



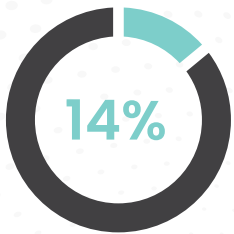
Insight by Zonal, Powered by CGA by NIQ

# The truth behind no-shows

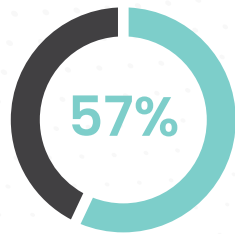
The scale of the problem and steps to  
fix it: results from an exclusive GO  
Technology survey



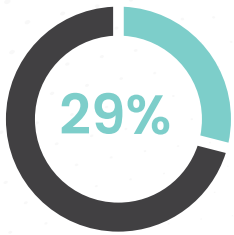
# No-shows in hospitality: Key numbers



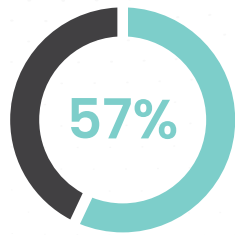
Have no-showed, **failing to turn up for a booking and not telling the venue**



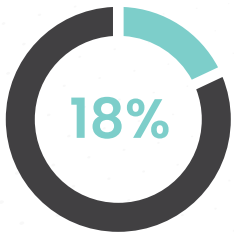
Of no-shows are **severely or moderately affected by the cost of living crisis**



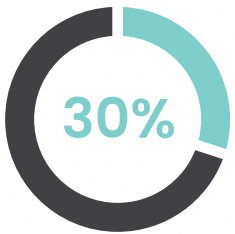
Of those who didn't turn up say it was because they decided it would be **too expensive**



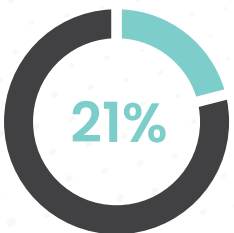
Of consumers have made a **booking at a hospitality venue in the last 6 months**



Have **cancelled a reservation in advance**



Of no-shows would be more **likely to cancel if the process was simpler**



Say the **risk of losing a deposit** would make them more likely to honour a booking



**Didn't honour a reservation** because they booked more than one venue



# Bookings and no-shows: Five top takeaways

Our new GO Technology survey reveals the latest trends in consumers' engagement with bookings at Britain's restaurants, pubs and bars. Here are the five most revealing insights.

## 1. More than half of consumers book

Well over half (**57%**) of consumers say they have made at least one advance booking at a pub, bar or restaurant over the last 6 months. This number has remained steady throughout 2024, but it's 3 percentage points down from a GO Technology survey in mid-2021, when bookings had been boosted by COVID safety concerns.

## 2. Most people turn up or cancel...

More than two thirds (**68%**) of consumers who make bookings say they turn up for all of them. Another 18% can't keep their reservation but cancel in advance—which with sufficient notice gives a venue the chance to replace the booking.

## 3 ... But one in seven hasn't showed up

While most consumers are conscientious about reservations, roughly one in seven (**14%**) admits to failing to turn up without telling the venue. This is a return to the proportion measured by GO Technology in mid-2021—proof that this is a significant and very persistent problem.

## 4. Costs are impacting no-shows

The stubbornly high level of no-shows may partly reflect the cost of living crisis. Well over half (**56%**) of those who haven't honoured a booking say they are severely or moderately affected by the crisis—10 percentage points more than the **46%** of those who have kept all bookings. These guests may be booking tables before discovering they don't have the money to go out after all. Echoing this, **29%** of those who didn't turn up say it was because they decided it would be too expensive (see page 4).

## 5. Hospitality compares well to other sectors

While no-shows are exasperating, hospitality does at least compare favourably with other sectors. The **14%** of consumers who don't turn up in restaurants, pubs and bars is far lower than for occasions like exercise classes, haircuts and cabs (see box). Of course, no-shows have a greater impact in hospitality because of the finely balanced margins, perishable stock purchasing, and finite capacities that are involved, but the figures suggest that meals and drinks out have an above-average value in people's lives.

## Who's booking... and who's not

People who book tables in hospitality tend to be regular visitors and high spenders. Nearly half (**46%**) of them eat out at least once a week—more than the **33%** of all consumers. They spend an average of £122 per month on out-of-home eating and drinking, which is £38 above the average. Parents over-index too—probably because they like to plan meals out with children. Bookers also tend to be more adventurous diners and drinkers, and are likely to be seeking new venues to visit when eating and drinking out.

Nevertheless, **43%** of consumers haven't booked at all in the last year. Two thirds (**66%**) of these say they haven't needed to, and another **28%** prefer to stay spontaneous, leaving only small numbers who have backed out of booking because they didn't want to pay a deposit (**7%**) or found the process frustrating (**6%**). Some non-bookers could be encouraged to make reservations if they got better prices or freebies—but nearly half (**47%**) say nothing would persuade them to do so.



## No-shows: How hospitality compares

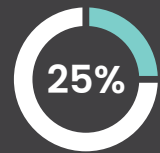
Have you no-showed in any of these sectors in the last year?  
(Selected sectors)



**1.**  
Gym or  
exercise classes



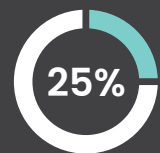
**6.**  
Car servicing /  
MOTs



**2.=**  
Hairdresser /  
barber



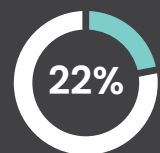
**7.**  
Hospitality



**2.=**  
Driving  
lessons



**2.=**  
Ride service  
(eg taxi, Uber)



**5.**  
Adult education /  
hobby classes



# Why guests don't show

Why don't people turn up for bookings? GO Technology research shows that while around a third of no-shows aren't necessarily the fault of the guest, the majority can't blame anyone but themselves.

Well over a quarter (29%) of those who didn't follow through on a booking say it was because they decided it would be too expensive, while nearly as many (27%) admit it was because they had a change of plans. The number who simply forgot (17%) is disappointingly high, and perhaps most egregious are the one in ten (10%) who kept their options open by booking a few venues, only to let all but one of them down.

Some reasons are more forgivable. A fifth (21%) didn't turn up because one of their group fell ill, and another 14% because someone else cancelled. But whatever the reason, the end results for operators are the same: lost sales, tables that could have been sold to others, wasted stock and labour, and exasperation.



## Why didn't you follow through with a booking?

1. I decided it would be too expensive (29%)
2. I had a change of plans (27%)
3. One of the group fell ill (21%)
4. I forgot about it (17%)
5. Someone else in the group cancelled (14%)
6. I booked a few venues (10%)



As with those booking tables (see page 3), no-show guests are likely to be regular and high-spending guests. Three in five (62%) eat and drink out at least once a week, and their average monthly spend is 10% higher than those who have kept or cancelled all their bookings. They are young too, with nearly two thirds (64%) aged under 34. But perhaps the most striking demographic is their density in urban areas. Two thirds (65%) of them live in city or town centres, compared to only 39% of those who never no-show. Only 12% live in rural areas.



**3 in 5**

(62%) eat and drink out at least once a week



Two thirds of guests who no-show live in city or town centres

## Making it personal

Could more personal service make people less likely to no-show? GO Technology research stresses the value of face-to-face interaction, and 45% of consumers think they receive a more personal welcome when they are recognised in venues they visit. Remembering guests' food and drink orders (23%) or knowing where they like to sit (17%) help too.

Venues are getting better and better at delivering personal touches, with 66% of consumers now saying they are usually recognised by staff. Among higher frequency visitors in particular, putting systems in place to remember past guests and their preferences can pay off in greater sales and loyalty.



# Five ways to fix no-shows

How can venues bring down the rate of no-shows? GO Technology flags five of the top actions to take.

## 1. Simplify the cancellation process

Making it quick and easy for people to cancel bookings is the top way to cut no-shows, as three in ten (30%) would be less likely to miss a booking if there was a simpler process. Previous GO Technology research has shown digital cancellations are now the preferred methods of cancelling—especially among people who are embarrassed about withdrawing. However, there's still demand for phone cancellations, especially among older demographics.

## 2. Offer incentives

Venues may well balk at the idea that they need to pay incentives to avoid an issue that is not of their making. However, with 28% of consumers indicating that these would make them more likely to fulfil a booking, operators might consider small rewards when guests arrive at their tables.

## 3. Provide reminders

Reservation reminders can make more than a quarter (25%) of consumers less likely to no-show. The timing and mode of these reminders are crucial, and previous research suggests reminders sent on the day of the booking, or a day or two ahead, are most effective.

## 4. Deposits

Deposits and no-show fees are tricky issues in hospitality. A fifth (21%) of those who don't show up for a booking say they would be more likely to fulfil the reservation if they would otherwise lose a deposit. However, some—especially younger adults—don't like the idea of being penalised for booking. All operators need to weigh up the benefit of deposits against the risk of losing bookings.

## 5. Loyalty to venues and hospitality

Consumers who feel connections to restaurants, pubs and bars are more likely to turn up. 17% say they are less likely to no-show if they were more loyal to a venue, and the same proportion would do so if they saw the impacts of lost bookings on hospitality. This demonstrates the importance of cross-industry awareness campaigns like Zonal's #ShowUpForHospitality, which has estimated that missed bookings cost the sector around £18bn a year.





## The view from CGA

“Our research shows no-shows remain a hugely frustrating issue for restaurants, pubs and bars. Bookings are a double-edged sword for hospitality, helping venues to plan better and fill tables but bringing the risk of substantial missed sales, at a time when margins and growth are under pressure.

“Fixing the problem is easier said than done but there are steps that all venues can take to mitigate losses, and technology has a major role to play in making the bookings process more effective for operators and guests alike. As we approach the crucial Christmas period, reducing no-shows is going to be a top priority for everyone in the sector.”

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



## The view from Zonal

“No-shows are a £17.59bn problem for the hospitality sector and the issue does not seem to be going away – in fact, this research suggests it has been exacerbated recently by the cost-of-living crisis.

“The report also reveals that those most likely to no-show are high-spenders and frequent visitors, which makes them very valuable customers to the sector. It is imperative that we get to grips with the problem, putting in measures to help customers keep in touch and working together to educate consumers about the damage not showing up can do to their much-loved local pubs, restaurants and bars”

*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 October 2024

For more information about the research, please contact [info@zonal.co.uk](mailto:info@zonal.co.uk)