

Say Goodbye to Buzzers and Hello to SMS Restaurant Communications



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It's not just quick-service restaurants and casual dining franchises that are engaging guests via mobile. Many smaller establishments and even high-end restaurants are now texting with guests — booking reservations, providing updates on wait times, and ensuring their patrons have an experience that is both convenient and satisfying.



SMS restaurant communications make it easy for establishments to make their guests' experience more seamless and enjoyable, from enabling text reservations to sending out personalized offers.

But what are the best ways to engage with guests via SMS text message alerts? Spoiler alert: SMS messages have many uses. Here are just a few:

Why Take SMS Restaurant Reservations?

Restaurant technology trends have been going mobile for years, and for good reason. People looking to go out to eat are often already out and about. Even when they're at home or work, they probably have their smartphones at hand.

Seventy-two percent of online searches related to food and beverage happen via mobile, according to Hitwise. That's more than any other industry or category, and it's 14 percent higher than overall mobile search volume, which accounts for about 58 percent of all internet searches.

So it's no wonder that restaurants are embracing mobile. They're optimizing their businesses for local search and rolling out mobile apps that enable guests to place takeout orders, access coupons, and pay for meals using their phones.

Now many innovative restaurateurs are going the extra mile to make the reservation process even easier — not by offering another DIY tool, but by simply offering smartphone users a more convenient way to communicate with restaurant staff.

Here are the benefits of SMS restaurant reservations:

- **More convenient for guests:** Sometimes it's just easier to text than to call — whether someone is in a crowded room, engaged in a conversation, in an area with poor cell service, or simply one of those people who forgets that phones can be used for talking, not just typing. Plus, texters never get put on hold or have their calls dropped.
- **Easier for staff:** Restaurants tend to be busy, noisy places, especially during peak hours. This can make it hard for staff to get to the phone and to hear callers, especially those with shoddy cell service. With SMS reservations, staff doesn't have to run back and forth to the phone, put people on hold, make guests repeat themselves, or ask how to spell anyone's last name.
- **Less prone to errors:** Even though the customer is always right, some of them have a bad memory. Disputes about reservation times put restaurant managers in the uncomfortable position of arguing with guests or making room for them and extending other patrons' wait times. With SMS reservations, everything is in writing, so if someone says they have a reservation but it's not on the books, the restaurant can either apologize for the clerical mistake or (politely) point out the guest's error.
- **No need for buzzers:** It's fun to dine out with family and friends, but it can be inconvenient. Even with reservations, there's usually a wait, since table turnover can be unpredictable. Many restaurants require everyone in the party to arrive before anyone gets seated. Then someone has to hold the buzzer, which can be startling at best and a grimy, germ-covered gadget that could put off anyone's appetite at worst. But with automated SMS text alerts, restaurants can communicate with patrons in real time — sending confirmation requests in advance, providing updates on wait time, and letting them know when the table is almost ready. Rather than waiting in a crowded lobby with a buzzer, guests can find a bar, coffee shop, or retail store close by to entertain themselves while they wait.

With that kind of convenient and personalized communication, the guest experience is off to a great start before patrons even walk into the restaurant. Then they're ready to eat, drink, and be merry — not to mention tip well.

SMS restaurant technology won't improve the quality of the food or the service, but it can put guests in a better mood before the food arrives.

Extending the Conversation Beyond Reservations

Reservations are just one way restaurants can leverage SMS alerts to engage with guests. Once they have patrons' contact information (and permission), they can keep the conversation going with personalized information and offers, especially when SMS technology used in restaurants is integrated into a robust marketing automation platform. Then restaurants can:

- **Send personalized coupons and offers:** Everyone loves a good mobile coupon, even those who can afford full price. In a RetailMeNot survey of more than 1,000 consumers, high earners (those with a household income exceeding \$150,000) were 26 percent more likely to have used an online or mobile coupon at a restaurant than those earning less than \$25,000.
- **Promote events and specials:** Automated SMS alerts are a great way to lure guests in with appetizing lunch menus and hard-to-pass-up happy hour specials. Of course, not all restaurant patrons want daily texts, but marketing automation makes it easy for them to opt in or out of certain types of messages.
- **Ask for feedback:** Guest surveys, new menu polls, and other requests for feedback can make guests feel valued and heard, and this makes them more likely to want to hear from the restaurant.
- **Turn around slow days:** Maybe it's a rainy day or a snowy week, or maybe there's a food truck parked down the street. Whatever the case, there's no reason to let the fish of the day go bad. Restaurants can use SMS alerts to drive traffic with last-minute deals, double loyalty points, and other special offers. Bonus points if their marketing automation platforms enable location-based marketing and can target patrons who are already in the neighborhood — and thus most likely to pop in.

At the end of the day, restaurant guests are looking for an easy way to secure a good meal. SMS restaurant technology won't improve the quality of the food or the service, but it can put guests in a better mood before the food arrives. That goes a long way toward delivering a great guest experience — and perhaps getting a great online review.

Contact Vonage Retail to learn more about SMS alerts and other marketing automation solutions for restaurants.