



RESTAURANT GROWTH BY THE NUMBERS

Brands weigh in on the 3 metrics that matter



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Survey takeaways

A survey of 150 restaurant leaders conducted by Olo and Studio's Restaurant Dive found that the brands most likely to report growth are the ones most confident in measuring three core metrics that drive sales growth:



Guest acquisition



Visit frequency



Average check size

Measurement matters.

Among brands extremely confident in measuring these metrics, **65%** report improved acquisition, **91%** report improved visit frequency, and **100%** report improved average check size.

Visit frequency is a bright spot.

92% are confident in measuring this metric; **73%** say visit frequency has improved over the past year.

First-time guests aren't coming back.

Only **21%** report acquisition gains; nearly **two-thirds** keep fewer than one in five first-time guests past 90 days.

Average check growth is common but incremental.

53% of brands report improvement in average check size, but **most** say check size grew by 1% to 4%; only **23%** saw gains of 5% to 10%.

Guest visibility is a major constraint.

Half of brands have zero visibility into third-party guest identity; half can't track third-party repeat-purchase behavior.

Brands can't decide where to use AI.

47% of leaders report that one of the biggest barriers to widespread AI use is finding the right use cases for it; **45%** name integrating AI with existing systems as one of the biggest barriers.

Restaurant growth is about tracking the right metrics — and then acting on them. Brands that can identify guests, connect data across systems, and respond with relevant experiences are better positioned to improve all three metrics.

When it comes to measuring sales performance, brands are swimming in a sea of vanity metrics. Data distractions are everywhere.

But three metrics need to move in the right direction if you want to see more revenue. To boost sales growth, you must be able to:

- 01 Drive acquisition (increase how many guests you have)
- 02 Increase frequency (increase how often these guests visit)
- 03 Grow average check size (increase how much these guests spend)


$$\frac{\begin{array}{l} \text{\# of active guests} \\ \times \text{ visit frequency} \\ \times \text{ average check size} \end{array}}{\text{annual revenue}}$$

While tracking these numbers may seem simple in theory, getting a clear picture of them is a different story. Brands can't drive scalable, reliable sales unless they know where their organization stands with these numbers right now.

But many struggle to measure these metrics effectively, as a survey of restaurant brands led by Olo and Studio's Restaurant Dive reveals. Nearly four in 10 respondents say data fragmentation across systems makes it difficult to build a view of guest behavior; another 20% say they still use manual reports and spreadsheets to piece this information together.

But for the brands that can measure this information with confidence, **visibility pays off**. The survey found a strong association between confidence in measuring these three metrics and self-reported improvement over the last 12 months. Across all three metrics, the brands most likely to report improvement are the ones that are sure they can track them effectively.

Among brands extremely confident in measuring a given metric:

65% say new guest acquisition improved

91% say visit frequency improved

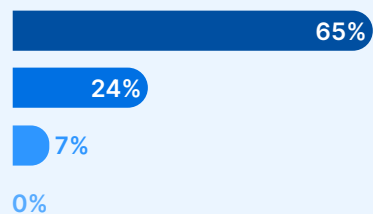
100% say average check improved



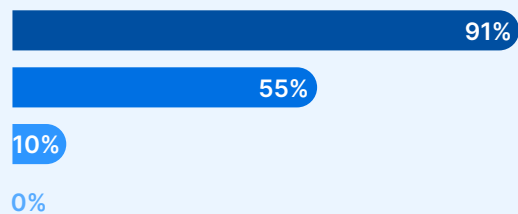
Brands reporting improvement measure with greater confidence

- Extremely confident
- Somewhat confident
- Very confident
- Not too confident

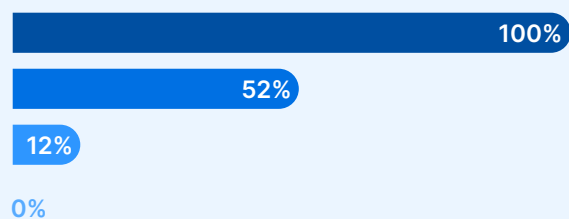
GUEST ACQUISITION



VISIT FREQUENCY



AVERAGE CHECK SIZE



Let's examine each of these metrics and the practices that distinguish the brands reporting stronger results.

Guest acquisition

HOW MANY GUESTS DO YOU HAVE?

Historically, growth through online ordering has come from new guests. But the survey suggests this trend is slowing: **70% of brands say guest acquisition has remained flat over the last 12 months**, and 9% report it falling.

Guest acquisition at a glance

11%

prioritize it to boost hospitality

60%

are very or extremely confident in measuring it

21%

report improvement in the last 12 months

11%

retain 30%+ of first-time guests

The problem, however, is that **the majority of these new guests aren't returning a second time**. And a guest you pay to acquire (and then lose) is a guest you have to buy twice: once to bring them in and again to replace the revenue they could've generated as a repeat customer. Nearly nine out of ten brands say they keep fewer than 30% of first-time guests past 90 days.

Retaining guests becomes even more difficult when brands don't know who their guests are. Off-premise demand is spread across channels: Four in 10 brands get 40% to 59% of their off-premise orders through first-party channels, while third-party marketplaces account for much of the rest — and **half of brands don't know who these guests are**.

Where off-premise orders come from — and what brands can see

41% receive 40% to 59% of off-premise orders from first-party channels

50% have zero visibility into third-party guest identity

50% have zero visibility into third-party repeat-purchase behavior

Without an identifiable guest, a brand can't reliably tell where an order came from or what should happen next. Is it a:

- First-time guest who needs an offer or experience that will encourage a second visit?
- Regular guest who could be invited to join a loyalty program?
- Lapsed guest returning who may warrant a follow-up after the order?

Without knowing who these guests are and what they ordered, next steps are a guessing game.



The brands bringing guests back are making them recognizable

Brands are using a range of tactics to tackle the first-time retention problem, including:

- Second-visit offers that give new guests a reason to return
- Personalized offers based on a guest's first order
- Automated follow-up messaging after a first order
- Invitations to join loyalty programs that recognize and reward future visits

The survey respondents that are the most successful at retaining first-time guests aren't just sending more messages to customers — they're building relationships with guests they can identify, recognize, and re-engage with. The brands focused on doing and measuring this outperform brands that don't.

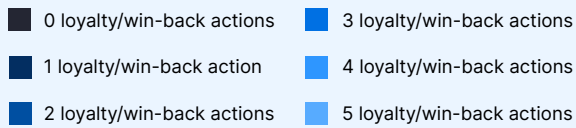
Leading brands pair loyalty with better guest experiences

Among five loyalty and win-back actions measured in the survey, the brands that run three or more of them are **nearly three times as likely as the rest to retain at least 20% of their first-time guests** compared to those that run fewer than three of these five actions.

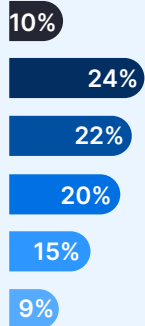
More specifically, brands most successful at keeping at least 20% of their first-time guests within 90 days are using these five actions. On the flip side, among brands that run none or one of these five actions, only 13% and 11% (respectively) retain at least 20% of first-time guests.



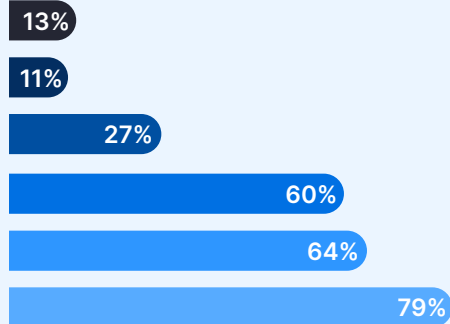
Brands that focus and execute outperform brands that don't



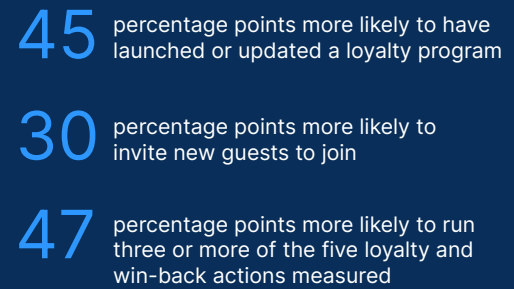
BRANDS USING THIS # OF ACTIONS



BRANDS RETAINING 20%+ OF FIRST-TIME GUESTS WITH LOYALTY/WIN-BACK ACTIONS

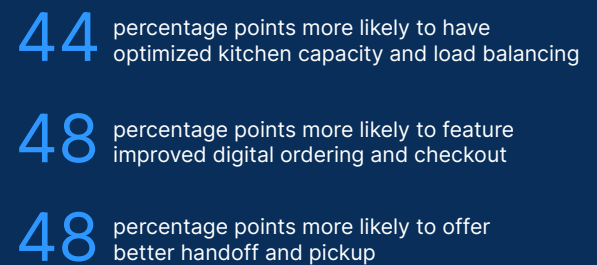


Brands that retain at least one in five first-time guests are:



But the findings suggest that **a first-time guest needs more than a reason to return ... they also need an experience that makes returning worthwhile.** The brands that retain more first-time guests are more likely to offer both.

In addition to loyalty, the brands leading in guest retention also prioritize the operations surrounding the ordering experience and are:





Turning first orders into lasting guest relationships

Marketplaces can connect brands to new demand, as long as those brands have a way to turn that first order into a guest relationship they can recognize and build on.

Running on the Olo digital commerce platform, restaurant operators can identify more guests and use that visibility to create more relevant experiences when they return.

- **California Fish Grill**, a fast-casual seafood chain, increased identified guests by 41% and generated \$7 million in digital revenue using Olo Accounts to recognize guests across touchpoints and the Guest Data Platform to bring first-party guest data together for analysis.
- **Five Guys**, a burger and fry chain, unlocked data insights on 8.1M guests and generated \$16M in revenue using the Guest Data Platform to build data-rich guest profiles and Marketing to execute targeted email campaigns.
- **Waffle House**, a 24/7 restaurant chain, increased repeat-order likelihood by 10% by implementing personalized order recommendations with Olo Serve, which suggest options for new and returning guests.

Brands that can recognize a first-time guest, deliver a smooth experience, and give them a reason to return have **a bigger base they can tap to increase frequency and average check size.**

Visit frequency

HOW OFTEN DO GUESTS RETURN?

Visit frequency is the metric where brands report having the clearest line of sight — and the strongest performance results.

Restaurant operators say they're more confident in measuring frequency than any other performance metric mentioned in the survey: **92% say they are very or extremely confident in their ability to track visit frequency.** And this ability to measure guest behavior is paying off, with nearly three-quarters of respondents seeing improvement in visit frequency over the past 12 months.

Visit frequency at a glance

38%

prioritize it to boost hospitality

92%

are very or extremely confident in measuring it

73%

report improvement in the last 12 months

The brands improving frequency make guest-return data a management priority

A higher rate of frequency improvement depends on measurement and focus.

Brands that can clearly see how often guests return are better positioned to recognize behavior changes and respond before a guest drifts away. Among the brands that are extremely confident in measuring visit frequency, **91% say this metric has improved over the past year.** Among the less-confident brands, only 46% say the same.

This is also a metric that brands are most likely to prioritize, with 38% naming it as a priority for understanding and improving the guest experience. The brands that improved frequency are more than twice as likely to name it a priority metric (46% vs. 18%).



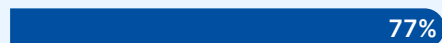
Frequency gains require the ability to act when guest behavior changes

When you track visit frequency, you **can flag a guest who's beginning to drift away** so you have time and opportunity to intervene before they lapse.

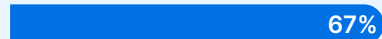
Many brands are using this signal to trigger outreach efforts, with more than half taking actions when:

- Visit frequency decreases
- There's no return from a new guest within a certain time period
- High-value guests don't return within a certain window

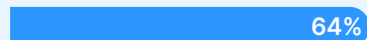
Brands use behavior changes to trigger return visits



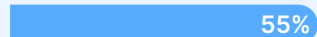
When visit frequency decreases compared to their usual pattern



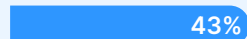
After a first visit with no return within a set number of days



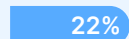
When high-value guests haven't visited within a set number of days



When loyalty program members become inactive after a set number of days



When guests switch from ordering directly to using third-party delivery



After a guest abandons a digital order or cart



“

The brands winning on frequency have figured out something that sounds simple but is hard to execute: make guests feel known.

COLLIN ANDERSON

Vice President of Strategy and Operations, Olo

Average check size

Competing on value puts greater pressure on pricing and margins, which makes average check size harder to grow. Brands are using a range of tactics to encourage larger orders, but the survey suggests there is no single, proven tactic to scale average check size.

Average check size at a glance

27%

prioritize it to boost hospitality

70%

are very or extremely confident in measuring it

53%

report improvement in the last 12 months

Most respondents say they are confident in their ability to measure average check, with 70% being very or extremely confident. They're also testing ways to influence what guests spend, with the most common approaches being:

- **Personalized recommendations** based on guest history that present the guest with items they're most likely to value
- **Helpful suggestions to complete a meal** with relevant add-ons, sides, or pairings at the point of purchase
- **Data-driven pricing or offer adjustments** that connect the guest to the right value proposition
- **Bundles or value-driven offers** that make a larger order feel like a better deal

HOW MUCH DO GUESTS SPEND?



Tactics to influence average check size

63%

Helpful suggestions to complete the meal (add-ons or pairings)

63%

Personalized recommendations based on guest history

56%

Bundles or value-driven offers

37%

General upsell prompts

57%

Change offers and pricing based on data

The brands improving average check size don't rely on one single tactic

Increasing average check size is about making each guest interaction more relevant. To do this, brands need identifiable guest data to understand what a certain guest has ordered in the past and what best complements their order, plus the right technology to apply it consistently across digital ordering experiences.

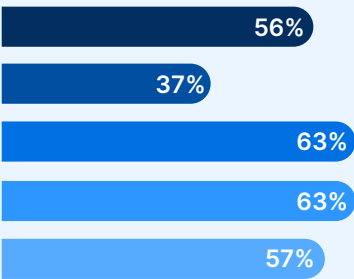
Recommendations rooted in an individual guest's preferences can improve conversion, drive add-ons, and increase basket value:

- > **True Food Kitchen** generates approximately \$150,000 annually through Olo Smart Cross-Sells, which uses order context to surface relevant add-ons and pairings at checkout.
- > **Waffle House** has seen a 4% increase in item adds through Olo Smart Cross-Sells, which helped it turn more orders into larger baskets, while personalized recommendations account for 36% of its online revenue. The brand also reported a 1.6% lift in overall revenue and a 2.4% increase in order conversion from Olo's Recent Items feature, which makes it easy for guests to reorder previous items. That feature is also driving basket-value gains of 10% in testing.

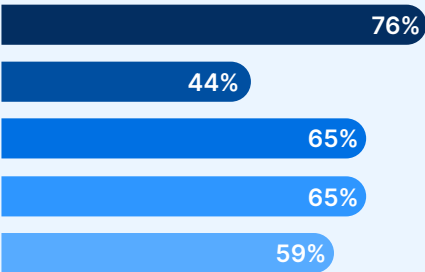
Tactic used

- Bundles or value-driven offers
- General upsell prompts
- Personalized recommendations based on guest history
- Helpful suggestions to complete the meal
- Change offers and pricing based on data

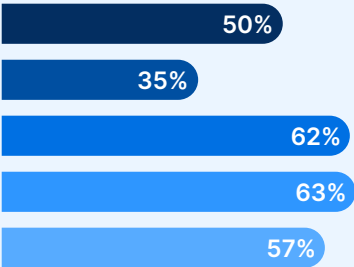
ALL BRANDS



BRANDS WITH 5%+ INCREASE IN CHECK SIZE



BRANDS WITH 5% OR LESS INCREASE IN CHECK SIZE





Where AI is improving restaurant growth

AI is already part of the restaurant technology conversation, but **adoption is slowing because of people, platforms, and policies.**

When sharing which barriers make it most difficult to use AI more broadly, nearly half of respondents say they can't find the right use cases for AI, while 45% point to difficulty integrating AI with platforms they already have, and 37% say risk and compliance concerns are holding them back.

The biggest barriers to AI implementation



For restaurant operators struggling to determine where AI would be the best fit, Anderson recommends **starting with one specific business problem**. He explains that AI should be assistive before it's autonomous. This means it should eliminate manual configuration work, surface the right insight at the right moment, execute with a human in the loop, and build toward more autonomous workflows as trust grows. AI belongs where it genuinely changes the outcome. It should be focused on a problem that machine learning could solve better and faster than generic, universal rules could.

Thinking about the three metrics that drive sales, this could mean using AI to:

- 01 **Identify first-time or at-risk guests**, estimate churn risk, and trigger relevant outreach to improve guest acquisition
- 02 **Pinpoint when an identified guest's behavior changes** and surface opportunities to bring them back and improve visit frequency
- 03 **Use a guest's order history**, current cart, time of day, and location to make relevant recommendations during the ordering journey that increase average check size

For restaurant operators struggling with the second most-mentioned barrier — integration — Anderson recommends pivoting to one system for commerce, ordering, and marketing to eliminate the integration step altogether. When guest data, ordering behavior, and marketing execution sit in the same platform, AI can act on a complete view of the guest instead of relying on data coming from disconnected systems. That gives brands a cleaner foundation for today's use cases and tomorrow's more autonomous workflows.

"No matter what AI tool you use, it's only as good as the data you give it," he explains. "We help you keep your data clean and historically consistent. Without that, you'll have a hard time doing anything related to AI."



Turn metrics that matter into action

Restaurant growth comes down to your brand's ability to accomplish these three things:



Drive acquisition by identifying first-time and dormant guests, bringing them into a first-party relationship and giving them a reason to return



Increase visit frequency by recognizing changes in guest behavior, reducing friction in the return journey and triggering timely, relevant outreach



Grow average check size by using guest and order context to surface recommendations, additions and offers that feel useful rather than generic

But deciding where to focus starts with a strategic view of the business. This means asking questions like:

- What share of our first-time guests order again?
- How many guests were active last year and aren't active now?
- How many times a year does our average guest order?
- What do our best guests spend compared with everyone else?
- How many guests could we contact tomorrow?

Those questions reveal **where the largest growth opportunity lies**: in recovering lapsed guests, increasing the value of an active guest base, or improving the value of each order.

And Olo can help operators turn those answers into action. Olo helps restaurant operators track the three metrics that matter so they can make straightforward changes to improve each one. With a connected system for commerce, ordering, guest data and marketing, brands can identify more guests, recognize behavior across visits and use those insights to deliver more relevant experiences.





Olo is a leading restaurant technology provider with ordering, payment, and guest engagement solutions that help brands increase orders, streamline operations, and improve the guest experience. Olo processes over 3.5 million orders on its open SaaS platform daily, gathering the right data from each touchpoint into a single source — so restaurants can better understand and better serve more than 100 million unique guests per year on every channel. Over 800 restaurant brands spanning 90,000+ locations trust Olo and its network of more than 450 integration partners to innovate on behalf of the restaurant community, accelerating technology's positive impact and creating a world where every restaurant guest feels like a regular.

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