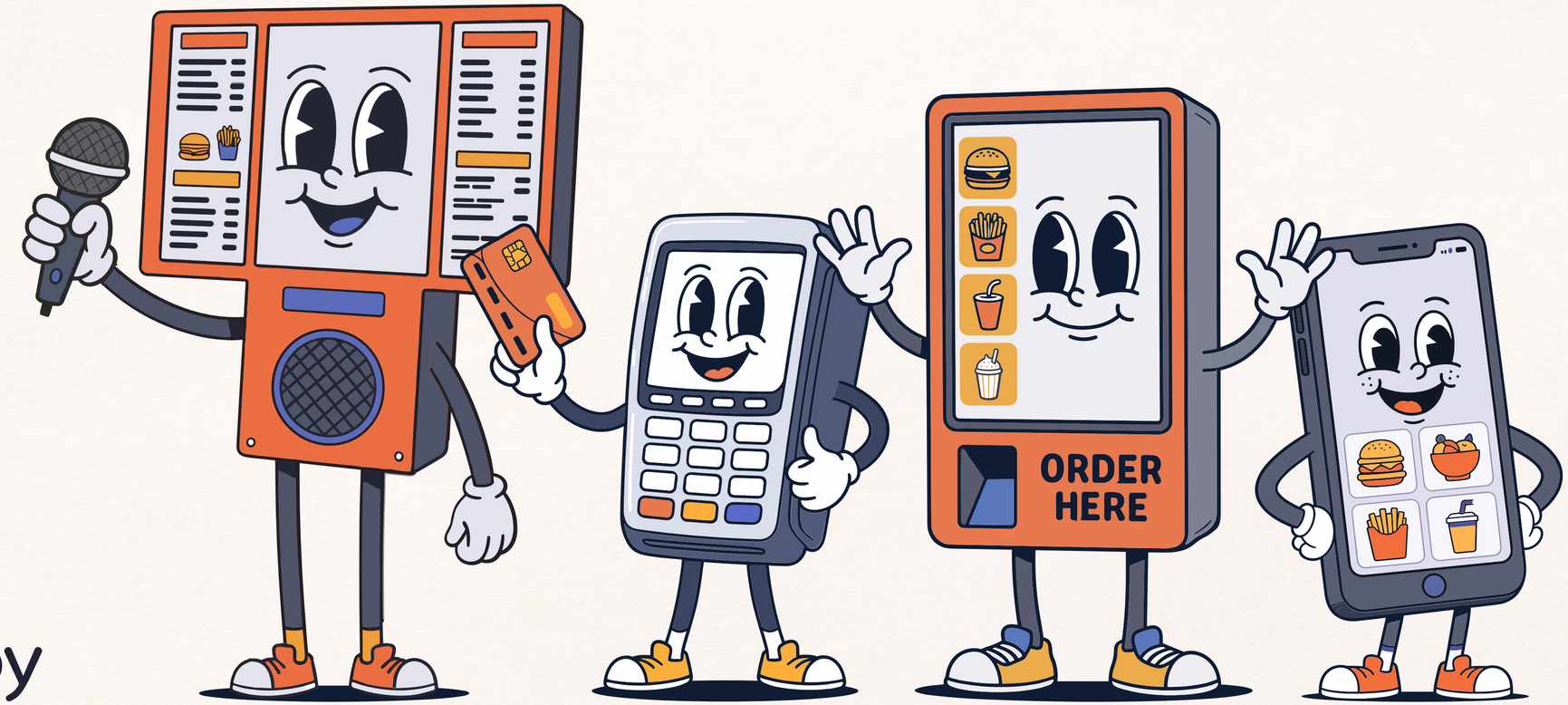
THE 2026 RESTAURANT TECH REPORT

Add Sauce, Hold the Friction

How Tech Is Shaping the QSR Customer Experience



Canopy

Executive Summary

When we interact with technology at every turn, anything less than a perfect experience is painful. For quick-service restaurants (QSRs), the margin is even thinner because speed and ease are part of the promise. If our phones can recognize our faces instantly, a self-serve checkout can't take three tries to register a tap. Customers expect restaurant technology to just work.

Canopy surveys customers annually about their technology use at QSRs. In 2025, we saw frequent issues with kiosks and payment systems, and most customers had yet to encounter an AI drive-thru. This year, we repeated those questions to see what had changed, while exploring mobile apps and loyalty programs more.

Our research reveals a widening gap between adoption and reliability. Customers are embracing new technology, with tap-to-pay usage increasing by 12 percentage points and encounters with AI drive-thrus rising by nine percentage points. However, the industry's Achilles' heel is reliability. For example, only 20% of kiosk users report that they always work.

Adding new technology doesn't automatically translate to a good customer experience. It has to work, or customers will take their business elsewhere.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on a national survey conducted by Canopy in August 2026 to understand consumer perceptions of technology in QSR settings. The survey collected responses from 1,007 U.S. adults across a mix of age groups and geographies.

KEY FINDINGS

Tech Matters Enough to Make Customers Leave

94% say technology influences which QSR they choose. 37% have left without completing an order because technology wasn't working.

Kiosk Reliability Is Not Getting Better

Only 20% of kiosk users say kiosks always work, unchanged from 2025.

AI Drive-Thru Encounters Are on the Up

AI drive-thru exposure rose 60% year over year, from 15% to 24%. Among customers who have encountered it, 70% say ordering with AI was about the same as or better than ordering from restaurant staff.

Tip Prompts Cause Frustration

29% of customers have changed how they order, chosen another restaurant, or left without completing an order because of a tip prompt.

Reward Apps Aren't Rewarding

Among customers with a QSR app installed, 49% have had issues with loyalty points not registering or expiring without warning.

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Customers Expect the Tech to Keep Up



Reliable technology is a regular part of the QSR experience. Customers trust some brands to deliver more than others.

Top QSR brands earned roughly the same marks as last year for meeting customers' technology expectations. McDonald's, Chick-fil-A, and Taco Bell remain the top three for tech experiences, and in the same order. Chick-fil-A saw the biggest year-over-year drop at 3.6 percentage points. Panera Bread had a similar drop at 3.2 points, while Wendy's saw the highest gain at 1.3 points.



McDonald's remains the top QSR brand meeting customers' technology expectations.

These rankings matter: 94% of customers still say technology influences where they choose to eat.

94% say technology influences which QSR they choose.

When technology fails, customers won't stand around and wait for help. They leave and take their wallets with them. More than 1 in 3 (37%) customers have left a QSR without completing their order because the technology wasn't working. Frequent customers are most likely to abandon their order when technology breaks down. Among customers who visit three or more times a week, 59% have abandoned an order over a technology problem. Among those who visit only a handful of times a year, 22% have.

Frequent QSR customers also place more weight on reliability: 82% rate a smooth, reliable technology experience as very or extremely important, compared with 62% of those who visit only a handful of times a year. Every additional visit gives the restaurant another chance to make the experience easy or to give customers a reason to walk away.

Best QSR Tech Experience

	Quick Service Restaurant	2025	vs	2026
1.	McDonald's	34%	=	34%
2.	Chick-fil-A	18%	↘	15%
3.	Taco Bell	8%	↘	7%
4.	Starbucks	6%	=	6%
5.	Burger King	4%	↗	5%
6.	Panera Bread	7%	↘	4%
7.	Wendy's	2%	↗	4%
8.	Dunkin'	2%	↗	3%
9.	Chipotle	3%	↘	2%
10.	Domino's	2%	↘	1%

37% of customers have left without completing an order because technology wasn't working.

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Convenience Has Conditions



Convenience Has Conditions

Customers choose kiosks to speed up and control their orders, but the tech keeps getting in the way.

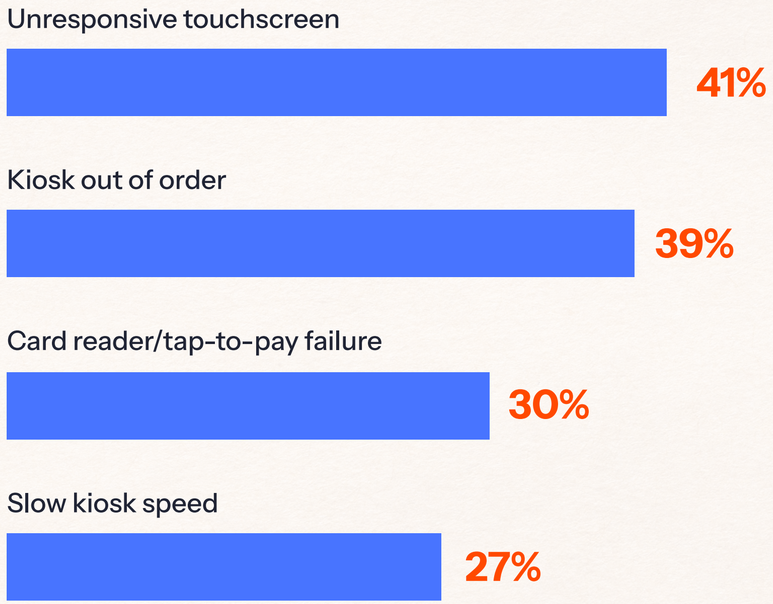
Self-serve kiosks are now a regular part of the QSR experience, with two-thirds of customers using them at least occasionally.

67% of customers use self-serve kiosks

Kiosks are appealing because they make ordering easier and faster. Half (50%) of customers use them for speed, while 34% like having more time to browse the menu, and 24% like that they make it easier to customize their orders. Nearly one in four use kiosks to avoid human interaction.

Customers lose these benefits when kiosks malfunction, which happens far too often. Only 20% of customers report that kiosks work every time.

Most-Common Kiosk Problems



A year later, the kiosk experience is still broken for **4 in 5**

Reasons for Ordering From a Kiosk

50% Faster ordering

34% More time to browse

24% Easier customization

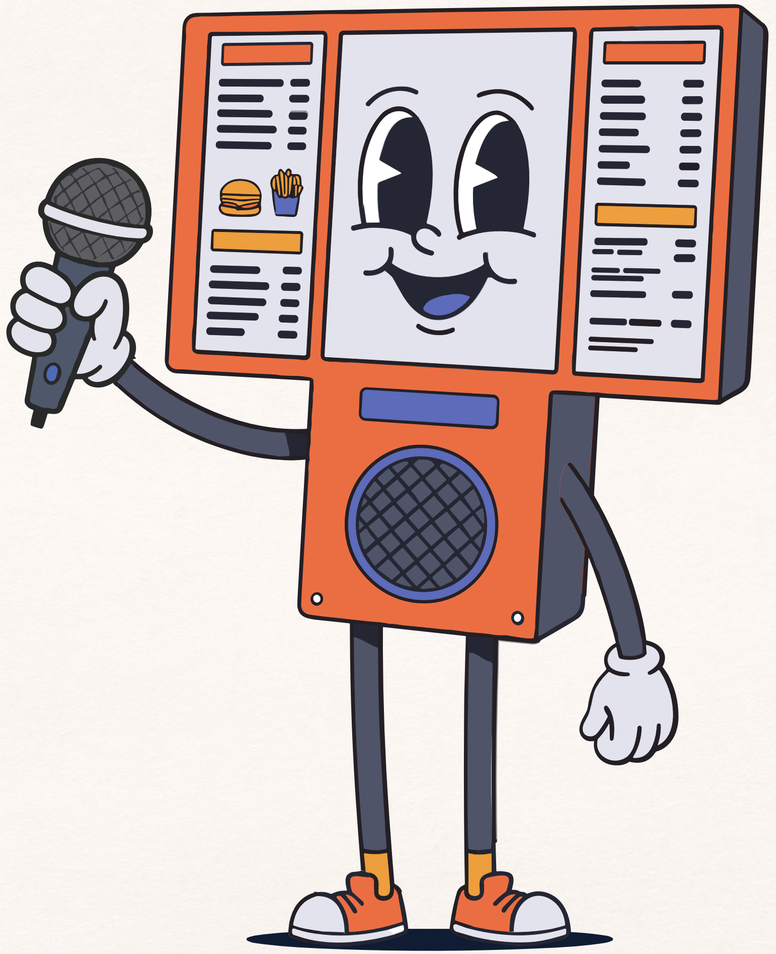
23% Avoid human interaction

18% More order accuracy

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AI Drive-Thrus Face the Next Test



AI drive-thrus are rated about the same as their human counterparts. That goodwill fades fast when customers have a question about an order.

Sixty percent more customers used an AI drive-thru in 2026 than in 2025. Most say the experience was about the same or better than ordering from restaurant staff.

70% say AI ordering was about the same as or better than ordering from restaurant staff.

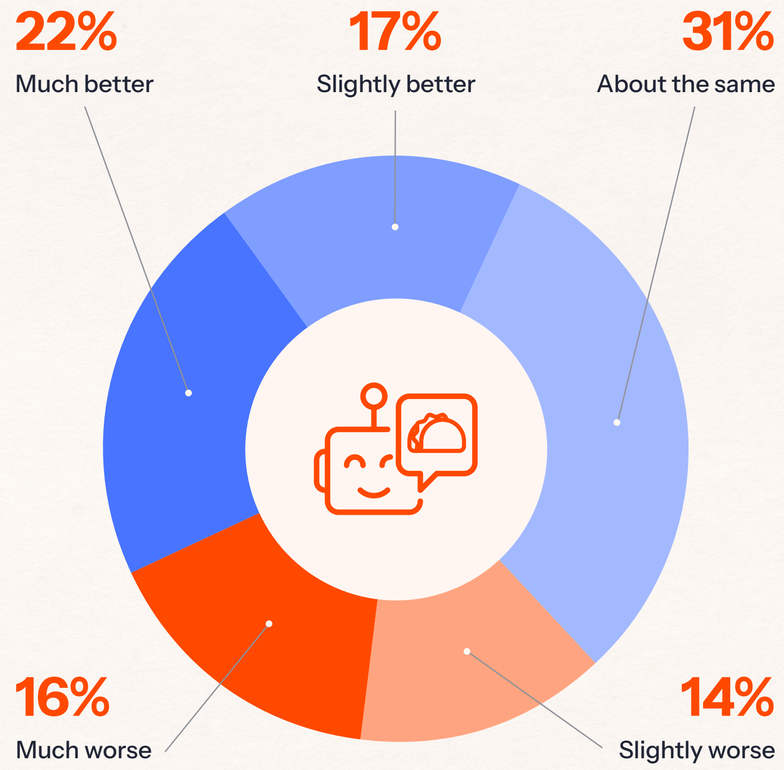
Among customers who rated AI worse than staff, 65% say the system misunderstood their order, while 39% say it could not answer their questions, and 39% say it added the wrong items. Three in 10 (29%) had trouble customizing the order, and one in four could not easily fix a mistake or make a change.

As QSRs consider adopting AI drive-thrus, they need to prepare for less predictable moments. When the system cannot answer a question or follow a customer's correction, the handoff from AI to an employee should preserve the order already in progress and shield customers from any consequences.

Where AI Ordering Falls Short

Problem	2025	vs	2026
Misunderstood order	75%	↘	65%
Couldn't answer questions	25%	↗	39%
Added wrong items	29%	↗	39%
Took too long	25%	↗	31%
Couldn't fix/change order	21%	↗	25%

How AI Ordering Compares With Restaurant Staff



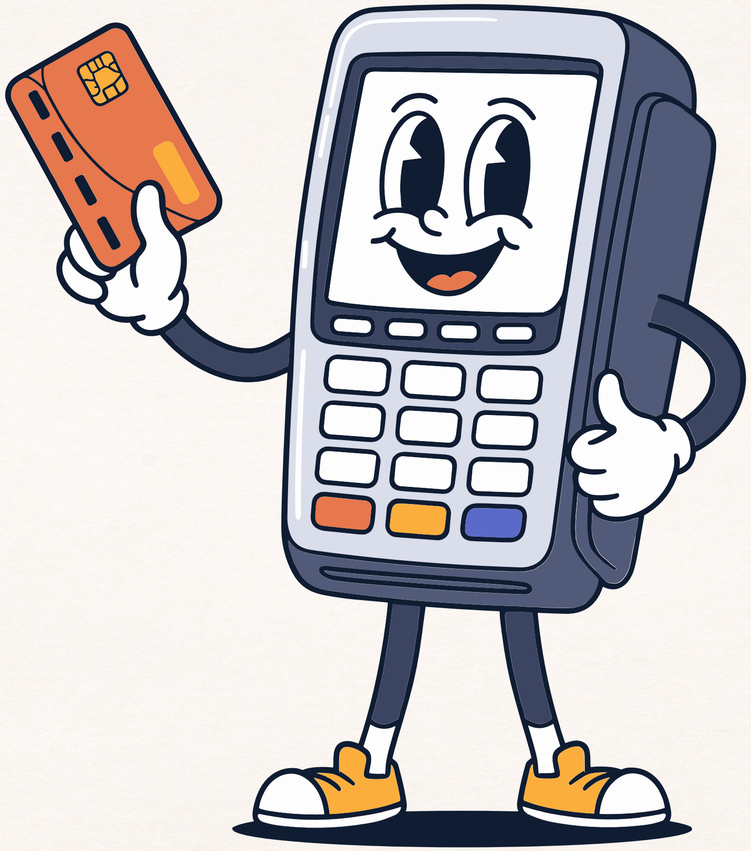
Customer Encounters With AI Drive-Thrus

15% (2025) ↗ 24% (2026)

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Checkout Keeps Hitting Snags



Checkout Keeps Hitting Snags

The card reader can work perfectly, and the checkout can still go sideways.

People rely on their phones for just about everything, including QSR checkout. More than half of customers use phone tap-to-pay at least some of the time, up from 42% last year. They expect it to be faster and more convenient than pulling out a card or cash. Tech delays upend that entire premise.

Phone Tap-to-Pay Use

42% ↗ 54%

2025 2026

The most common payment failure is as annoying as it is simple: the customer has to try again. Among customers who say payment technology doesn't always work, more than a third have had to repeat the same action multiple times before a payment finally

21% tipped when they did not want to.

went through. That problem is slightly less common than last year. The customer expectation remains unchanged, though. People don't want to wait, and only about one in four customers (27%) say payment technology works every time.

Tip prompts create problems. Even if the terminal works exactly as designed, tip prompts have resulted in 29% of customers changing how they order, choosing another restaurant, or leaving without completing their order.

Payment Problems Are Easing, Slowly

Problem	2025	vs	2026
Requires multiple attempts	42%	↘	38%
Tap device unresponsive	33%	↘	32%
Chip reader unresponsive	27%	↘	25%
Takes too long to process	23%	↘	20%

Why Customers Use Phone Tap-to-Pay

63%
Faster checkout

36%
Convenience

32%
Safer or more secure

30%
Works better than swiping or inserting a card

29% have changed how they order, chosen another restaurant, or left without completing an order because of a tip prompt.

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Loyalty Apps Reward ... and Punish



A reward that expires or won't apply at checkout doesn't feel like much of a reward.

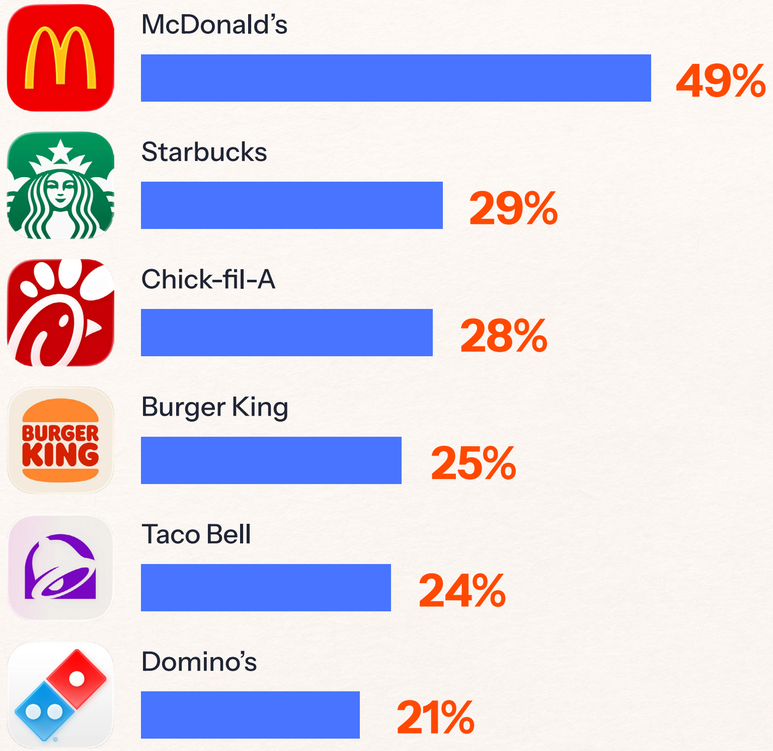
About eight in 10 customers have at least one QSR app on their phone. Rewards points motivate them to come back again and again, if they actually work.

Nearly half (49%) of QSR app users have run into a problem with points or rewards, from points expiring or failing to register to rewards not applying at checkout. App performance can get in the way before customers even reach their rewards, too. Thirty percent report crashes, glitches, or slow loading. No one wants to troubleshoot their way to a free small fry.

49% of customers with a QSR app installed have experienced at least one problem involving points or rewards they expected to use.

Open-ended responses reveal additional frustration around expiration. Respondents asked for "points that don't expire" and "longer times before points expire." A loyalty program only earns loyalty if customers can use what they earn. Giving customers more time to use rewards and making it easier to redeem them would address two of their clearest pain points.

Most-Installed QSR Apps



Most-Common Loyalty App Problems

30% App crashes, glitches, or slow loading

28% Points expired before they could be used

22% Points or purchases didn't register

21% Offers were not relevant

20% Rewards wouldn't apply at checkout

18% Trouble logging in at a kiosk

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The Last Bite

Customers think of a QSR visit as a single experience, even though it depends on multiple technologies working in sync.

If any component breaks down, from ordering to payment or rewards, it can sour the visit.

Because most customer-facing devices are unsupervised, downtime can go unnoticed until it begins to impact orders. Technical support teams often lack a single, uninterrupted view across all devices and the ability to resolve issues remotely.

Canopy provides that centralized view across locations and enables teams to address problems remotely. And by making restaurant technology intelligible to AI, Canopy AI agents can continuously monitor device health and handle routine triage or remediation, saving technicians for when a problem requires human attention.

With Canopy, restaurant technology runs itself. Learn more at goCanopy.com.

Canopy Helps QSR Service Teams...

See What's Happening

Give support teams visibility into system device health across locations.

Find Recurring Problems

Identify issues that repeat across locations, device types, and vendors.

Act Remotely

Resolve common device problems without waiting for someone on-site.

Put AI Agents to Work

Use them for ongoing monitoring and routine device actions while support teams retain control when human attention is needed.

Learn more ↗

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