



Insight by Zonal, Powered by CGA by NIQ

Fixing people's hospitality bugbears

Consumers' top frustrations and annoyances in hospitality and how to fix them: results from an exclusive GO Technology survey

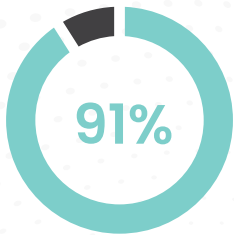
Zonal



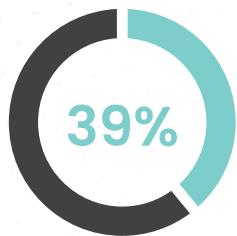
GO Technology Report, May 2024



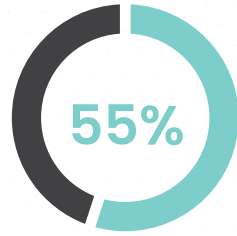
Bugbears in hospitality: Key numbers



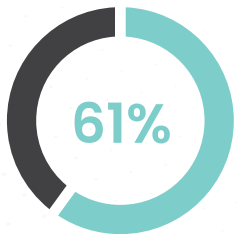
Of consumers find **long waits for food and drink and hot food served cold annoying**—making them hospitality's two biggest bugbears



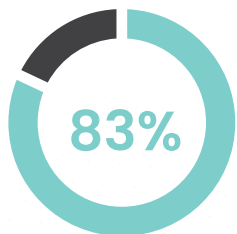
Of those who find something annoying during a visit would **tell their friends and family about it**



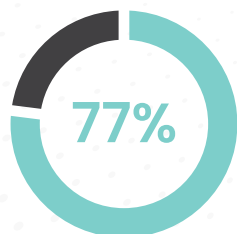
Think a **broken promise on a special deal or loyalty discount** is very frustrating



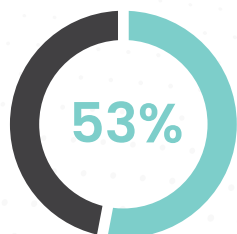
Of those who encounter problems during a visit say they would **never visit again or go less often**



Think **out-of-date or missing menus online** are very or somewhat frustrating



Say it's very or somewhat frustrating to **be unable to cancel or amend a booking online**



Of those who encounter an annoyance would **complain about it at the time**



Hospitality's biggest bugbears

As the last [GO Technology](#) report showed, restaurants, pubs and bars generally provide excellent service and memorable experiences. But when guests get frustrated, sales, loyalty and brand reputation can all be quickly lost. Our latest GO Technology research reveals the five biggest points of friction to watch for.

1. A long wait

Many of consumers' biggest bugbears relate to speed of service, and more than nine in ten (91%) say they find it either very or somewhat annoying to wait a long time for food or drinks. These frustrations are nothing new: back in 2014, 'The Need for Speed' report from Zonal and CGA found nearly half (47%) ranked waiting a long time for food as their number one frustration when eating out. But with many people becoming even more time-poor in the ten years since then, this annoyance has intensified.

2. Cold food

An equally major bugbear during visits also relates to speed and poor operational processes: hot food served cold, which is annoying for 91% of guests. This is also the issue that is most likely to feature in consumers' top three annoyances.

3. Broken promises on a deal

Consumers value special offers and loyalty discounts, especially when their spending is under pressure. But if brands promise guests a good deal, they need to keep it. Nearly nine in ten people say they are very (55%) or somewhat (33%) annoyed by a venue's failure to honour a deal or loyalty reward that it has offered.

4. Food served at different times

This is a source of annoyance for 87% of guests, and it's a particularly frustrating issue for groups of family or friends.

5. Waiting for their table to become available

Advance bookings have increased in recent years, because consumers want to plan their visits with certainty. But as with offers, the promise of a table needs to be kept. The large majority (86%) of people say having to wait to be seated, when they have already booked, is somewhat or very annoying.

Five more points of friction

Beyond slow service and broken promises, there are many aspects of operations that can frustrate guests. They include several aspects of the ordering stage, like items being out of stock (an annoyance for 85%), menus being difficult to use (82%) and staff not having enough knowledge (80%). Two more bugbears come during payment: having to wait to receive and settle the bill (77%) and not being able to split the bill (64%).



Pre-visit frustrations

Guests' irritations can begin even before they've walked through the doors of a restaurant, pub or bar. And pre-visit problems can be even more damaging than mid-visit ones, as they can lead to missed bookings or broken loyalty—usually before a venue has found about an issue or had a chance to solve it. Here are guests' top three issues during their planning stages.

1. Poor information

Consumers expect to have information about eating and drinking out at their fingertips, and they get frustrated if they can't find it. More than four in five say out-of-date or missing menus online are very (46%) or somewhat (37%) frustrating. It gets their engagement with a brand off to a very bad start.

2. Online booking problems

Guests also expect to be able to reserve tables quickly and easily. Three in five (63%) say the inability to book online is frustrating, and even more (77%) say the same about being unable to cancel or amend a booking online. It's particularly disappointing for people who are aware that technology should be able to make tasks simple—especially digital-savvy younger adults who over-index for these frustrations. Making it hard to amend or cancel bookings can also increase the likelihood of no-shows (see next page).

3. Deposits

Deposits have long been a bone of contention in hospitality. For venues, they can be a useful solution to no-shows—a problem that GO Technology research has shown to cost the sector £17.59bn a year. But despite 11% of consumers admitting they have failed to turn up for a booking recently, many guests remain resistant to deposits, and three quarters (74%) say they are frustrated when asked to pay one when booking. In the months after COVID lockdowns, people were more open to the idea of deposits—but now that visits have returned to normal, understanding of them appears to have diminished.



11%

of consumers admitted they have failed to turn up for a booking recently.

Mind the age gap

Bugbears vary significantly from person to person, and it pays to understand the top frustrations and fixes for different groups.



Older people tend to be more irritated by problems relating to speed and service. Those in the 65+ bracket are **nine** and **15** percentage points more likely than average to be very annoyed by long waits for food and drink to arrive and hot food being served cold respectively, and they heavily over-index for annoyance at broken promises like the failure to honour deals or waiting for a table they've booked. This group is also **16** percentage points more likely to complain about a problem when it occurs. Our [GO Technology research](#) has shown previously how older guests are particularly loyal to venues, so solving their issues is a top priority.



16% of people aged 65+ are more likely to complain about a problem when it occurs.



10% of people are more likely to get annoyed at not being able to split a bill.

Younger people's issues tend to be in areas where technology should make life easier. Those aged 18 to 24 are **five** percentage points more likely than average to be frustrated by not being able to amend bookings online, and **ten** more likely to get annoyed at not being able to split a bill.



There are some notable divides between genders too. For example, women are **nine** percentage points more likely than men to be frustrated at not being able to make or amend bookings online—partly because they are also more likely to be leading the planning of meals or drinks out as previously reported.



9% Women are **nine** percentage points more likely to be frustrated at not being able to make or amend bookings online.



Measuring the damage and fixing the frustrations

Our GO Technology research reveals how guests' frustrations can lead to significant damage. Four in five (82%) consumers say they would take action if they were frustrated by something before a visit, and even more (96%) would act if they were annoyed while actually eating or drinking out.

In the short-term, this can lead to missed sales opportunities. Three in five (61%) of those who are frustrated by problems at the research or booking stage say they would find somewhere else to go or think twice about visiting the venue in the future. Of those who encounter problems during a visit, the same proportion (61%) say they would never visit the venue again or go less frequently.

Damage to a brand's reputation can be even greater in the longer term. Two in five (39%) of those who encounter an annoyance during a visit say they would tell their friends and family about it, and adverse word of mouth soon spreads. With a fifth (18%) of guests likely to leave a poor review online, negative impressions also become visible on influential platforms like TripAdvisor.

The cost of complaints is particularly high among younger guests who are just starting to spend money in restaurants, pubs and bars. Those aged 18 to 24 are seven percentage points more likely than average to visit a venue less often if they are annoyed by something, and three percentage points more likely to post about a pre-visit irritation on a venue's social media feed.

More positively, complaints give venues the chance to resolve problems and turn potentially disappointed guests into brand advocates. Half (53%) of those who encounter an annoyance say they would complain directly about it at the time, which provides an opportunity to head off any damage to revisits and reputation. Perhaps more problematic are the guests who don't complain when they are annoyed—especially younger age groups like 18 to 24 year-olds, who are only half as likely to lodge a complaint (25%).



FOUR IN FIVE

(82%) of consumers say they would take action if they were frustrated by something before a visit



Three in five of those who are frustrated by problems at the research or booking stage say they would find somewhere else to go or think twice about visiting the venue in the future.



53%

of those who encounter an annoyance say they would complain directly about it at the time, which provides an opportunity to head off any damage to revisits and reputation.





The view from CGA

“The large majority of consumers’ visits to restaurants, pubs and bars are happy and hassle-free. But things inevitably go wrong sometimes, and this GO Technology research shows the damage that poor experiences can soon do to venues’ sales and reputation. From researching a visit to paying the bill, understanding where and how frustrations emerge along the guest journey is the first step towards fixing them, and by getting on the front foot operators will effectively remedy annoyances. No operator is able to get everything right all of the time, but the best ones turn problems into solutions and negatives into positives.”

Karl Chessell, business unit director – hospitality operators and food, EMEA, CGA by NIQ



The view from Zonal

“We know that for the most part, people’s hospitality experiences are generally positive. However, consumers are becoming more expectant of the venues they visit and demand an even higher level of service, so it’s vital that operators deliver on this. Simple hiccups in service, such as hot food arriving cold or guests not being able to amend a booking top the list consumer frustrations, when it comes to eating out. Venues that don’t tackle these issues head on, run the risk of losing customers and ultimately, damaging their bottom line.

“Technology can act as a helping hand in supporting operators meet the demands of consumers. Online booking systems and digital kitchen management tools, can help to automate services that would otherwise be time consuming or laborious for staff, allowing them to focus on the most important thing – delivering an excellent customer experience.”

Tim Chapman, Chief Commercial Officer, Zonal



About the report

This report is based on figures from Zonal and CGA’s exclusive GO Technology survey of 5,000 nationally representative British consumers in February 2024.

For more information about the research, please contact info@zonal.co.uk