

State of Calls 2026 Report

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State of Calls Report 2026

Chapter 1

The Revenue Leak Crisis

How Unanswered Calls Are Draining Restaurant Profits





It's 10:47 on a Tuesday night, and Sarah is craving pizza. She pulls up her favorite local shop's phone number and taps the call button. Ring. Ring. Ring. By the fourth ring, she's already opening DoorDash. By the seventh, she's placed an order with a competitor. **The local shop's phone continues ringing into the void, unaware that they just lost a \$45 order and possibly a loyal customer.**

The local shop's phone continues ringing into the void, unaware that they just lost a **\$45 order and possibly a loyal customer.**

This scenario plays out thousands of times every day across the restaurant industry. But unlike a failed credit card transaction or a bounced check, most restaurant owners have no idea how much revenue is slipping through their fingers with every unanswered ring.

The Scale of the Problem

Our analysis of 12,091 restaurant phone calls reveals missed revenue hiding in plain sight. Across the industry, more than one in 10 calls go unanswered. However, that industry average masks dramatic variation by restaurant type, and, for some, the problem is substantial.

40.1%
of QSR calls go unanswered.
That's 2 out of every 5 customers.

Restaurant Type	Answer Rate	Missed Rate
Quick Service (QSR)	59.9%	40.1%
Fast Casual	75.3%	24.8%
Full Service (FSR)	91.0%	9.0%
Pizza	93.1%	6.9%

The quick service restaurant (QSR) segment faces the steepest challenge, missing 40% of inbound calls. Fast casual eateries perform significantly better at 25% missed calls, showing that limited-service models can achieve better phone coverage with the right systems. Full-service restaurants and pizza establishments perform markedly better, but even their ~7-9% miss rates translate to thousands of lost opportunities across a chain or franchise system. And, as we'll see in subsequent chapters, rush hours and time zones affect answer rates.



The QSR Paradox

Quick-service restaurants built their business model on speed and convenience, yet **they're missing four in 10 phone calls**. The very segment that should excel at high-volume, quick transactions is hemorrhaging revenue through their most basic customer touchpoint.

"Should restaurants aim for 100% answer rates?
No. And if you try to get there manually, you end
up paying a lot to solve a pretty small problem."

Michael Beck, CEO, Inc Tank (www.inctankgtm.com)

Full-service restaurants, don't celebrate just yet. You're potentially leaving more than **\$24,000** in lost revenue on the table. A nine percent miss rate looks trivial next to QSR's **40%**, but FSR calls represent a fundamentally different value.

A typical FSR location handling **25 calls per day** (vs QSR's 50) with a **9% miss rate** loses **821 calls annually**. At a conservative **\$60 average ticket** (reservations, takeout orders, catering inquiries), that's **\$24,630** in lost revenue.

For upscale concepts where average tickets exceed **\$100**, the leak reaches **\$41,050**, which is more than half the QSR's loss despite answering **91% of calls**. The math changes when every call could be a party of six celebrating an anniversary or a corporate catering order for 50 people. FSR operators can't hide behind "we answer most calls" because the calls they miss are often their most valuable.

Fast casual restaurants occupy an interesting middle ground. With a **24.75% miss rate**, they answer noticeably more calls than traditional QSRs (**59.9 vs 75.3% answer rate**) but lag behind full-service and pizza concepts. At **30 calls per day** with a **25% miss rate**, a fast casual location loses **2,738 calls annually**. With an average ticket of **\$18**, that's **\$49,284** in annual revenue leakage, nearly as much as QSR despite having half the call volume.

Pizza franchises and regional chains face a unique challenge: their business model depends heavily on phone orders, yet even best-in-segment performance



leaves money on the table. At a **6.9% miss rate**, which is better than the industry average, a typical pizza shop with **40 calls per day** can lose **\$22,120 annually**.

Fast casual's **24.75% miss rate** shows this isn't inevitable because better systems and processes can dramatically improve phone performance even in high-volume, limited-service environments. For a **100-location franchisee**, that scales to **\$2.2 million**. For a **500-location regional chain**, it's **\$11 million** walking out the door every year.

This is money that could be used for enterprise software, national advertising, and new equipment across the system. The pizza segment's efficiency paradox is that they've optimized operations to handle high phone volume, but even their impressive **93% answer rate** represents millions in lost opportunity at scale.

\$11M

For a 500-location regional chain, it's \$11 million walking out the door every year, from missed calls alone.



Hidden Call Out: The Coffee Shop

Stat:

66.3%

A well-known, multi-location coffee shop misses nearly seven out of 10 calls.



Insight:

Coffee shops, built on the promise of quick service, have some of the worst performance. The variance within the QSR segment is **18.6 percentage points**, proving this is an execution problem, not one that's industry-wide. Some QSRs answer **72% of calls**, while others answer **less than 30%**. Brand matters more than segment.

Why This Matters:

This contradicts the narrative that "**QSR is just hard.**" It shows that operational excellence is achievable even in high-volume, low-margin environments. The gap between best and worst QSR performers is wider than that of QSR and FSR averages.

Breaking Down the Numbers

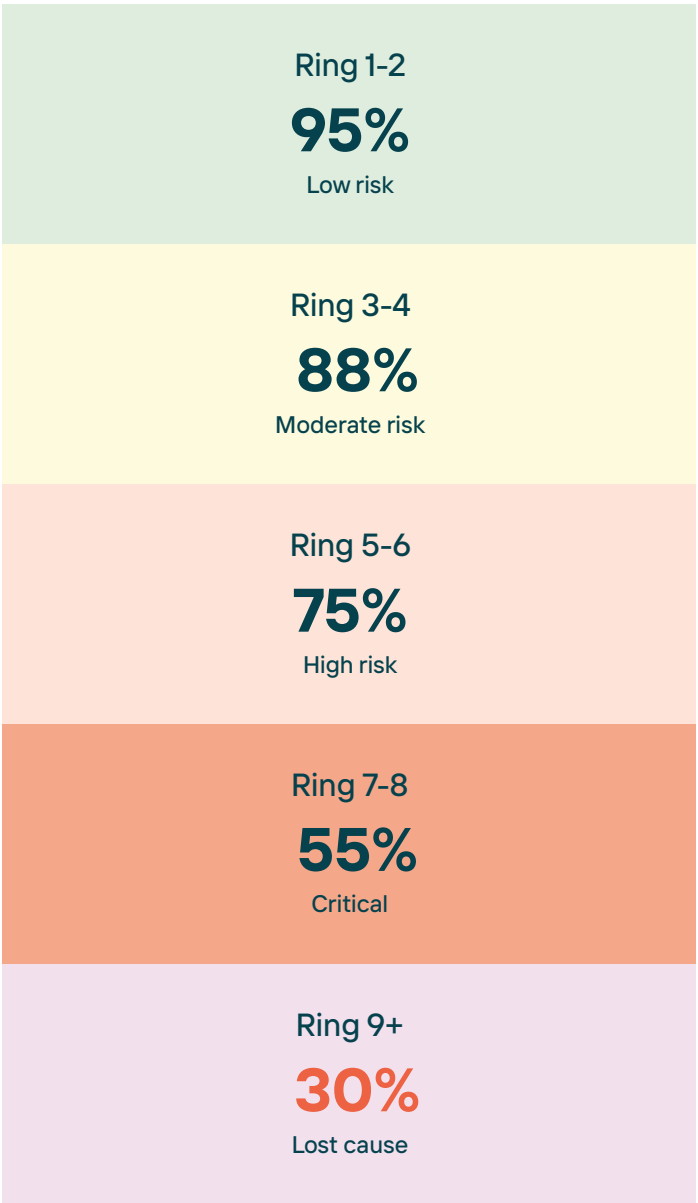
To understand the true cost of this crisis, we need to follow what happens when a customer picks up the phone. Let's first look at all calls across every type of restaurant.

Call Outcome	% of Calls	Avg Rings	Result
Answered	89%	1.8	Revenue captured
Unanswered	11%	5.5	Revenue lost

For the **11% of calls** that never get answered, the average customer listens to 5.46 rings before giving up. At roughly three seconds per ring, that's 16 seconds of mounting frustration before they make a decision that could cost your business hundreds or thousands of dollars over time.

The 5-Ring Threshold: When Patience Expires

Our data reveals a crucial inflection point at five rings. This is the moment when customer patience begins to crack, and each additional ring exponentially increases the likelihood they'll abandon the call.



This means every second counts. The difference between picking up on ring three versus six is the difference between capturing revenue and losing a customer to a competitor.

"If you have a high volume of calls, wouldn't it be great if every call was answered quickly, without anyone sitting on hold and having their questions answered in a timely manner? Yes. That's what AI does."

David Rev Ciancio, CMO, Salad House | Handcraft Burgers & Brew www.restaurantsgrow.tv



An In-Depth Look: The Instant Abandonment Phenomenon

Stat:

35.7%

of customers abandon in 0–2 rings

Why this Matters:

The instant abandoners represent a different customer psychology. They're comparison shopping in real-time, so every ring is a competitive disadvantage. Conversely, the **10+ ring** persisters are likely regular customers. They may be willing to forgive the first unanswered call but will give up if their calls are regularly neglected.

Insight:

More than one-third of customers who abandon calls do so almost immediately. This suggests they're calling while browsing alternatives and will switch to a competitor at the slightest friction. Meanwhile, **22% persist through 10+ rings**. These are your most loyal customers, and you're failing them the worst.

22%

wait 10+ rings

>1/3

abandon instantly



Calculating the Revenue Leak

Abstract percentages become concrete when translated into dollars. Let’s examine a typical QSR location to understand the annual cost of missed calls with an average lower-ticket value.

Typical QSR Location-Annual Calculation	Value
Incoming calls per day	50
Annual call volume	18,250
Calls missed @ 40% rate	7,300
Conversion rate (calls to orders)	70%
Lost orders per year	5,110
Average ticket size	\$14.25
Annual Revenue Leak	\$72,818

This calculation assumes conservative industry averages. Many locations experience higher call volumes during peak seasons, have higher average ticket sizes, or see better conversion rates from phone orders. For these restaurants, the annual revenue leak could easily exceed \$100,000 per location.

Fast Casual Revenue Impact

Typical Fast Casual Location-Annual Calculation	Value
Incoming calls per day	30
Annual call volume	10,950
Calls missed @ 25% rate	2,738
Conversion rate (calls to orders)	70%
Lost orders per year	1,917
Average ticket size	\$18.00
Annual Revenue Leak	\$34,506



An In-Depth Look: Days of the Week Matter

Stat:

6.2

rings

MON

3.9

rings

SUN

Customers persist 6.2 rings on Monday vs. 3.9 rings on Sunday

Insight:

Customers give up fastest on **Sundays (3.9 rings)** and slowest on Mondays (6.2 rings), suggesting Monday callers are more motivated and loyal but encounter worse staffing. Even more surprisingly, people give up faster in **evening and night calls (5.38 rings)** versus morning and day (**5.87 rings**). They seem to have less patience when hungry.

Why This Matters:

This reveals **temporal psychology patterns** that should inform staffing. Monday's patient customers are likely planning the week ahead or dealing with business needs, meaning they're **higher-value interactions**. Evening callers are impulsive and hungry and want instant gratification. **Different times require different strategies.**

The Franchise System Multiplier

For franchises and multi-unit operators, these per-location losses compound dramatically. A QSR franchise with 50 locations isn't losing \$73,000. It's losing \$3.65 million annually. A 500-location system? That's \$36.5 million in missed revenue.

\$36M
million in missed revenue.

System Size	Locations	Annual Revenue Leak
Small Franchise	10	\$728,180
Regional Chain	50	\$3.65 Million
Mid-Size Operator	100	\$7.3 Million
Major Chain	500	\$36.5 Million

Calculate your potential missed revenue with our custom Revenue Calculator.



"If 4,000 people walked up to your store and found the door locked, you'd fire the manager on the spot. That is exactly what \$73k in missed calls represents. Stop viewing the phone as a communication tool and start viewing it as a transaction portal. If it's not being answered, your store is effectively closed to that revenue."

Paulos Berhane, Senior Director of Growth, [Reality Based Group](#)

The Hidden Costs Beyond Lost Sales

Revenue leakage is the obvious cost, but unanswered calls create ripple effects that compound the damage:



01 Customer Acquisition Waste

Marketing dollars spent acquiring customers through **ads, SEO, and local campaigns** are wasted when those customers can't connect by phone. If you're spending \$50 to acquire a customer who can't reach you, you've simply **transferred that \$50 to your competitor**.



02 Lifetime Value Erosion

A customer who can't reach you once might forgive it. **A customer who can't reach you twice will remember it.** Each unanswered call jeopardizes the entire lifetime value of that customer relationship.



03 Brand Reputation Damage

In the age of online reviews, **operational failures become public**. "Tried to call three times, no answer" is a common refrain in one-star reviews. The reputational cost of these experiences extends **far beyond the individual caller**.



04 Competitive Disadvantage

In tight markets, restaurant success often comes down to **execution at the margins**. When competitors answer their phones, and you don't, you're voluntarily ceding ground in a **zero-sum game targeting customer loyalty**.



The Loyalty Tax

Ironically, the restaurants most hurt by missed calls are often those with the most loyal customer bases. Regular customers **who know your number by heart** and call directly are **more profitable** than third-party app users. **Missing their calls means losing your most valuable customers** to the very aggregators you're trying to avoid.

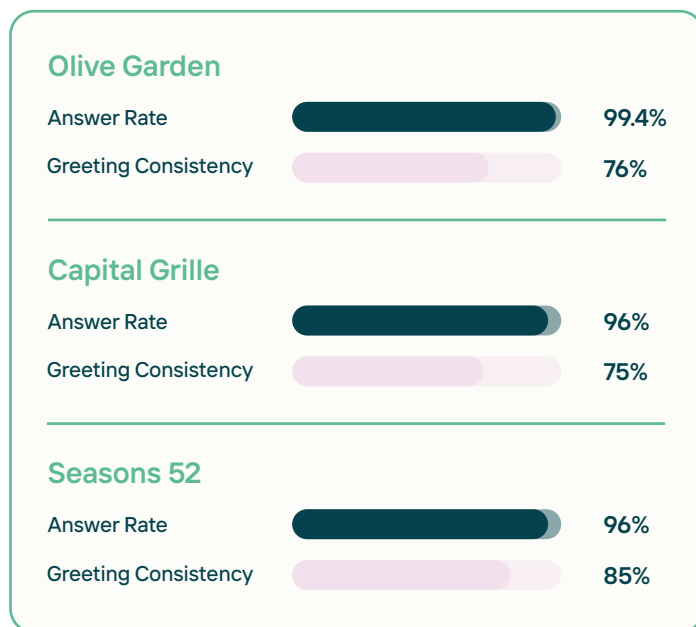




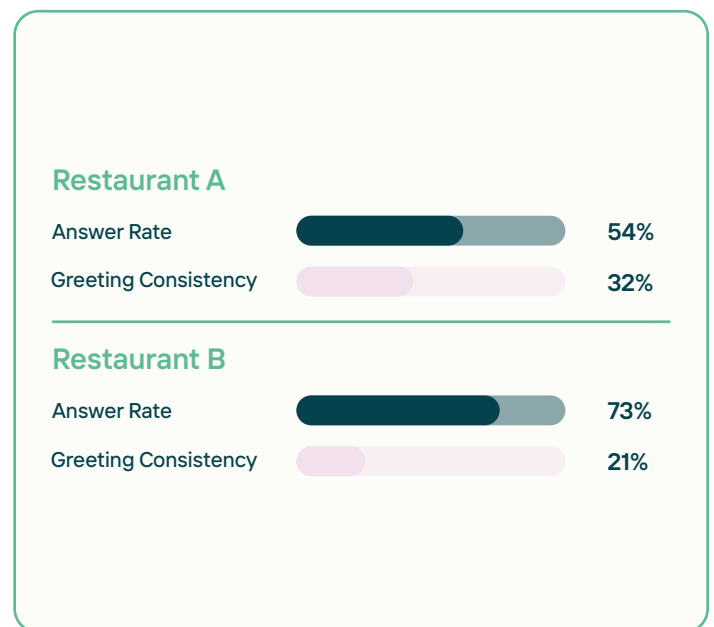
The overall industry sees a .24-point sentiment boost from proper phone greetings. FSR matches this exactly, which might seem unremarkable until you consider that this restaurant category has the highest baseline greeting rate (**77%**) and sentiment expectations.

When an FSR customer calls and doesn't receive a proper greeting, they're questioning whether this restaurant deserves their celebration dinner reservation or corporate event booking. The same greeting lapse that might be forgiven at a QSR becomes a brand violation at an upscale steakhouse.

FSR brand leaders understand this:



Compare to bottom performers:



The correlation is clear: FSR brands that compete on hospitality treat phone greetings as sacred. Those competing on price or convenience often neglect this basic courtesy, and their sentiment scores reflect it.

Why This Problem Persists (and Why It's Getting Worse)

If missed calls represent such a massive revenue leak, why aren't restaurants fixing it? The answer lies in a perfect storm of industry challenges:

Challenge	Impact on Phone Coverage
Labor Shortage	Restaurants can't hire enough staff to cover all shifts, leaving phones as a "when we have time" priority.
Competing Priorities	During rush periods, in-person customers take precedence over ringing phones.
Lack of Visibility	Most restaurants don't track phone metrics, so they don't realize they have a problem.
Training Gaps	High turnover means new employees often lack phone training or scripts.
Technology Friction	Legacy POS systems and phone infrastructure make improvements difficult and expensive.

Free Phone Audit

Historically, tracking phone metrics hasn't been available without secret shoppers and expensive custom solutions. Revmo offers a free phone audit, so you have a realistic understanding of your phone metrics along with tangible takeaways for improvement.

Click here for a free phone audit. [→](#)





These challenges feed each other. Understaffing makes phone coverage harder, which frustrates customers, then damages revenue, and constrains hiring budgets. The cycle continues, and the revenue leaks grow.

Counterintuitively, brands with higher call volumes have lower miss rates than low-volume counterparts (i.e., pizza restaurants). The data suggests busier restaurants are forced to develop better systems, which improves performance.

The Digital Ordering Paradox

Many restaurants respond to phone coverage challenges by pushing customers toward online ordering. However, this strategy has unintended consequences.

Third-party delivery apps charge commission rates of 15-30%, turning your most profitable channel (direct phone orders) into your least lucrative one (marketplace orders). By failing to adequately staff phones, restaurants are essentially paying premium

commission rates to third-party platforms to solve a problem they themselves created.

15-30%

Third-party delivery apps
charge per order.





The Path Forward

The revenue leak crisis is solvable, but only if restaurants acknowledge its scale and prioritize phone operations with the same rigor they apply to in-person service. This is the first chapter in a series of five diving deep into the impact phone lines have on the restaurant industry. The following chapters explore how this crisis manifests in day-to-day operations, why current approaches fall short, and what high-performing restaurants are doing differently.

Click here to download all five chapters. →

The first step is measurement. You can't fix what you don't measure, and most restaurants have no visibility into their phone performance.

Click here for a free phone audit to see how your restaurants are performing. →

Coming in Chapter 2: *The Strain on Staff. Operational pressure impacts wait times, service quality, and the employee experience.*



Revmo AI is a Phoenix-based company **specializing in voice-enabled conversational AI designed for restaurants**. From handling inbound calls and taking reservations to answering common customer questions, **Revmo helps restaurants streamline communication, reduce missed calls, and keep tables full**. By automating phone interactions, Revmo improves efficiency, enhances the guest experience, and **allows restaurant teams to focus on what they do best; serving great food and creating memorable dining experiences**.

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Click here to download all five chapters. —→

State of Calls Report 2026

Chapter 2

The Strain on Staff

How Phone Operations Burden Already Short-Staffed Restaurants





It's 12:17 p.m. on Thursday, and Maria, the shift manager at a busy restaurant, is juggling multiple tasks simultaneously. A customer is asking about allergen information, two delivery drivers are waiting for orders, the expo line has three tickets going cold, and the phone is ringing.

She glances at the phone on ring four. Ring five. The in-store customer is still talking. Ring six. The phone stops. Another call goes unanswered, and

one more potential order is lost. **Maria returns to the customer, unaware that she just missed a large catering order that would have taken 90 seconds to place.**

Chapter 1 quantified the revenue leak from unanswered calls. This chapter examines the human cost: **how phone operations create operational burden on short-staffed restaurant teams and why wait times and service degradation are the resulting symptoms.**

The Hidden Labor Tax

Every ringing phone represents a decision point for restaurant staff. One option is to answer the call and delay the in-store customer, and the other is the opposite. Unlike some other industries, restaurants operate with razor-thin labor budgets and peak-hour volume that makes this trade-off brutal. The phone doesn't care that it's a Friday night rush. It rings anyway.

Our analysis reveals the operational strain through two primary metrics: wait time (how long customers wait before speaking to a person) and hold duration (how long they wait when placed on hold). These numbers tell the story of teams stretched too thin.

Segment	Avg Wait Time	Hold Rate	Avg Hold Duration
Quick Service (QSR)	17.5 sec	7.2%	48.2 sec
Fast Casual	31.2 sec	7.7%	41.2 sec
Full Service (FSR)	29.1 sec	19.5%	73.4 sec
Pizza	26.0 sec	9.9%	64.0 sec

"Should you answer every call that comes into your restaurant? Yes, but is it the best use of your team member's time? Assuming it's a robo call or someone just wants to know what time you close today, AI can handle that. Taking a team member away from helping or checking in on a guest in store is way more valuable. If you have a high volume of calls, wouldn't it be great if every call was answered quickly, without anyone sitting on hold and having their questions answered in a timely manner? Yes. That's what AI does."

David Rev Ciancio, CMO, [Salad House and Handcraft Burgers](#)





The Pattern: QSR Answers Fast, Everyone Else Struggles

Quick service lives up to its name with the fastest **average answer time of 17.5 seconds**. This makes sense because QSR operations are optimized for speed, staff are trained for rapid transactions, and phone orders follow predictable scripts.

This efficiency comes at a cost, though. The **40% miss rate of QSRs, as identified in Chapter 1**, shows that when calls do get answered, they're quick. Nevertheless, most calls don't get answered at all.

The fast casual category faces the worst wait times at **31.2 seconds, nearly double that of QSRs**. This segment occupies an awkward middle ground as they promise QSR speed but operate with FSR complexity (i.e., customizable orders, dietary accommodations, premium ingredients). Staff juggle assembly line production with customer service, and the phone suffers. Unlike QSR's scripted orders ("Number 2 with a Coke"), fast casual calls involve questions about ingredients, modifications, and meal customization that require staff attention and knowledge.

Full-service and pizza restaurants sit in the middle **at 29.1 and 26.0 seconds**, respectively. The lengthier wait times at FSRs reflect their focus on in-person hospitality. Hosts greeting arrivals, servers managing tables, and kitchens coordinating multi-course meals all take priority over incoming phone calls. The pizza category's efficiency (comparable to QSR in answer rate and moderate in wait time) demonstrates how the operational focus of phone orders as core business matters.

40%

miss rate of QSRs shows that when calls do get answered, they're quick. Nevertheless, most calls don't get answered at all.



QSR: Speed When You Answer, Chaos When You Don't

Quick Service Restaurant Metrics

QSR Quick Stats

17.5 sec

average wait
time

7.2%

hold rate
(lowest across all
segments)

48.2 sec

average hold
duration

20%

slower at dinner
vs. lunch
(20.4 vs. 17.0 sec)

The operational DNA of QSRs is speed. Drive-thru times are measured in seconds, kitchen systems are optimized for throughput, and the training of employees emphasizes rapid transactions. This shows in phone performance because when QSR locations answer calls, they do it faster than any other segment.

However, the dinner rush reveals cracks in the system. Wait times increase **20% from lunch to dinner (17.0 to 20.4 seconds)**, suggesting that staffing models optimized for in-person volume don't adequately cover phone demand during peak periods. The lunch rush is predictable and staffed accordingly, but dinner brings variability that phone coverage fails to absorb.

The Hold Paradox: Rarely Happens, Long When It Does

QSRs boast a **7.2% hold rate**, the lowest across all segments. Staff in this category either handle calls immediately or miss them entirely.

When customers do get placed on hold, though, **they wait an average of 48 seconds**. This suggests inadequate hold protocols, such as staff not knowing how to efficiently park calls or systems not existing to do so.

The QSR Staffing Bind



QSR locations face the unique challenge of high call volumes meeting busy in-store traffic during identical peak windows. Unlike FSR, where phone orders might come between meal services, or pizza restaurants, for which phone orders are primary revenue, QSR gets slammed on all channels simultaneously. The result is that operators must choose between answering phones or serving in-person customers, and those already in the restaurant usually win.



Fast Casual: Speed When You Answer, Chaos When You Don't

Fast Casual Restaurant Metrics

Fast Casual Quick Stats

31.2 sec

average wait
(highest across all
segments)

7.7%

hold rate

41.2 sec

average hold
duration

31%

slower at dinner
vs. lunch
(33.6 vs. 25.6 sec)

Fast casual restaurants suffer the longest wait times in the industry. At **31.2 seconds average**, nearly double that of QSRs and 20% worse than FSRs, fast casual represents the operational strain of trying to deliver premium service with limited-service staffing.

The root cause is complexity without support. Fast casual brands like Chipotle, Panera, and Smashburger promise customization ("made your way"), fresh ingredients, and dietary accommodation. Phone callers inquire about gluten-free options, ingredient sourcing, and nutritional information, questions that require product knowledge and time.

But staffing models mirror QSR's lean approach, leaving no dedicated phone coverage. The result is staff toggling between assembly lines, cash registers, and ringing phones, without a sole focus on one.

Dinner Rush Breakdown

The dinner deterioration is severe, with **31% slower wait times compared to lunch (33.6 vs. 25.6 seconds)**. This is the worst lunch-to-dinner degradation across all segments. Fast casual locations appear to staff for throughput, not communication. As order volume rises in evenings, phone coverage collapses.

Unlike the QSR segment, where dinner orders are predictable (i.e., combo meals and standard items), fast casual dinner calls involve more decision-making, such as families debating modifications, couples building bowls, and individuals navigating allergen concerns. Each call takes longer, and the **33.6-second wait suggests staff** are finishing other tasks before answering.



The Digital Promise Trap

Many fast casual brands invest heavily in mobile ordering apps, positioning digital as the solution to phone strain. Customer behavior is stubborn, though, with complex questions, dietary concerns, and real-time decision-making still driving phone calls.

The app can't always help when customers need to ask, "Is your chicken antibiotic-free?" or "Can you make that without dairy?" The digital investment by fast casual restaurants might have reduced some call volume, but it hasn't eliminated the need for knowledgeable humans for phone interactions.





Full Service: Hospitality Meets Hold Times

Full-Service Restaurant Metrics

FSR Quick Stats

29.1 sec

average wait

19.5%

hold rate
(Highest - 2.5x industry average)

73.4 sec

average hold duration
(Longest)

19%

faster at dinner
vs. lunch
(27.5 vs 34.1 seconds)

Full-Service restaurants demonstrate a fascinating operational paradox. They answer calls better than QSRs (91% vs. **60% answer rate from Chapter 1**) but struggle with call management. Nearly one in five answered calls results in holds, which average 73 seconds — more than a minute of dead air.

The Hold Problem: FSR's Unique Burden

At 19.5%, the hold rate of FSRs is nearly triple the industry average and 2.7x higher than that of QSRs. Why? The nature of FSR calls demands it. Unlike QSR's transactional orders ("I'll have a #3") or pizza restaurants' straightforward requests, FSR calls involve:

- **Reservation management:** Checking availability, coordinating party sizes, noting special occasions
- **Menu inquiries:** Detailed questions about ingredients, preparations, seasonal specials
- **Event coordination:** Private dining, catering logistics, pricing negotiations
- **Service recovery:** Complaint resolution, reservation changes, refund processing

Each of these requires information that the host or server answering the phone doesn't immediately have. Staff must check with managers, consult reservation systems, or coordinate with kitchen staff, resulting in customers being put on hold.

The **73.4-second average hold duration** is punishing. It's enough time for a customer to reconsider their choice, search for alternatives, or simply hang up in frustration. For a segment that competes on hospitality and service, forcing customers to wait over a minute on hold undermines a brand's promise before the individuals ever walk through the door.

The Dinner Efficiency Puzzle

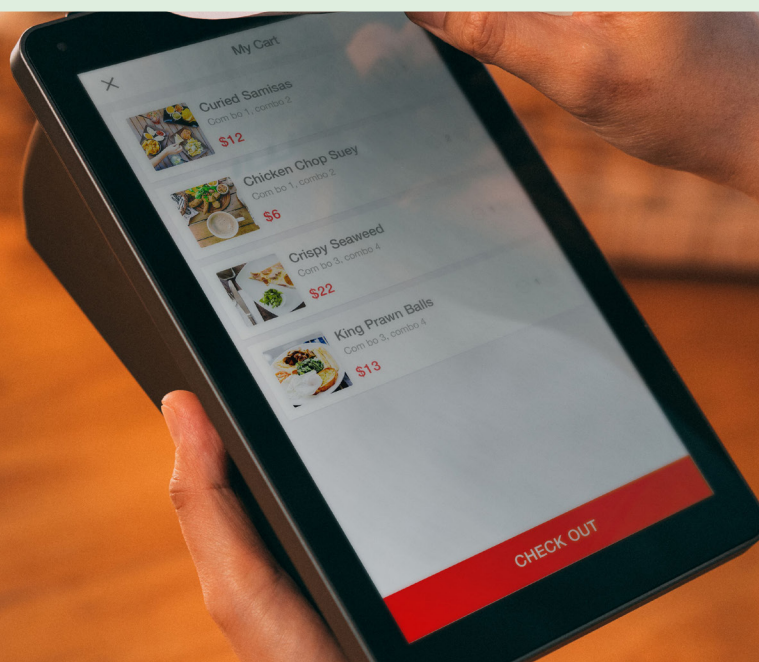
Unlike every other segment, **FSR improves during dinner service through 19% faster wait times** (27.5 vs. 34.1 seconds). This counterintuitive finding suggests FSR staffing models anticipate dinner demand better than lunch. Many FSR locations run lean during lunch, then staff up for dinner service. The phone benefits from this increased coverage.

The improvement also reflects the FSR operational reality of dinner being when hosts, managers, and dedicated front-of-house staff are present. At lunch, that same restaurant might have one server covering the floor and the phone. At dinner, there's a host stand staffed by a human whose job includes answering phones.



The Reservation System Advantage

The optimal answer rate of FSRs (91% vs. industry average) likely stems from cultural and technological factors. Culturally, FSR brands emphasize hospitality training, in which answering phones is part of the service ethos. Technologically, many FSR locations use reservation management systems (i.e., OpenTable, Resy, Yelp Reservations) that include call handling features, caller ID, and integration with table management. These tools make it easier to manage phone operations even when busy, explaining why FSR establishments answer more calls despite longer individual wait times.





Pizza: The Phone-First Business Model

Pizza Segment Metrics

Pizza Quick Stats

26.0 sec

average wait

9.9%

hold rate

64.0 sec

average hold duration

5%

slower at dinner
vs. lunch
(27.0 vs. 25.8 sec)

Pizza restaurants demonstrate the **operational gold standard for phone management**, which is best answer rate (93% from Chapter 1), moderate wait times (26 seconds), controlled hold rates (9.9%), and minimal lunch-to-dinner degradation (five percent). This segment proves that high-volume phone operations can be managed well if phones are treated as **core business** instead of an afterthought.

Why Pizza Succeeds: the Phone-First DNA

The phone excellence of the pizza segment stems from business model fundamentals. For decades, phone orders were the primary revenue channel. Unlike QSRs (built around in-person/drive-thru) or FSRs (built around dine-in reservations), pizza restaurants were phone businesses that happened to have kitchens. This legacy shows in operational design:

- **Dedicated phone stations:** Pizza locations often have physical phone areas with order pads, price charts, and POS access.
- **Role clarity:** Staff know who answers phones (usually whoever is at the front counter or dedicated phone person during rush).
- **Standardized scripts:** Pizza orders follow predictable patterns (size, toppings, delivery/pickup), enabling faster handling.
- **POS integration:** Most pizza systems integrate phones with order entry, reducing hold time for pricing or menu questions.

Consistent Performance Across Dayparts

Pizza's **five percent lunch-to-dinner degradation (25.8 to 27.0 seconds)** is the smallest across all segments, a consistency that suggests staffing models should be built around phone volume rather than foot traffic. Unlike QSRs or fast casual restaurants, where dinner brings surges in multiple channels, pizza restaurants' dinner rush is manageable because it's **predictable and phone-centric**.

The modest hold rate (**9.9%**) and duration (**64 seconds**) further demonstrate operational control. The staff at pizza restaurants know how to park calls

when needed but do so less frequently than FSRs because the information required to complete orders is readily accessible. The POS has pricing, the menu is standardized, and delivery zones are clearly defined. Customers are put on hold during confirmation of delivery addresses or processing of payments. These are **necessary pauses, not knowledge gaps**.

The Digital Transition Challenge

The phone excellence of the pizza segment creates an interesting strategic tension. While third-party delivery apps have captured significant market share, many pizza operators resist because these platforms charge **20-30% commissions** on orders that were historically phone direct.

The phone infrastructure that made pizza businesses successful now represents both a competitive advantage (i.e., direct customer relationships, no commission drain) and vulnerability (younger consumers prefer apps over calls). The segment's challenge is to maintain phone excellence while adapting to digital-native ordering preferences.



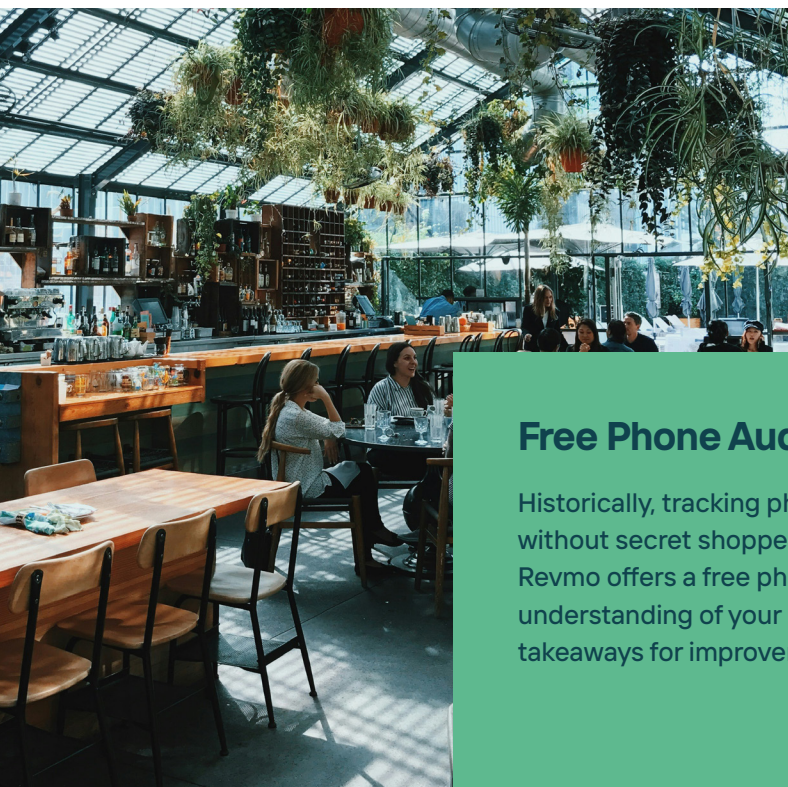
The Labor Reality: Why Phones Get Deprioritized

Understanding wait times and hold durations requires understanding restaurant labor economics. The workers answering phones — or failing to do so — operate under constraints that make coverage systematically difficult.

The Visible Customer Bias

Restaurant staff face the perpetual triage of serving the in-house customer or answering the phone. Operational training, manager oversight, and social pressure all favor the in-person customer. An individual standing at the counter creates immediate pressure because they can make eye contact, show impatience, or complain to a manager. **The phone caller is invisible, unknown, and easily ignored.**

This bias compounds during peak periods when both channels spike simultaneously. Lunch rush brings drive-thru lines and phone calls, while dinner service prompts filled tables and even more calls. Staff must choose, and in-person customers typically win. The result is that calls are answered more during slow periods but not during peak periods when phone orders matter most.



The Knowledge Gap Problem

High turnover means the person answering your call might be working their third shift. They don't know the menu, can't answer ingredient questions, and lack confidence in pricing or policies. This creates two failure modes:

- **Avoidance:** Inexperienced staff hesitate to answer phones because they fear looking incompetent or saying something wrong.
- **Long holds:** When they do answer, they must frequently put customers on hold to find managers, check systems, or verify information.

The FSR segment's 73-second hold duration directly reflects this. Hosts answering phones lack kitchen knowledge, servers lack reservation system access, and managers are busy managing tables. Everyone must check with someone else, which generates holds.

The Metrics Blindness

Most restaurant operators have **no visibility into phone performance**. They track sales, labor costs, food costs, table turns, and ticket times, but not missed calls, wait times, or hold durations. **What doesn't get measured fails to get managed.**

Without data, operators default to the anecdotal assessment of "The phone rings sometimes, we answer it when we can." They don't realize **that 40% of QSR calls go unanswered**, or that FSR customers wait over a minute on hold. The problems documented in this chapter are invisible to most decision-makers, which is precisely why they persist.

Free Phone Audit

Historically, tracking phone metrics hasn't been available without secret shoppers and expensive custom solutions. Revmo offers a free phone audit, so you have a realistic understanding of your phone metrics and tangible takeaways for improvement.

Scan for
a free phone audit.





The Cost of Strain: Beyond Wait Times

Wait times and hold durations represent quantifiable operational failure. However, the true cost of phone strain extends beyond seconds on a clock.

Employee Stress and Burnout

The constant pressure to manage competing demands, such as answering phones or serving in-person customers and taking orders or fixing problems, creates sustained stress on restaurant employees. Staff feel perpetually behind, never able to fully satisfy any customer. This manifests in:

- **Increased errors** (wrong orders, pricing mistakes, missed details)
- **Degraded service quality** (rushed interactions, impatient tone)
- **Higher turnover** (staff burnout)
- **Reduced morale** (teams feel set up to fail)

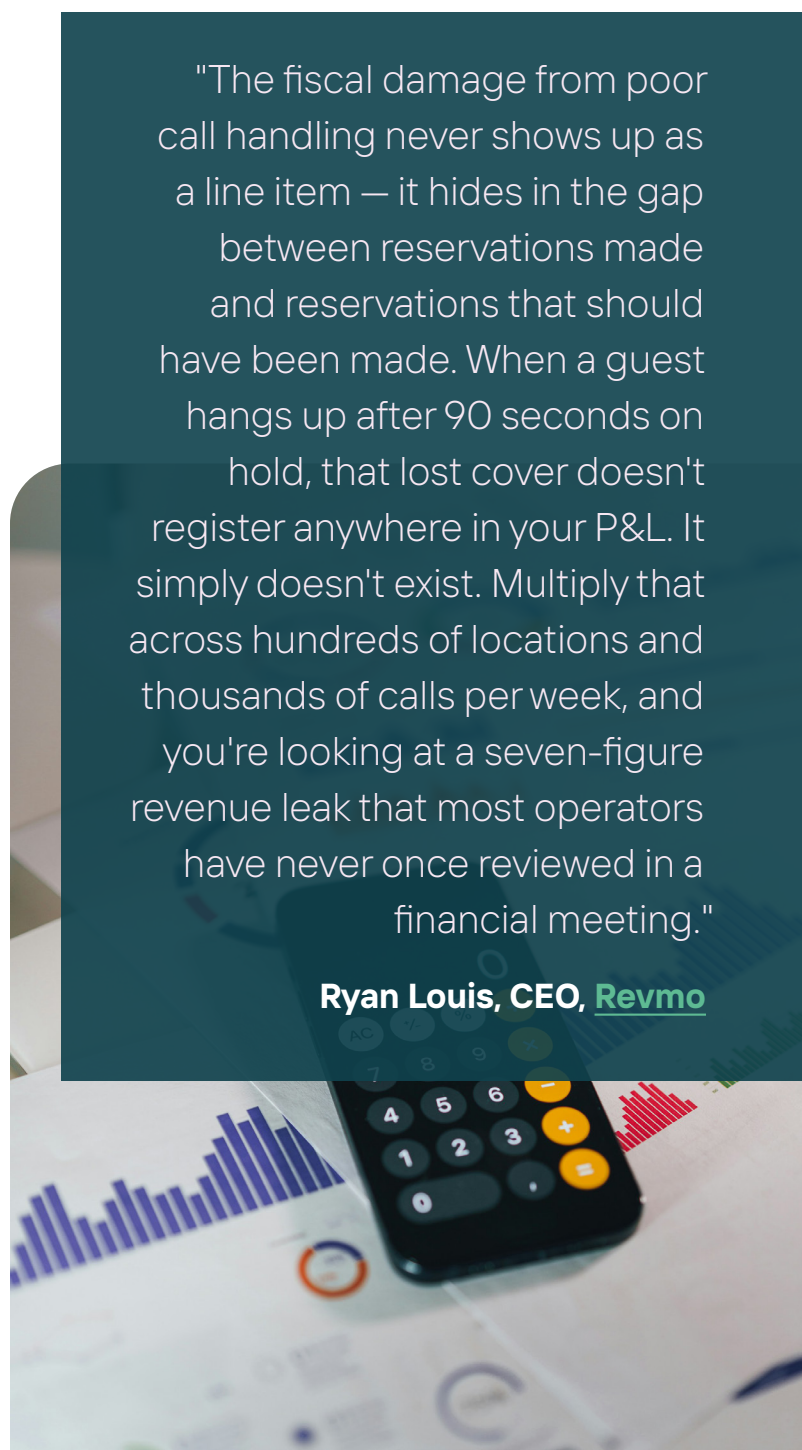
Customer Experience Degradation

In addition to frustrating customers, lengthy wait times, and extended holds shape brand perception. A **30-second wait creates anxiety** ("Did they forget about me?"), and a **60-second hold generates** resentment ("They don't value my time"). By the time someone finally speaks to an employee, they've already decided whether this restaurant respects customers.

For premium segments like FSR, this is particularly damaging. When you charge **\$50 per person for dinner**, customers expect exceptional service from first contact. Making them wait **29 seconds to speak** to someone and another **73 seconds on hold** undermines the entire hospitality positioning.

"The fiscal damage from poor call handling never shows up as a line item — it hides in the gap between reservations made and reservations that should have been made. When a guest hangs up after 90 seconds on hold, that lost cover doesn't register anywhere in your P&L. It simply doesn't exist. Multiply that across hundreds of locations and thousands of calls per week, and you're looking at a seven-figure revenue leak that most operators have never once reviewed in a financial meeting."

Ryan Louis, CEO, [Revmo](#)



Operational Inefficiency

Poorly managed phones create downstream **operational chaos**. When staff rush through calls to get back to in-person customers, they make mistakes, including wrong pizza toppings, incorrect delivery addresses, and missed dietary restrictions. Each error requires correction through refunds, angry callback conversations, and manager interventions. The **30 seconds saved by rushing through the call** become 10 minutes spent fixing problems.

The data reveals that when phones ring unanswered or customers are left on hold too long, it's a symptom of **a workforce stretched to its breaking point**. From the 40% miss rate in the QSR category to the 73-second hold times in FSRs, these metrics are the fingerprints of staff who are **forced to choose between the customer in front of them and the one on the line**.

This tension creates a cycle of burnout. When fast casual restaurants face a **31% degradation in speed during dinner**, it's a sign that complexity has outpaced capacity. Instead of simply missing calls, staff are navigating a systemic "metrics blindness" where the pressure to manage in-person flow leads to a visible bias against the phone, ultimately **hurting the bottom line and employee morale**.

"Volume (data) gives us the baseline metrics, but it doesn't give us the "why." Traditional call volume, food cost, sales and labor reports might show a negative variance at a specific location, but unstructured outliers—like call content, emails, or guest feedback—reveal the non-obvious correlations. Uncovering those specific friction points helps us turn hidden tribal knowledge into actionable intelligence. Using AI to connect those dots and address the micro-frictions is what actually moves the needle."

Patrick Bobrukiewicz, Vice President Data Services, [Thrive Restaurant Group](#)





The Path Forward

The labor crisis in the restaurant industry doesn't have to lead to a revenue crisis. Solving the strain on your staff requires moving beyond simple "hustle" and toward intelligent call management.

This chapter illustrates how current staffing models are buckling under the weight of phone demand. The subsequent chapters in this series will break down why traditional "fixes" fail and how top-tier performers, like those in the pizza segment with **their 93% answer rate**, leverage technology to protect their teams and their profits.

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The first step is measurement. You can't fix what you don't measure, and most restaurants have no visibility into their phone performance.

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Coming in Chapter 3: *The Professionalism Gap. Greeting consistency and service quality reveal how operational pressure impacts brand perception and customer experience.*



Revmo AI is a Phoenix-based company **specializing in voice-enabled conversational AI designed for restaurants**. From handling inbound calls and taking reservations to answering common customer questions, **Revmo helps restaurants streamline communication, reduce missed calls, and keep tables full**. By automating phone interactions, Revmo improves efficiency, enhances the guest experience, and **allows restaurant teams to focus on what they do best; serving great food and creating memorable dining experiences**.

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State of Calls Report 2026

Chapter 3

The Professionalism Gap

How Pressure Erodes Service Quality and Brand Perception





Two customers call the same pizza chain within minutes of each other. The first one hears, **"Thank you for calling ABC Pizza on Main Street. This is Jennifer. How can I help you today?"** The greeting is warm, professional, and establishes immediate rapport.

The second caller hears: "ABC Pizza." Flat tone. No name or location, just acknowledgment that someone picked up.

Both customers get their pizzas made accurately and delivered on time.

However, only the first customer feels valued. The difference is a mere seven words that cost nothing and take only two seconds but shape brand perception from the first moment of contact.

This is the professionalism gap between how restaurants want to be perceived and how they present themselves on the phone.

Chapter 1 quantified revenue loss from missed calls, and Chapter 2 examined operational strain on staff. **This chapter explores service quality, focuses on greeting consistency, and reveals how pressure impacts customer experience and brand perception.**

The Greeting Standard: Why It Matters

A proper phone greeting accomplishes four things in under five seconds:

01

Confirms the caller reached the right place: Brand name and location eliminate uncertainty.

02

Establishes accountability: Providing a name creates personal connection and responsibility.

03

Sets service tone: Professional greetings signal organized, customer-focused operations.

04

Builds brand equity: Consistent greetings reinforce brand standards and hospitality positioning.

Our analysis measured **greeting consistency** across all answered calls, including whether the person answering identified the restaurant and themselves. The results reveal a **professionalism crisis concentrated in specific segments** and exacerbated by operational pressure.

Segment	Greeting Rate	Sentiment Boost	Rank
Quick Service (QSR)	87.2%	-0.12*	1st
Full Service (FSR)	76.6%	+0.24	2nd
Pizza	69.2%	+0.31	3rd
Fast Casual	60.6%	+0.01	4th

* Continue reading to understand the QSR sentiment paradox.

The QSR category leads at an **87.2% greeting consistency**, which is surprising given their 40% miss rate from Chapter 1. When QSR locations do answer calls, they follow protocols well. The FSR segment follows at 76.6%, then the pizza sector at 69.2%. Fast casual trails at 60.6%, meaning two out of every five customers calling receive no proper greeting.

This ranking reverses the answer rate performance from Chapter 1. **Pizza restaurants answer 93% of calls** but greet properly only 69% of the time. QSRs answer just 60% of calls but **greet 87% of those answered**. The segments best at answering phones aren't necessarily best at professional service once answered.

Answering the phone is table stakes — what happens in the first three seconds after pickup is where your brand either shows up or falls apart. A greeting isn't just courtesy; it's the audible equivalent of your signage, your uniforms, your plating. When two out of five customers calling a fast casual location hear nothing consistent on the other end, that's not a training problem. That's a brand problem.

Ryan Louis, CEO, [Revmo](#)





QSR: Scripted Excellence, Selective Execution

Quick Service Restaurant Metrics

QSR Quick Stats

87.2%

greeting consistency
(highest across all
segments)

10-point

drop during dinner
(76.5% vs. 86.4%
at lunch)

3.88

sentiment score
(no measurable
greeting boost)

**96.4% to
85.8%**

brand variance

The QSR segment's greeting excellence reflects its operational focus on scripts, training, and standardization. Major QSR brands invest heavily in employee onboarding with specific phone protocols. Employees learn exact phrasing and are measured on script adherence.

But even with 87% consistency, the QSR category shows cracks during dinner service. **The 10-point drop from 86.4% at lunch to 76.5% at dinner suggests that greeting discipline erodes when pressure rises.** Staff answering phones during rush periods skip introductions to save seconds, **which undermines brand standards for minimal time savings.**

The Sentiment Paradox

The QSR sector indicates no sentiment benefit from greetings, as evidenced by a rate of 3.88 with greetings versus 4.00 without. This counterintuitive finding suggests that QSR customers care more about transaction speed than formality. A quick one or two-word answer might satisfy a QSR caller better than a 10-second formal greeting that delays order-taking.

This doesn't mean QSR should abandon greeting standards, though. Brand consistency and professionalism still matter for employee training and operational discipline. However, **it suggests that QSR greetings serve a different purpose than FSRs**, which is confirming location and readiness to take orders, matters more than establishing personal rapport.



Fast Casual: The Greeting Disaster

Fast Casual Metrics

Fast Casual Quick Stats

60.6%

greeting consistency
(lowest across all
segments)

30%

dinner collapse
(76.9% lunch
to 47.6% dinner)

3.97

average sentiment
(no meaningful
greeting impact)

**86% to
27.9%**

brand variance

The greeting performance of the fast casual restaurant segment is abysmal. At 60.6%, more than one-third of answered calls receive no proper greeting. That's the worst in the industry by nine percentage points and represents systematic failure to execute basic customer service standards.

The Dinner Collapse

The dinner degradation is catastrophic, as indicated by the industry-worst **30-percentage point drop from lunch to dinner (76.9% to 47.6%)**. By evening, fewer than half of customers calling fast casual restaurants receive professional greetings. Staff are so overwhelmed during the dinner rush that basic phone etiquette becomes optional.

Recall Chapter 2's findings, in which fast casual suffers the worst wait times (31.2 seconds) and dinner wait degradation (31%). **The pattern is clear: fast casual operations collapse under pressure.** Customers wait longest, get improper greetings most frequently, and experience the steepest quality decline during peak periods.



Brand Performance: The Smashburger Exception

The fast casual category's poor average masks dramatic brand variance. Smashburger achieves 86% greeting consistency, approaching QSR standards and demonstrating that **fast casual brands certainly can execute professionally**. Nevertheless, a few other notable brands drag the segment down, suggesting that operational discipline varies wildly.

The brand gap (86% to 27.9%) is 58 percentage points, larger than the gap between best and worst performing segments. This proves **that the greeting problem at fast casual restaurants is solvable through operational focus but not inherent to the business model**.



When people say 'we're slammed,' what's really happening is the system is getting overloaded from multiple directions at once. You've got in-store customers, delivery apps, online orders, and phone calls all hitting at the same time. The kitchen display fills up, expo becomes the bottleneck, and the team naturally focuses on what's right in front of them. The phone drops to the bottom of the list.

Michael Beck, CEO, [Inc Tank](#)



Full Service: Hospitality Expectations, Inconsistent Delivery

Full-Service Restaurant Metrics

FSR Stats

76.6%

greeting
consistency

18-point

dinner drop
(88% lunch
to 70% dinner)

24 point

sentiment boost from
greetings (highest
across all segments)

**99.2% to
27.5%**

brand variance
(Morton's to Golden
Corral)

The Greeting-Sentiment Connection

Full-service restaurants occupy a paradoxical position because they compete explicitly on hospitality but deliver inconsistent phone professionalism. **At a greeting consistency of 76.6%**, the FSR segment performs better than the fast casual and pizza categories but worse than QSRs. For brands charging \$30 to \$100 per person and marketing themselves as hospitality leaders, **a 23% greeting failure is not ideal.**



Unlike QSRs, where greetings show no sentiment impact, FSRs demonstrate a clear sentiment boost from proper greetings. Customers calling FSRs notice and appreciate professional phone service. When you're **spending \$200 on dinner for four**, a sloppy phone greeting creates cognitive dissonance. Customers might think that if they can't answer the phone professionally, they are sloppy in other areas of their operation.

This makes the FSR category's 23% greeting failure more damaging than the raw number suggests. Each unprofessional greeting **misses an opportunity to impress a customer** and actively undermines brand positioning.

Brand Performance: The Steakhouse Standard

The FSR sector shows the **widest brand performance variance in the industry**, from 99.2% at a popular steakhouse to 27.5% at a well-known Asian food restaurant. This 72-point spread reveals the difference in categories:

01

Premium steakhouses treat phone professionalism as non-negotiable. These brands understand that customers booking **\$300 dinners expect white-glove service from first contact**. Their near-perfect greeting rates reflect training, accountability, and cultural emphasis on hospitality.

02

Value-oriented chains show **QSR-level greeting failure** despite FSR positioning. These brands compete on price and volume, not service excellence, and **phone professionalism reflects those priorities**.

The middle performers demonstrate that mid-tier FSRs can achieve excellence if management prioritizes it. Greeting consistency is about operational discipline, not price point.

The Lunch vs Dinner Story

The 18-point lunch-to-dinner greeting drop from 88% to 70% in the FSR segment tells an operational story. Lunch shifts run lean with fewer front-of-house staff, but those employees have time to execute properly. Dinner brings more hosts and servers but also more chaos, such as tables filling, reservations arriving, and takeout orders stacking. Ironically, better staffing doesn't guarantee improved phone service when all employees are overwhelmed at the same time.





Pizza: The Volume Trade-off

Pizza Segment Metrics

Pizza Quick Stats

69.2%

greeting
consistency

16-point

dinner drop
(80.7% lunch
to 64.6% dinner)

.31-point

sentiment boost
(highest impact)

94.8%

to 0%
brand variance

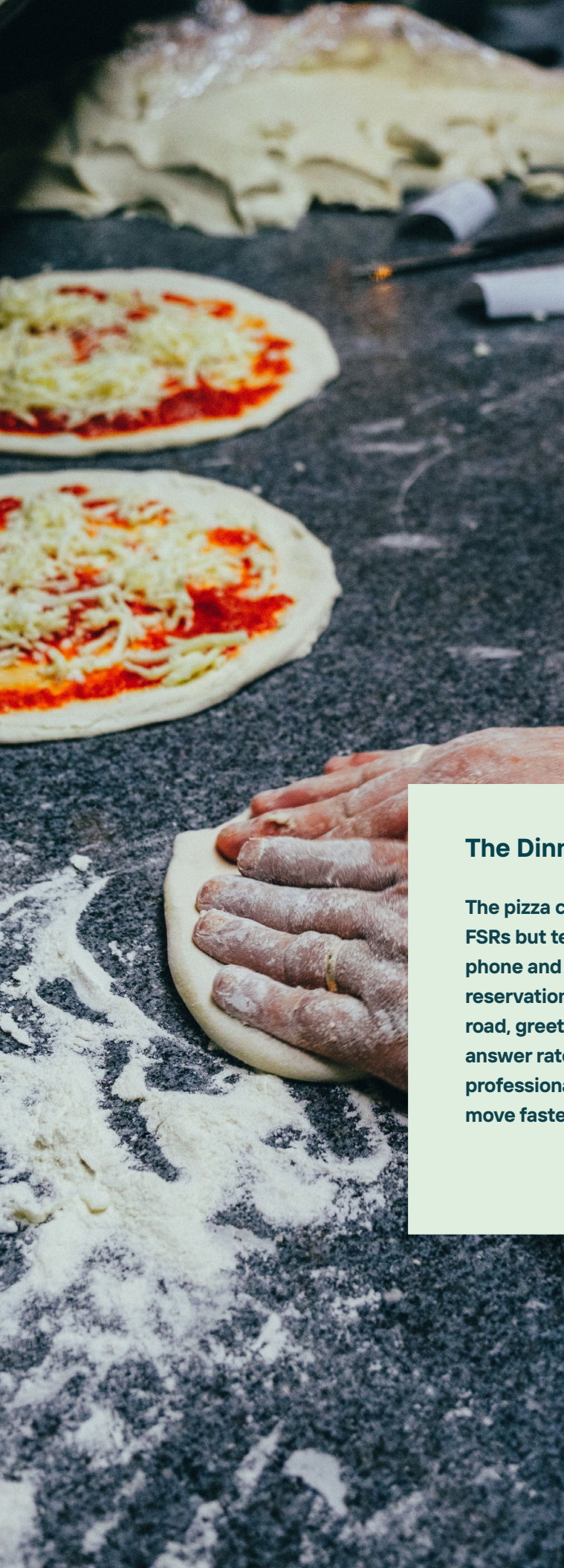
Pizza restaurants face a unique challenge because they handle the highest phone volume in the industry with moderate greeting consistency. **At 69.2%, the pizza category trails QSRs by 18 percentage points** and FSRs by seven. However, the pizza segment answers 93% of calls, which is best in the industry (Chapter 1), and maintains moderate wait times (Chapter 2).

The pattern suggests a conscious trade-off in which pizza operations prioritize call volume and speed over greeting formality. Staff focus on answering quickly and taking orders efficiently. A proper greeting takes five to seven seconds, whereas saying just the restaurant name takes about one second. When you're handling 40 to 60 calls per shift, those seconds compound.

The Sentiment Impact: When Greetings Matter Most

The pizza sector shows the largest greeting-sentiment correlation, as evidenced by its **.31-point boost (3.97 with greeting vs. 3.66 without)**. This is 29% higher than the FSR segment's boost and 31 times larger than that of QSRs, which proves that pizza customers notice and appreciate proper greetings more than any other segment.

Why the big focus on greetings? Pizza ordering is relationship-based. Customers often call the same location repeatedly and develop rapport with employees. A proper greeting acknowledges this relationship, but a terse call answer feels transactional and cold. Greeting warmth matters for phone-first businesses where customer lifetime value depends on repeat orders.



Brand Performance: the California Pizza Kitchen Standard

California Pizza Kitchen achieves a **94.8% greeting consistency**, approaching premium steakhouse levels while maintaining a **97% answer rate**. This proves that pizza brands can simultaneously deliver volume and professionalism.

Conversely, the rate of other well-known pizza restaurants dips as **low as 38.6%** and indicates **greeting numbers comparable to struggling FSR brands**. Their volume-focused, price-driven operations sacrifice phone formality for transaction speed. The trade-off may work financially, but it caps brand positioning and customer satisfaction.

The Dinner Degradation Pattern

The pizza category's 16-point dinner drop (80.7% to 64.6%) mirrors FSRs but tells a different story. Pizza dinner rush is purely about phone and production volume instead of table management or reservations. As ovens fill and delivery drivers get ready to hit the road, greeting discipline erodes. The first casualty of overload isn't answer rate (93%) or wait time (26 seconds average) but greeting professionalism. Staff answer quickly but skip introductions to move faster.



The Pressure Effect: How Rush Hour Erodes Standards

Across all segments, greeting consistency collapses during dinner service. The pattern is universal but varies in severity:

Segment	Lunch	Dinner	Degradation
Quick Service (QSR)	86.4%	76.5%	-10 pts
Fast Casual	76.9%	47.6%	-30 pts
Full Service (FSR)	88.0%	70.0%	-18 pts
Pizza	80.7%	64.6%	-16 pts

Fast Casual's 30-Point Catastrophe

Fast casual's dinner collapse from 76.9% to 47.6% represents the worst service degradation in the restaurant industry. Chapter 2 showed that fast casual suffers the worst wait time degradation at dinner (31% slower). This chapter adds greeting degradation (30-point drop), resulting in the compounding effect of fast casual dinner callers waiting the longest and receiving the worst service.

This dual degradation creates a customer experience disaster. Imagine calling a fast casual restaurant at 6:30 p.m. and waiting 33 seconds (vs. 25 at lunch). When someone finally answers, they simply grunt the name of the eatery instead of a proper greeting. You've invested

more than 30 seconds of time waiting but received minimal acknowledgment. Thirty seconds in today's consumer-prioritized age can feel like a lifetime. This is how brands lose customers.

The Lunch Excellence and Dinner Mediocrity of FSRs

The pattern FSRs exhibit is the opposite of typical assumptions because of their 88% greeting rate at lunch (best in industry for that daypart) dropping to 70% at dinner. Most operators assume that the dinner period, during which hosts and managers are present, would show better service. Instead, lunch's lean staffing creates accountability. With fewer people, each person has their responsibilities, including phone professionalism.

At dinner, a diffusion of responsibility occurs, and employees assume someone else will answer properly. The host greets customers, servers manage tables, and managers expedite orders. The phone becomes the least important task, and greeting standards suffer.

QSR and Pizza: Relative Stability

The 10-point drop for QSRs and 16-point decrease in the pizza sector divulge smaller degradation, suggesting that their operational systems better withstand pressure. The scripted training at QSRs and phone-centric culture of pizza establishments maintain some greeting discipline, even during rush. But even these "stable" segments lose professionalism when volume spikes, albeit less catastrophically than the fast casual sector.



The Brand Perception Cost

Poor greeting consistency shapes broader brand perception and competitive positioning. And it impacts individual call sentiment.

The Consistency Premium

Brands with greeting consistency above 90% (i.e., Morton's 99.2%, Del Frisco's 95.1%, California Pizza Kitchen's 94.8%, Bahama Breeze's 94.9%) share common traits:

- **Premium positioning:** High prices justify and fund rigorous training.
- **Lower staff turnover:** Better wages and conditions retain experienced employees.
- **Cultural emphasis:** Hospitality is core brand identity, not just marketing.
- **Management accountability:** Standards are monitored and enforced.

These brands understand that proper greetings lead to better sentiment (our data confirms this), better sentiment drives repeat visits, repeat visits enable premium pricing, premium pricing funds better wages, higher wages reduce turnover, and lower turnover improves execution. The virtuous cycle starts with something as simple as "Thank you for calling."

The Value Trap

Brands with greeting rates below **50% operate in a different yet vicious cycle**. Low prices require cost minimization, lower costs mean minimal training, inadequate training yields poor execution, mismanaged tasks prevent premium positioning, and inability to charge premium prices perpetuates cost pressure.

These brands aren't necessarily wrong to deprioritize greeting formality; their customers might not care or prefer transaction speed over formality (recall QSR's neutral sentiment impact from greetings). However, **they must accept the ceiling this creates:** you can't evolve upmarket without operational execution to match.



What Professionalism Signals

Greeting consistency serves as a proxy for broader operational competence. When a restaurant answers the phone properly, they signal:

- **Training exists and is enforced:** Staff know what to say because someone taught them.
- **Standards are maintained under pressure:** Greeting discipline during rush suggests similar standards are met.
- **Management oversight functions:** Someone is monitoring and correcting performance.
- **Culture prioritizes customers:** Phone professionalism reflects organizational values.

Conversely, perfunctory greetings signal operational dysfunction. **If a restaurant can't execute a simple five-second phone script, are they also neglectful about food safety, order accuracy, and cleanliness?** Customers subconsciously make these associations.

This is particularly damaging for FSR and fast casual brands trying to justify premium pricing. **When Chipotle charges \$14 for a burrito bowl, triple the price of a similar product at Taco Bell,** customers expect corresponding service elevation.





The Path Forward

The professionalism gap documented in this chapter isn't about employee incompetence. **When fast casual greeting rates collapse 30 points during dinner rush**, it indicates employees are drowning in competing demands without any infrastructure to support them. Closing this gap requires moving beyond **"train harder"** toward intelligent systems that protect service standards even under pressure. This chapter has shown how different segments respond to operational strain.

The pizza sector maintains relative consistency because phone operations are built into their business model.

The QSR category executes scripted greetings because systems and training make it automatic. Fast casual and FSR establishments struggle because they haven't invested in phone infrastructure commensurate with their volume and complexity.

The subsequent chapters in this series will explore why traditional **"solutions"** (i.e., **hire more people, train better, work harder**) fail to close the professionalism gap and how top-performing brands use technology to maintain standards when human capacity maxes out.

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The first step is measurement. You can't fix what you don't measure, and most restaurants have no visibility into their phone performance.

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**Coming in
Chapter 4:**

The Upsell Opportunity. Beyond answering calls and greeting professionally, restaurants miss revenue through inadequate order enhancement and menu knowledge.



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State of Calls Report 2026

Chapter 4

The Upsell Opportunity

Revenue Left on the Table Through Inadequate Order Enhancement





A customer calls a **pizza restaurant at 6:45 p.m. on Friday**. "Large pepperoni for delivery, please." The employee takes the address, phone number, and payment for the order and delivery, **then gives the total: \$16.99**. After that, the call ends.

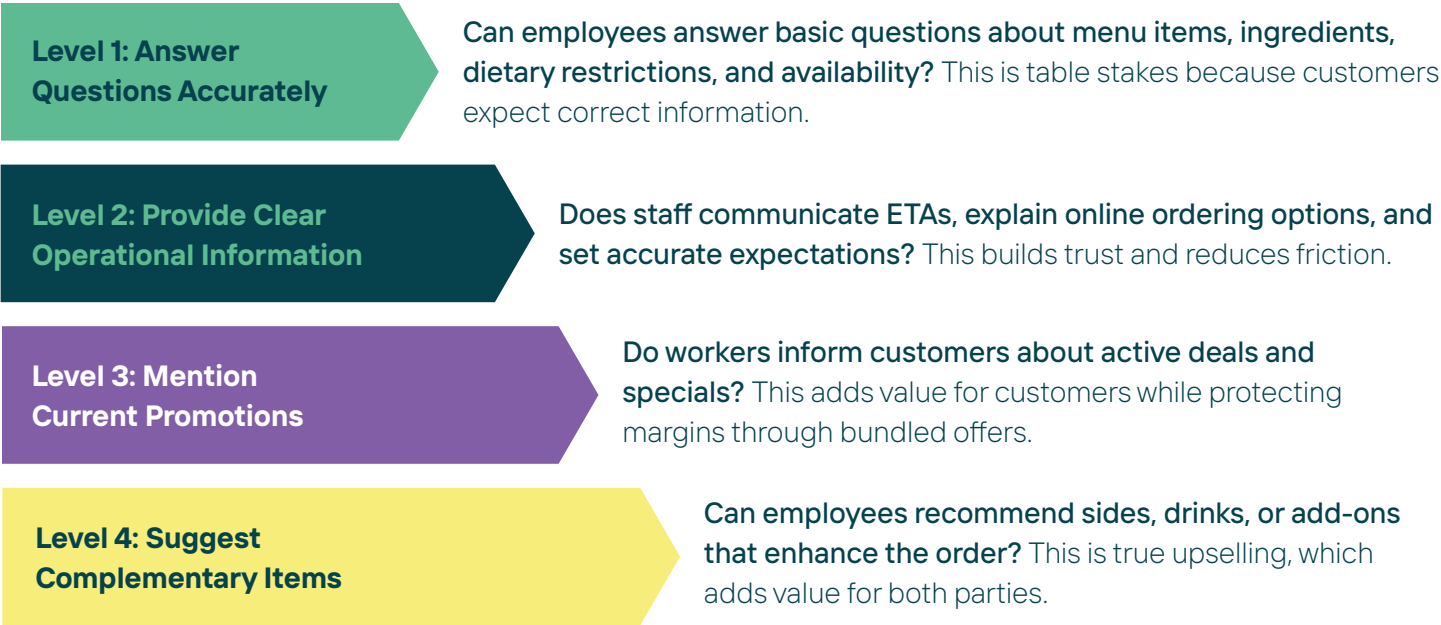
The same customer calls a competitor down the street. "Large pepperoni for delivery." This employee responds: "Great choice! Just so you know, we're running a special tonight: **add a second large for just \$10**. Also, would you like our garlic knots? They're really popular with the pepperoni." The customer adds both items for a total of \$32.99.

Same customer, same opening order. The second pizzeria captured **\$16 more**. **The first pizza establishment captured a transaction, but the other maximized an opportunity.**

Chapters 1-3 documented how restaurants lose revenue by missing calls, making customers wait, and failing to greet professionally. This chapter explores a different kind of revenue leak: **the money left on the table when restaurants answer calls but fail to enhance orders. The issue isn't answering the phone; it is what happens after you answer.**

The Order Enhancement Hierarchy

Phone orders present multiple opportunities to increase ticket size and improve customer satisfaction. These opportunities exist on a hierarchy, from basic expectation to revenue maximization:



Our analysis measured performance across these levels. The results reveal massive variance by segment, with billions in aggregate opportunity across the industry.

Segment	Promo Mention	Side Suggest	ETA Provided	Dietary Info
Pizza	75.6%	28.6%	85.5%	83.8%
Fast Casual	66.2%	18.2%	88.7%	95.5%
Full Service (FSR)	61.8%	18.9%	87.2%	84.6%
Quick Service (QSR)	57.5%	17.8%	74.6%	92.7%

The Patterns That Emerge

The pizza sector dominates **promotion mentions (75.6%)** and **side suggestions (28.6%)** because it treats upselling as a core competency. The fast casual category leads **dietary accommodations (95.5%)**, reflecting its health-conscious and detail-oriented customer base. The QSR and FSR segments fall in the middle, performing adequately on operational basics but missing revenue enhancement opportunities.

The most striking finding is that even the pizza category, the best performer, suggests sides on only 28.6% of calls. This means seven out of 10 pizza orders are completed without any attempt to add complementary items, meaning the industry is systematically underperforming order enhancement.



Pizza: The Upsell Masters (Still Leaving Money Behind)

Pizza Segment Metrics

Pizza Quick Stats

75.6%

Promotion mention
rate (highest across
all segments)

28.6%

Side suggestion
rate (highest across
all segments)

85.5%

ETA
provision rate

83.8%

dietary options
knowledge

Pizza restaurants lead the industry in order enhancement. At 75.6%, three-quarters of pizza calls include promotion mentions, nearly 10 points higher than any other segment. Side suggestions occur on 28.6% of calls, 50% more frequently than the next-best category (FSR at 18.9%).

Why Pizza Excels at Upselling

The pizza sector's upsell advantage stems from business model fundamentals:

- **Natural add-on structure:** Pizza orders logically pair with wings, breadsticks, drinks, and desserts. The menu architecture encourages bundling.
- **Promotion-driven pricing:** Pizza brands compete aggressively on deals (i.e., "Two for Tuesday," "large 3-topping for \$9.99"). Staff must know current offers to remain competitive.
- **Commission/incentive culture:** Many pizza locations incentivize upselling through employee contests, shift bonuses, or commission structures. Employees have financial motivation to enhance orders.
- **Script integration:** Pizza phone scripts explicitly prompt upselling, so the query becomes automatic rather than optional.



The 71% Gap: Pizza's Remaining Opportunity

Despite leading the industry, the pizza segment's 28.6% side suggestion rate means **71.4% of orders** end without attempted add-ons. This represents enormous revenue leakage, even for the best performers.

Consider the math: A typical pizza location handles 40 calls per day. At a 28.6% side suggestion rate, only 11 calls receive upsell attempts. The other 29 are naked transactions. If the average side item value is six dollars and the conversion rate is 50%, that's 14.5 missed sales per day, which equals \$31,755 ($14.5 \times \$6 = \$87/\text{day} = \$31,755$) annually per location. For a 100-location chain, that's **\$3.2 million in upsell revenue left uncaptured.**





Fast Casual: Operational Excellence Without Revenue Focus

Fast Casual Metrics

Fast Casual Quick Stats

66.2%

promotion
mention rate

18.2%

side
suggestion rate

88.7%

ETA provision
rate (highest across
all segments)

95.5%

Dietary options
knowledge (highest
across all segments)

The fast casual category demonstrates a fascinating contradiction: best-in-class operational information delivery paired with mediocre revenue enhancement. At an **88.7% ETA provision** and **95.5% dietary knowledge**, this segment excels at answering customer questions and setting expectations. However, **18.2% side suggestions** and **66.2% promo mentions** indicate weak commercial instincts.



The Service vs. Sales Divide

Fast casual brands position themselves as premium QSR alternatives offering better ingredients, healthier options, and customizable meals. This messaging attracts health-conscious, detail-oriented customers who ask lots of questions. Staff training reflects this, as employees can expertly explain product details and demonstrate how to modify orders in the app.

What some of these employees aren't trained to do is close with **"Would you like to add a cookie?"** or **"We're running a BOGO bowl special today."** The service ethos, which is to assist customers in making informed choices, doesn't always extend to revenue maximization.

The Premium Pricing Paradox

Fast casual restaurants typically charge premium prices (i.e., \$12-15 for entrées vs. QSR's \$6-8 per item), creating higher margins that could absorb aggressive promotion. However, they mention promotions less frequently than the pizza sector (66.2% vs. 75.6%).

Two factors explain this paradox. First, fast casual brands compete on quality instead of price. Running constant promotions undermines value perception. Second, these brands often lack the deal infrastructure pizza has built, so the menu doesn't facilitate promotional upselling.

This lack of upselling creates missed opportunities because premium customers are still price sensitive. Mentioning "add a drink and cookie **for \$3 more**" **works even when base prices are high**. Thus, the fast casual category's reluctance to promote leaves easy money uncaptured.



The Customization Trade-off

The fast casual segment's build-your-own model (i.e., Chipotle bowls, Panera's "You Pick Two," Sweetgreen salads) creates complex orders that consume phone time explaining options. Employees are exhausted by the time they finish walking customers through protein choices, dressing options, and modifications. Suggesting a side feels like prolonging an already-long interaction. The result is operational excellence that paradoxically reduces commercial effectiveness.



Full Service: Missing the Phone Upsell Window

Full-Service Restaurant Metrics

FSR Quick Stats

61.8%

promotion
mention rate

18.9%

side
suggestion rate

87.2%

ETA
provision rate

84.6%

dietary options
knowledge

Full-service restaurants show mid-tier performance across all upsell metrics. At **61.8% promotion mentions** and **18.9% side suggestions**, these brands perform better than QSRs but lag behind the pizza and fast casual categories. This mediocrity is surprising given FSR's hospitality positioning and server-based upselling culture.

The In-Person Upsell Bias

FSR businesses are built around in-person upselling. Servers are trained to suggest appetizers, upsell premium proteins, push desserts, and recommend wine pairings. These techniques drive check averages and server tips. Many FSR brands tie server compensation directly to sales performance through tip structures or sales contests.

Phone calls don't go to servers; they go to hosts. Hosts are compensated hourly instead of via tips and have no financial incentive to enhance phone orders. **Their job isn't revenue maximization**; it's reservation management and greeting arrivals. When a host takes a takeout order, they're simply processing a transaction that distracts from their primary responsibilities.

The result is that the FSR segment's sophisticated in-person upsell culture doesn't transfer to phone operations. The employees answering phones aren't the ones trained to sell.



The Takeout Revenue Miss

FSR phone orders fall into three categories: reservations (information only, no revenue), general inquiries (hours, menu questions), and takeout orders. Although only takeout orders present upsell opportunities, they receive the least attention.

Many FSR brands view takeout as secondary revenue, necessary during COVID but not core business. This mindset shows in execution, as an FSR host taking a takeout order treats it as an interruption to their primary tasks rather than an opportunity to maximize revenue.

Consider the missed opportunity of a customer calling to order \$60 in takeout. The host captures the order, confirms pickup time, and ends the call. A server handling that same order in person would suggest an appetizer, upsell the protein, and push dessert. That \$60 order becomes \$85. But on the phone, hosts skip all upselling, leaving at least \$25 on the table.

The way fast casual is staffed isn't built for interruptions. It's built for flow. Everyone has a role, and it works when things move in sequence. The phone breaks that flow. It pulls someone out of what they're doing, and no one is fully responsible for it. So it turns into this shared task that doesn't get handled well when things get busy. Then the kitchen hits capacity, and this is the part most people don't say out loud. Sometimes calls don't get answered on purpose. Not as a policy, just as a reaction. Because answering the phone means adding more orders into a system that's already maxed out. So what looks like poor performance is sometimes the team trying to protect the operation from getting overwhelmed. And once the pressure is on, all the training fades. Greetings get shorter. Tone changes.

Michael Beck, CEO, [Inc Tank](#)



QSR: Scripted Attempts, Inconsistent Execution

Quick Service Restaurant Metrics

QSR Quick Stats

57.5%

promotion mention
rate (lowest across
all segments)

17.8%

Side suggestion
rate (lowest across all
segments)

74.6%

ETA provision
rate (lowest across all
segments)

92.7%

dietary options
knowledge

The QSR segment ranks last or near last across most upsell metrics despite having the most scripted and standardized operations in the industry. With rates of 57.5% for promotion mentions and 17.8% for side suggestions, it underperforms in every category except dietary knowledge (92.7%).

The Drive-Thru vs. Phone Divide

QSR brands have perfected drive-thru upselling. "Would you like fries with that?" is cultural shorthand for suggestive selling. Drive-thru systems prompt employees with upsell scripts, track suggestive sell rates, and tie performance to employee evaluations. Major QSR chains consistently measure drive-thru attachment rates (the percentage of orders with add-ons) and average tickets.

Phone orders lack this infrastructure. There's no screen prompting "suggest apple pie" or manager monitoring whether staff offered to upsize. And, no metric tracks phone order attachment rates. Drive-thru is measured, managed, and optimized, while phones are answered when convenient and processed transactionally.

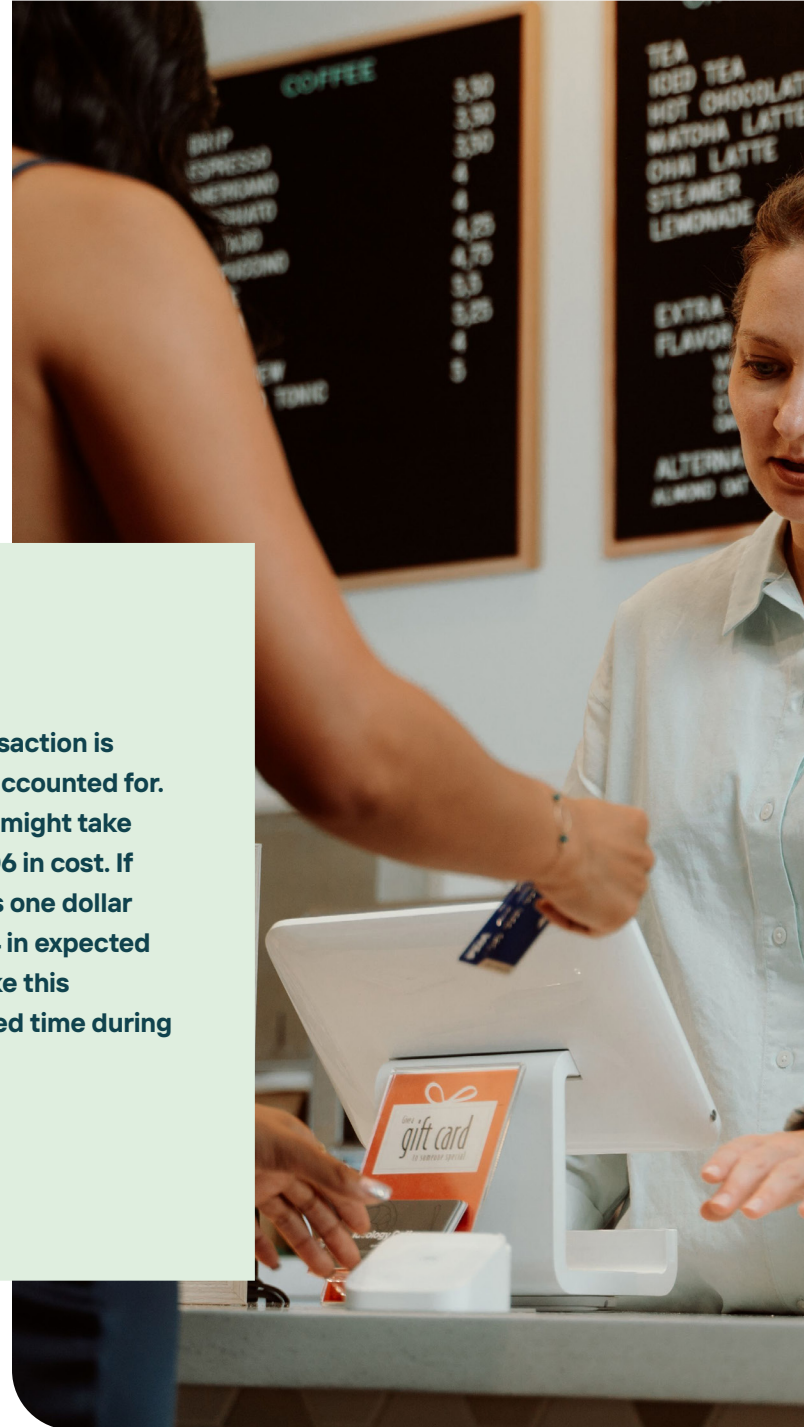


The Volume Trap

Recall Chapter 2's finding of QSRs answering phone calls in just 17.5 seconds (fastest in industry) but missing 40% of these interactions. Speed prioritization directly conflicts with upselling, which requires conversation.

Staff answering a phone during lunch rush face conflicting directives. The employee has the option to answer quickly to minimize wait time, upsell to increase ticket size, or immediately return to in-store customers. Most choose speed, capture the base order, and move on. The 30 seconds required to

suggest sides, mention promotions, and close the upsell feels unjustifiable when five customers are waiting at the counter.



The Labor Cost Calculation

QSR operators optimize for labor efficiency. Each transaction is measured in seconds, and every employee minute is accounted for. Suggesting a two-dollar side item during a phone call might take an extra 15 seconds. At \$15 an hour for labor, that's \$.06 in cost. If the suggestion converts at 50%, the expected value is one dollar in revenue minus the \$.06 cost, which equals a \$.94 in expected contribution. Nevertheless, operators often don't make this calculation and only see the extra 15 seconds as wasted time during rush instead of a high-ROI revenue opportunity.



The Promotion Paradox: Deals Exist but Go Unmentioned

Every segment in our analysis runs active promotions, but promotion mention rates range from 57.5% (QSRs) to 75.6% (pizza restaurants). This means 24% to 42% of customers never hear about deals, even when calling during active promotional periods.

Why Promotions Go Unmentioned

- **Employees don't know current offers:** High turnover and inadequate training mean staff are unaware of this week's deals.
- **Promotions change too frequently:** Weekly or daily deal rotations overwhelm employees who can't keep track.
- **Complexity discourages mention:** "Buy one get one half off on Tuesdays after 5 p.m. on large specialty pizzas" is too complicated to quickly explain.
- **No incentive to promote:** Staff compensation doesn't reward promotion mentions, so employees skip them to save time.

The irony is that restaurants invest heavily in promotional marketing, such as digital ads, direct mail, app notifications, and signage, to drive customer interest. When interested customers call, though, employees don't mention the promotions. The marketing spend drives the call, but execution fails to capitalize.

Operators are spending real money to get the phone to ring — and then leaving the conversion on the table.

The ad worked. The customer called. That's the hardest part of the funnel, and it's already done. But if the person answering has no idea there's a promotion running, or doesn't think to mention it, you've just paid to create interest you didn't capture. That's not a marketing problem. That's an execution gap that shows up nowhere in your marketing ROI.

Ryan Louis, CEO, [Revmo](#)

"The food is
really good"
Savannah Morning News, GA

"The perfect hand cut fries
alone are not to be missed"
Long Island Press

The Side Suggestion Gap: \$10 Billion Industry Opportunity

Side item suggestions represent the purest form of upselling, which is adding complementary products that enhance the customer experience while increasing ticket size. However, across all segments, side suggestions occur on just 18-29% of calls.

The Industry-Wide Math

Consider aggregate industry impact. The restaurant industry handles hundreds of millions of phone orders annually.

Conservative assumptions:

- Approximately **500,000** restaurants in the United States with phone ordering
- An **average of 20 phone orders per day** per location
- A total of 365 days per year = **3.65 billion phone orders annually**
- A current side suggestion rate of **~22% (weighted average)**
- A **75% target rate** if properly executed (matching the pizza segment's promo rate)
- Additional suggestions: **53% × 3.65 billion = 1.93 billion opportunities**
- A **35% conversion rate** on suggestions
- Average side item value of **\$5**

Annual opportunity:

$$1.93 \text{ billion} \times 35\% \times \$5 = \$3.4 \text{ billion}$$

This estimate is conservative. If we include drink upsells, dessert attachments, and premium protein upgrades, the total industry opportunity likely exceeds \$10 billion annually.



The Training vs. Technology Question

The Training Approach

Traditional wisdom suggests better training solves upsell problems. Teach employees to suggest sides, explain promotions, and close orders professionally. The pizza segment's success seemingly validates this, as their 75.6% promo mention rate reflects cultural emphasis on upselling.

Training, though, faces structural barriers, including:

- **High turnover erases** training investment within months
- **Pressure during rush hours** overrides training, causing reversion to transactional processing
- **Training requires time employees** don't have and managers can't spare
- **Lack of measurement means** training effectiveness remains unknown and unimproved



The Technology Alternative

Emerging phone AI systems can handle upselling systematically. These platforms never forget to mention promotions, consistently suggest relevant sides, and maintain enthusiasm through the umpteenth call of the day. Plus, they don't get flustered during rush hours or skip upsells to save time.

Chapter 5 will explore AI's role in restaurant phone operations in depth. For now, the key insight is that upselling is precisely the kind of repetitive, rule-based task at which AI excels. Training humans to upsell 75% of the time is hard, but programming AI to upsell 100% of the time is straightforward.



The Path Forward

The upsell opportunity documented in this chapter represents a different kind of revenue leak than that included in Chapters 1-3. Missed calls, long wait times, and poor greetings prevent transactions from happening. But weak upselling means transactions happen; they're just smaller than they should be.

This makes the upsell gap simultaneously more subtle and solvable. You don't need to redesign operations to mention promotions or hire more staff to suggest sides. The answer is systematic execution that ensures the behaviors that drive revenue occur consistently instead of only occasionally.

The subsequent chapters explore how top-performing brands create this consistency, why traditional solutions fall short, and how technology is enabling systematic upselling at scale.

[Click here to download all five chapters.](#) →

The first step is measurement. You can't fix what you don't measure, and most restaurants have no visibility into their phone performance.

[Click here for a free phone audit to see how your restaurants are performing.](#) →

Coming in Chapter 5: *The AI Solution. How artificial intelligence is solving the revenue leaks documented in Chapters 1-4 through consistent execution at scale.*



Revmo AI is a Phoenix-based company **specializing in voice-enabled conversational AI designed for restaurants**. From handling inbound calls and taking reservations to answering common customer questions, **Revmo helps restaurants streamline communication, reduce missed calls, and keep tables full**. By automating phone interactions, Revmo improves efficiency, enhances the guest experience, and **allows restaurant teams to focus on what they do best; serving great food and creating memorable dining experiences**.

REVMO

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more info!



revmo.ai/restaurants

Click here to download all five chapters. —→

State of Calls Report 2026

Chapter 5

The AI Solution

Promise, Performance, and the Path to Scalable Phone Excellence





It's 11:47 on Saturday night, and a customer calls a pizza restaurant to place an order. After just two rings, a warm, professional voice answers immediately, saying, **"Thank you for calling ABC Pizza on Main Street. How can I help you tonight?"**

The customer orders a large pepperoni. "Great choice! Just so you know, we're running a special right now: **add a second large pizza for just \$10, or get our garlic knots for \$5.** Would either of those interest you?" After the customer adds an order of knots, the voice provides an accurate ETA, confirms the delivery address, and ends with "Your total is \$24.99, and we'll have that to you in about 35 minutes. Thanks for choosing ABC Pizza!"

Lasting only 90 seconds, the call involved no human employee. An AI voice proved sophisticated enough to professionally handle the entire transaction yet subtle enough that the customer neither noticed nor seemed to care.

Chapters 1-4 documented systematic failures in restaurant phone operations, including a QSR missed **calls rate of 40%, 30+ second wait times**, inconsistent greetings, and minimal upselling. Each chapter revealed problems, such as **staff shortages, competing demands, training gaps, and inconsistent execution, rooted in human limitations.**

This chapter explores whether artificial intelligence can solve these problems. It also examines AI's current performance and its potential to transform restaurant phone operations across all restaurant categories.

The AI Promise: Solving Human-Scale Problems

AI phone systems promise to resolve every pain point documented in this report:

100% Answer Rate

AI never misses calls. It doesn't get overwhelmed during rush, juggle competing priorities, or step away for breaks. The problem outlined in Chapter 1, **QSRs missing 40% of calls, theoretically disappears**. Every ring is answered, and each customer immediately reaches an agent.

Instant Answer Speed

AI answers in under one ring on average. The Chapter 1 finding of customers **waiting 5.5 rings before abandoning becomes irrelevant**. Customers never wait long enough to get frustrated because AI instantly picks up.

Perfect Consistency

AI greets every caller identically, using the brand name, location, and polite introduction. The issue outlined in Chapter 3 — **the fast casual category's 60.6% greeting rate collapsing to 47.6% at dinner** — doesn't happen with AI. There's no lunch versus dinner degradation, training gaps, or fatigue-driven shortcuts.

Systematic Upselling

AI never forgets to mention promotions or suggest sides. The Chapter 4 finding of **only 28.6% of pizza restaurants' calls receiving side suggestions** becomes 100%. Every order gets enhancement attempts, and each promotion gets mentioned. Plus, every upsell opportunity is enacted.



The promise is that AI addresses every documented failure through tireless, consistent, and scalable execution. However, promises and performance often diverge. **Our data reveals a more complex reality.**

The Performance Reality: AI vs. Human Benchmarks

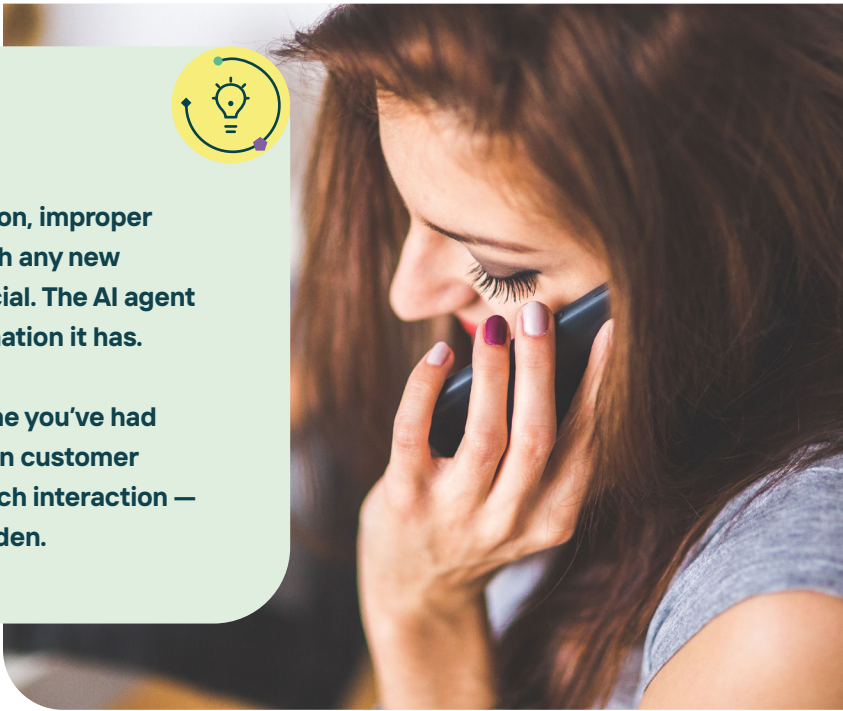
Our dataset includes **224 AI-answered calls** and **9,187 human-answered ones**. This sample size limitation means that AI conclusions are preliminary and not definitive. But the patterns are not only revealing but also encouraging and noteworthy.

Metric	AI	Human	Winner
Rings Before Answer	0.88	1.84	AI
Wait Time (seconds)	0.88	28	AI
Greeting Rate	69.6%	74.3%	Human
Sentiment Score	3.30	3.90	Human
Promo Mentions	63.0%	67.7%	Human
Ring Consistency (std. dev., lower is better)	1.20	2.01	AI

Important Note

Many AI struggles are due to incomplete information, improper scripting, or a set-it-and-forget-it approach. As with any new technology, implementation and adoption are crucial. The AI agent will only know how to respond based on the information it has.

If you've set up an AI agent, it might be the first time you've had access to real-time call data. In addition to common customer frustrations, you can now strategically examine each interaction — even natural upsell opportunities — previously hidden.



The Scorecard: Mixed Results

AI wins decisively on answer speed (.88 rings vs. 1.84) and consistency. But the technology loses on customer satisfaction (3.30 vs. 3.90 sentiment) and greeting professionalism (69.6% vs. 74.3%). The upsell performance is almost equal (63% vs. 68% promotion mention rate).

This mixed performance demands deeper analysis. Why does AI answer faster but create worse customer experiences? Why do AI greetings, which should be perfectly scripted, underperform humans?

Let's address the elephant in the room.

Where AI Excels: Speed and Availability

Answer Speed: The Clear AI Victory

AI's .88-ring average represents near-instantaneous pickup. Customers hear one ring at most before connection. **This 52% improvement over human performance** (1.84 rings) translates to 2.9 seconds saved per call, a marked difference when customers on average abandon after 5.5 rings.

More importantly, AI's consistency (**1.20 standard deviation vs. 2.01 for humans**) means customers get predictable service. Humans vary wildly; some answer in one ring, while others pick up in seven or more. AI answers in one ring every time, a consistency that builds trust and sets clear expectations.

Important Note

Although our dataset shows limited after-hours data, AI's theoretical advantage is overwhelming. Humans answer anywhere from zero to 42% of after-hours calls, depending on staffing, but AI answers 100% of these inquiries. For restaurants losing revenue to missed evening and weekend calls, AI represents a transformation of turning a zero percent answer rate into 100% overnight.



Sure, you're probably not going to capture orders after hours. But you could secure reservations, catering opportunities, and general inquiries for future visits.

24/7 Availability: AI's Unfair Advantage

AI doesn't sleep, take breaks, or call in sick. A restaurant closes at 10 p.m. but receives calls until 11 p.m. Humans ignore these calls, but AI captures them, whether taking orders for next-day pickup or providing information that drives future business.

For 24-hour operators, such as late-night QSRs and diners, AI solves overnight staffing nightmares. The graveyard shift typically runs skeleton crews focused on the kitchen and drive-thru. Phones go unanswered or receive terrible service from exhausted, undertrained staff. **AI provides consistent service at 3 a.m. that matches 3 p.m. quality.**





AI's Service Immediacy Advantage

The "wait time" metric reveals a pivotal AI advantage that traditional measurements are missing. Our data shows that AI agents immediately provide service to a customer, compared to **28 seconds for humans**. A comparison shows two fundamentally different experiences:

Human "wait time" = time on hold or waiting for attention

- **Customer answered**, then put on hold while staff checks availability
- **Customer waiting** while staff asks manager about substitutions
- **Customer on hold** while staff processes payment or looks up information

AI "wait time" = active service delivery

- **Customer receives** immediate greeting and menu assistance
- **Order taken**, modifications confirmed, payment processed, all continuously
- **No hold time**, transfers, or waiting for callbacks

The distinction matters. When a human answers and the customer experiences **28 seconds of wait time**, they're listening to hold music, waiting for an employee to check on something, or sitting in silence while staff multitasks. AI immediately begins placing orders, asking questions, getting recommendations, or confirming details.

AI eliminates wait time. From the moment the call connects, the customer is being helped. Instead of customer frustration, the longer metric reflects more thorough service, such as **AI asking confirming questions, suggesting add-ons, or providing accurate ETAs**.

Customers are not waiting with AI. They're being served.

Where AI Struggles: The Customer Experience Gap

The Sentiment Problem: 0.60 Points Behind

AI's 3.30 average sentiment rate compared to the 3.90 achieved by humans represents a noticeable customer satisfaction deficit. On a five-point scale, a **.60-point gap indicates 15% worse performance**. Customers interacting with AI are measurably less satisfied than those speaking with humans.

Several factors contribute:

- **Uncanny valley effect:** Customers can tell they're talking to AI, creating discomfort or resentment.
- **Reduced flexibility:** AI rigidly follows scripts, unable to adapt to unusual requests or complex situations, resulting in inquiries that get transferred to staff anyway.
- **Empathy deficit:** Humans detect frustration and respond with warmth; AI misses emotional cues.
- **Transaction focus:** AI optimizes efficiency, while humans balance efficiency with rapport.

This sentiment gap matters most for segments competing on hospitality. FSR customers calling to make reservations expect warm, personal service. An AI voice, no matter how polished, undermines premium positioning. **Customers in the fast casual and pizza sectors, where transactions are more functional, might better tolerate AI.**

The 0.60-point sentiment gap is the number we spend the most time thinking about — because it's the honest part of the data. AI is faster, it's consistent, and it never has a bad shift. But right now, customers know they're talking to a machine, and for a meaningful percentage of them, that creates friction before the conversation even starts. The goal isn't to pretend that gap doesn't exist. It's to close it. The roadmap is getting AI to the point where it reads the room — where it recognizes that a caller who's been on hold is not the same conversation as a caller who dialed in fresh, and responds accordingly. We're not there yet across the board. But the delta between AI and human sentiment is shrinking every quarter, and the segments where AI already performs closest to human — high-volume, transactional, predictable — tell us exactly where the technology is headed.

Ryan Louis, CEO, [Revmo](#)



The Hybrid Model: The Best of Both Worlds

Given AI's mixed performance, prioritizing superior speed and availability but lagging in customer satisfaction, the optimal solution might be artificial intelligence augmenting humans instead of replacing them. Different call types each suit a specific handler.

AI-First Call Types

Certain interactions play to AI's strengths:

- **After-hours calls:** AI's 100% availability versus humans' zero percent
- **Ordering:** Transactional calls (i.e., standard or complex menu items, delivery addresses, payment processing) where speed matters more than warmth
- **Information requests:** Factual inquiries (i.e., hours, locations, menu questions) with clear answers
- **Overflow/peak periods:** Overwhelmed human staff, AI handling excess volume

Human-First Call Types

Other interactions demand human judgment and empathy:

- **Complaints/service recovery:** Angry customers need empathy and problem-solving flexibility that AI lacks.
- **High-value orders:** Large catering orders, corporate events, and wedding inquiries are relationship-building opportunities
- **Premium brand interactions:** FSR reservations and fine dining inquiries where hospitality is the product



Smart Routing: The Implementation Key

Advanced AI systems can route intelligently. AI answers the call, recognizes complexity or frustration, and transfers to humans when needed. The customer hears, **"Let me connect you with someone who can help with that specifically."** It's a transition that feels natural.

This hybrid model captures the AI benefits of speed, availability, and consistency while mitigating its weaknesses of empathy, flexibility, and customer satisfaction. **Most importantly, it protects human staff from the burden of repetitive tasks and frees them for interactions where humanity matters.**

Segment-Specific AI Strategies

AI suitability varies dramatically by segment. **Each sector faces different phone challenges and serves customers with contrasting expectations.**

QSR: AI for All

The quick service segment is perfectly suited for AI phone systems. QSR calls are transactional, menu-standardized, and volume-driven. The Chapter 1 finding of a 40% missed call rate makes AI's 100% figure transformative. **QSR customers prioritize speed over warmth** (recall Chapter 3's finding that QSR greetings don't boost sentiment), so AI's efficiency focus aligns with customer preferences.

Recommended approach: AI handles all phone orders, transfers only when customers explicitly request human assistance or orders exceed complexity thresholds. **Employees focus entirely on in-store and drive-thru service.**

Pizza: AI for Volume, Humans for Relationships

Pizza businesses handle the highest phone volume in the industry while maintaining relationship-based customer loyalty. **AI can manage 70-80% of calls** about orders, deliveries, and operating hours, while humans handle regular customers and complaint resolution.

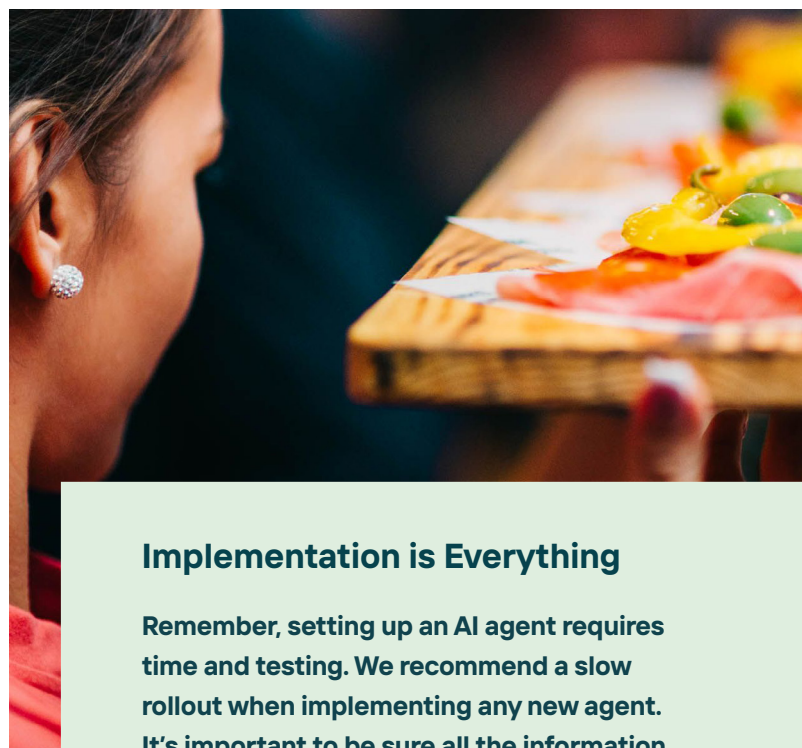
Fast Casual: AI for All

The fast casual category encounters the worst dinner degradation across all metrics (Chapters 2-3). **AI can absorb off-peak volume and handle build-your-own orders**, allowing humans to manage in-person rush periods.

FSR: Limited AI Role, Strategic Human Focus

Full-service restaurants compete for hospitality and personal service. AI's sentiment deficit (3.30 vs. 3.90) directly contradicts FSR brand positioning. **AI should field only low-stakes interactions** that don't touch the core dining experience.

Recommended approach: AI answers after-hours for basic information and manages reservation requests for staff follow-up. During business hours, humans handle all calls. **AI serves not as the primary interface** but as backup during extreme peaks or emergencies.



Implementation is Everything

Remember, setting up an AI agent requires time and testing. We recommend a slow rollout when implementing any new agent. It's important to be sure all the information is given, scripts are dialed, and transfers are handled correctly. Regardless of when the agent is implemented, it is best practice to audit your call data at least once per month. Daily, then weekly and monthly. You will undoubtedly find hidden insights in your call data that help you better serve the customers and capture more revenue.



The Cost-Benefit Analysis: When AI Makes Financial Sense

AI phone systems require investment, including software subscriptions, integration costs, and ongoing optimization. **Operators must weigh these costs against revenue capture and labor savings.**

Revenue Capture: The Upside

Return to Chapter 1's QSR revenue leak calculation of \$73,000 annually per location from missed calls. If AI captures even half of those missed calls, turning the 40% miss rate into 20%, it is a **\$36,500 annual revenue gain per location**. For a 50-location franchise, that equals \$1.8 million.

Add Chapter 4's upsell opportunity. AI systematically mentions promotions and suggests sides on 100% of calls versus the current 18-29% rates achieved by humans. With a conservative estimate of \$20,000 in additional revenue from improved order enhancement at 50 locations, that's \$1 million annually.

Combined revenue opportunity: **\$2.8 million annually for 50-location system**. AI subscription costs typically run \$100-500 per location monthly (\$1,200-6,000 annually). **Even at the high end, ROI is 47x**. At conservative estimates, AI pays for itself in weeks.

You can see for yourself how much your business can potentially capture using our Missed Calls Calculator [here](#).



Labor Impact: The Complicated Reality

AI doesn't necessarily reduce headcounts because many restaurants are already understaffed. Instead, **the technology reallocates human labor from phones to higher-value activities**, such as in-person service, food preparation, cleanliness, and hospitality.

For a QSR location handling **50 phone orders daily**, employees spend roughly two to three hours managing calls. AI recaptures that time without reducing headcount. Staff use the extra time for faster drive-thru service, better order accuracy, and cleaner dining rooms, all improvements that boost customer satisfaction and repeat business.

The labor benefit from AI is optimization. You're already paying those employee hours, but **AI ensures they're spent on activities that humans do best.**



Pure utility and labor savings are great, but the real value is in what we call the "return on attention." By taking these repetitive, high-volume tasks off the plates of our frontline teams, we give them their time back. We need them focusing their energy on developing our staff and elevating the guest experience — not staring at screens and drowning in seas of data.

Patrick Bobrukiewicz,
Vice President Data Services,
[Thrive Restaurant Group](#)



Implementation Considerations: Getting AI Right

AI phone systems fail when implemented carelessly. Success requires strategic planning across multiple dimensions.

Voice Quality and Naturalness

Early AI voices sounded robotic, which created customer resistance. Modern systems use neural text-to-speech that sounds almost human. Operators must test voices extensively and choose systems where most customers **don't notice they're talking to AI**.

Critical consideration: Voice should match brand positioning. Upscale FSRs necessitate polished, warm, and professional tones. QSRs can use efficient, friendly, and slightly more casual voices. Be aware that misalignment creates brand confusion.

Menu Integration and Accuracy

AI must integrate with POS systems, menu databases, and inventory management. AI platforms need to know immediately when items are sold out or menu items and prices change. **The updates must synchronize automatically** because manual updates create failure points.

Critical consideration: Start with a one-restaurant rollout to ensure your AI agents are dialed in and working correctly.

Escalation Protocols

AI needs clear escalation paths to humans for frustrated customers, complaints, payment issues, or any other situation in which AI detects confusion or anger. The transfer must be smooth, so customers don't have to repeat any information.

Critical consideration: Train staff on AI's backup role. They need to know how AI escalates, what information is passed, and how to handle frustrated customers who have already dealt with artificial intelligence unsuccessfully.

Continuous Optimization

AI systems improve through data. Operators must monitor sentiment scores, escalation rates, order accuracy, call completion times, and customer complaints. Review daily or weekly to start, which allows you to separate successful AI deployments from failed ones.

Critical consideration: Assign ownership, as someone must be responsible for AI performance, including reviewing metrics, adjusting scripts, retraining models, and addressing failures. **Without ownership, AI stagnates, and customer satisfaction declines.**

The Future Evolution: What's Next for Restaurant AI

Current AI phone systems represent early-stage technology. **The performance gaps documented in this chapter reflect immaturity, not fundamental limits.** The trajectory points toward rapid improvement.

Near-Term Evolution (1-2 Years)

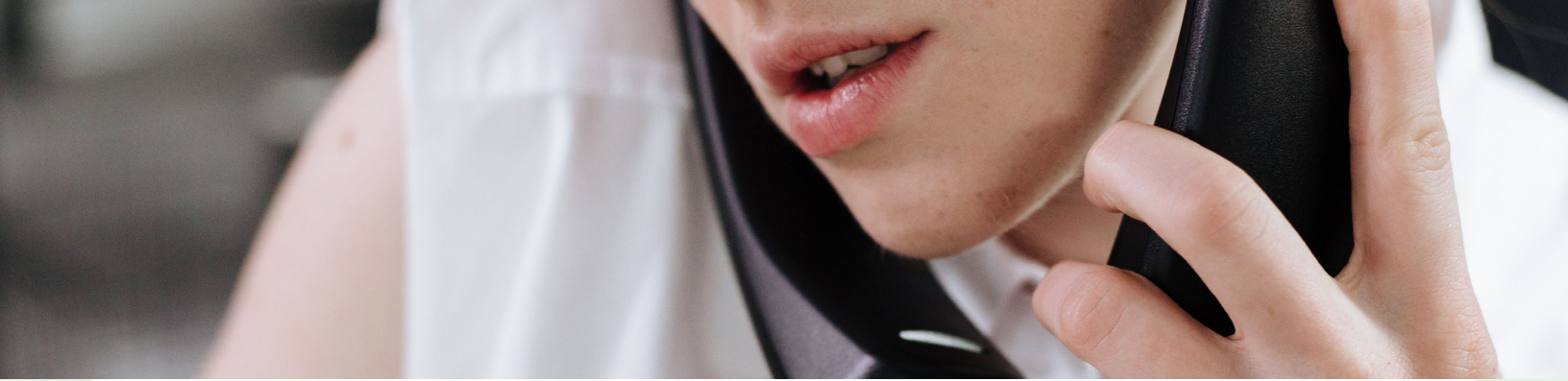
- **Sentiment parity:** Improved emotional intelligence and empathy modeling should close the .60-point satisfaction gap.
- **Accent and noise handling:** Better speech recognition will reduce errors from background noise, accents, and crosstalk.
- **Personalization:** Caller ID integration will enable AI to greet regulars by name and recall preferences. This is currently available in some instances and will continue to improve over time.

Medium-Term Evolution (3-5 Years)

- **Proactive service recovery:** AI will detect frustration early and automatically escalate or offer compensation before customers complain.
- **Multi-modal integration:** AI will handle voice, text, and app interactions smoothly. Start order on phone, modify via text, and complete in app.
- **Predictive recommendations:** AI will anticipate orders based on history, time, weather, and local events.
- **Dynamic pricing and promotion optimization:** AI will test different offers in real-time and learn which upsells work best for specific customers.

The competitive implication is that early adopters will gain two to three years of learning and optimization advantage. By the **time competitors deploy AI, leaders will have refined systems that convert at higher rates, satisfy better, and operate more efficiently.** The window for first-mover advantage is now.





The Path Forward

This report has documented systematic failures across restaurant phone operations, including billions of dollars in lost revenue from missed calls, wait times, poor service quality, and inadequate upselling. Chapters 1-4 reveal problems rooted in human limitations, and AI offers solutions to every documented problem.

AI isn't a magic solution that doesn't require thought, though. Current technology has gaps, including sentiment deficit, wait time issues, and implementation complexity. Success requires strategic deployment matched to segment needs, customer expectations, and operational realities.

The strategic questions operators must answer:

- Which call types should AI handle versus those managed by humans?
- How do we maintain brand voice and hospitality standards through AI?
- What metrics will we use to measure AI success beyond answer rate?
- How do we handle the transition period during which both AI and humans answer calls?
- Who owns AI optimization and continuous improvement?

The competitive reality is that AI phone systems are transitioning from experimental to essential. Early movers gain learning benefits, revenue capture, and operational efficiency that compound over time.

The first step remains measurement. Understanding current performance, such as answer rates, wait times, greeting consistency, and upsell frequency, is a prerequisite to improvement. You can't optimize what you don't measure.

Click here for a free phone audit to establish your baseline performance across all metrics documented in this report. See exactly where AI could drive the greatest impact on your operations.



Conclusion

Missed calls, long waits, and skipped upsells all cost restaurants billions of dollars annually. This report puts numbers behind that cost and verifies that the technology to fix it already exists.

AI answers faster and never misses a call. It works after hours when no one else is picking up the phone. For most locations, the revenue gained from these two things alone pays for the AI system many times over.

AI isn't perfect yet, though. Customers are still less satisfied talking to AI than to a person. That gap matters, and it means AI shouldn't handle every call. The best approach uses AI for speed and volume and keeps people in charge of calls that need empathy or judgment.

What that mix looks like will differ by restaurant. A QSR taking simple orders can rely on AI more than a full-service restaurant built around personal hospitality. However, every operator should start by measuring your current call performance before deciding where AI helps most.

The technology is ready. The only question left is whether you act on it before your competitors do.

**The question is:
Will you capture
that value,
or will your
competitors?**





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