received offers from a rival hospitality vendor

12%
Have left to pursue such an offer

Building for the future

Our survey has demonstrated that today's customers want convenience, speed and technology, and they expect this to be provided through a combination of their own technology and that which they encounter in a hospitality venue.

This new world of technology-enabled customer service is ultimately dependent on data networks to run effectively, and the price of network failure is tangible. A poor network is likely to frustrate customers, leading to lost conversions; in the worst case, sensitive customer data is lost, and a vendor's reputation irrevocably harmed. Meanwhile, slow connections in a venue affect **62%** of customers' purchasing decisions, and a lack of connectivity to use personal devices frustrates **52%** of them.

As more technology is introduced to hospitality venues – by both the vendor and the customer – the strain placed on their communications infrastructure is increasing; a network capable of performing under growing pressure is a necessity in modern hospitality.

Vodat is one of the fastest-growing suppliers of telecom solutions and private, managed

What goes on behind the scenes is just as important as the customer-facing interactions

networks to the UK hospitality market, and it understands that what goes on behind the scenes is just as important as the customer-facing interactions.

From its extensive experience of working with hospitality businesses, Vodat's dedicated hospitality and leisure team has learned how to deliver a cost-effective, reliable, resilient and secure managed network; one that will not buckle when under pressure, or put a vendor's sensitive data at risk.

Contact Vodat to discover how its expertise and flexibility is enabling it to deliver an exemplary service to hospitality businesses across a range of sectors

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