



CHEF'STORE INDUSTRY REPORT:

**Your Guide to Restaurant Consumer Confidence &
How to Plan When It's Low**



CONSUMER CONFIDENCE HAS EMERGED AS ONE OF THE **MOST CRITICAL SIGNALS** FOR RESTAURANT OPERATORS.

Consumer confidence has emerged as one of the most critical signals for restaurant operators. It measures how optimistic or uncertain people feel about the economy and strongly influences how they spend their discretionary dollars. When confidence is high, diners treat themselves to premium dishes, experiment with new menu items, and upgrade their experiences. When it falls, they pull back.

For restaurants, this means confidence levels are more than abstract statistics; they directly affect traffic, check averages, and profitability. This guide explores how shifting sentiment shapes diner behavior, why perception matters as much as reality, and how operators can adapt pricing, menu planning, and marketing strategies when consumer confidence dips.

UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: A BREAKDOWN OF DINING TRENDS

Restaurants have often sat at the heart of discretionary spending. Tangible factors like unemployment and fuel costs used to be the primary triggers for reduced dining out.



2007-
2008:

As the recession deepened, consumers cut spending by **over \$200 billion¹** from the previous year.



2009-
2011:

Higher gas prices and unemployment rates meant a **4 percent reduction²** in dining traffic.



2020-
2022:

Rising inflation and pandemic protocols contributed to a **15 percent loss³** in dinership.



2023-
PRESENT:

Fluctuating inflation has impacted restaurant traffic, causing a **1 percent drop⁴**. However, current traffic stats are also guided by how diners feel about the economy. Rising inflation, for today's customers, translates to uncertainty about the future. It's this uncertainty that directly affects consumer confidence.



The Cost of Customer Confidence

The numbers tell a clear story about the importance of consumer confidence for restaurant profits.



10-point drop⁵ in consumer confidence can reduce traffic by up to 2 percent.



Since 2023, confidence has fallen by 14 points⁶.

PERCEPTION AND REALITY: A CHALLENGE FOR THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

A significant shift has emerged: diners' perceptions do not always match the data.

- **Three-quarters of customers⁷** believe menu prices are higher than last year
- **40 percent⁸** have stated they are spending less on dining out

Yet, quick-service restaurants' menu prices are lower **overall in 2025⁹**, compared to 2024 and 2023.



Quickservice Menu Pricing Stats

- **2023: 10.6 percent¹⁰** increase
- **2024: 2.9 percent¹¹** increase
- **2025: 1.3 percent¹²** increase



This disconnect demonstrates that managing hard costs isn't enough. A guest who believes they are paying more may reduce visits, even if prices are more stable. The lesson: customer psychology is now a business variable, and understanding and managing it can empower you to make strategic decisions that positively impact your business.

PRACTICAL WAYS TO REASSURE DINERS WHEN CONFIDENCE IS LOW

Even in uncertain economic periods, restaurants can take clear, practical steps to build trust and maintain steady sales.

Highlight Value Without Cutting Quality

72 percent¹³ of diners believe that quality is the main factor in selecting a restaurant, while 48 percent¹⁴ look for value. Providing both to customers can give restaurants a competitive edge.

Strategies:

- Flexible pricing strategies based on demand
- Specials such as happy hours, weekday lunches, or early seating offers.
- Loyalty programs or neighborhood discounts that encourage repeat visits.





Keep Menus Fresh With Seasonal Rotations

Limited-time offerings bring fresh flavors, help manage food costs, and tap into diners' sense of excitement. Seasonal dishes also create urgency, motivating guests to visit sooner rather than later. This sense of excitement and urgency can attract more customers and keep your existing ones engaged and interested.

Seasonal Stats



59%

59 percent¹⁵ of customers are more likely to order a seasonal menu item



49%

49 percent¹⁶ find seasonal eats more appealing



26%

Limited offering items, like seasonal ingredients, could boost orders by 26 percent.¹⁷



Bringing Confidence Into Business Metrics

Operators are well-versed in tracking performance indicators like prime costs, table turns, and food cost percentages. Adding consumer confidence as a reference point provides a complete picture of what influences sales.

Ways to keep a pulse on confidence include:

- **Reviewing national reports¹⁸**
- Using guest surveys to gauge perceptions of value and fairness
- Comparing notes with local businesses to spot shared patterns in spending behavior

By blending these insights with in-house sales data, operators can quickly determine whether downturns are due to operational issues or broader market anxieties.

FINAL TAKEAWAY: THE POWER OF CUSTOMER CONFIDENCE

Consumer confidence is no longer a background economic trend but a frontline driver of restaurant performance. The restaurants that thrive in 2025 and beyond will be those that align their strategies with the confidence levels of their guests, reassuring them that dining out is still worth the investment, even in uncertain times.

Sources

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