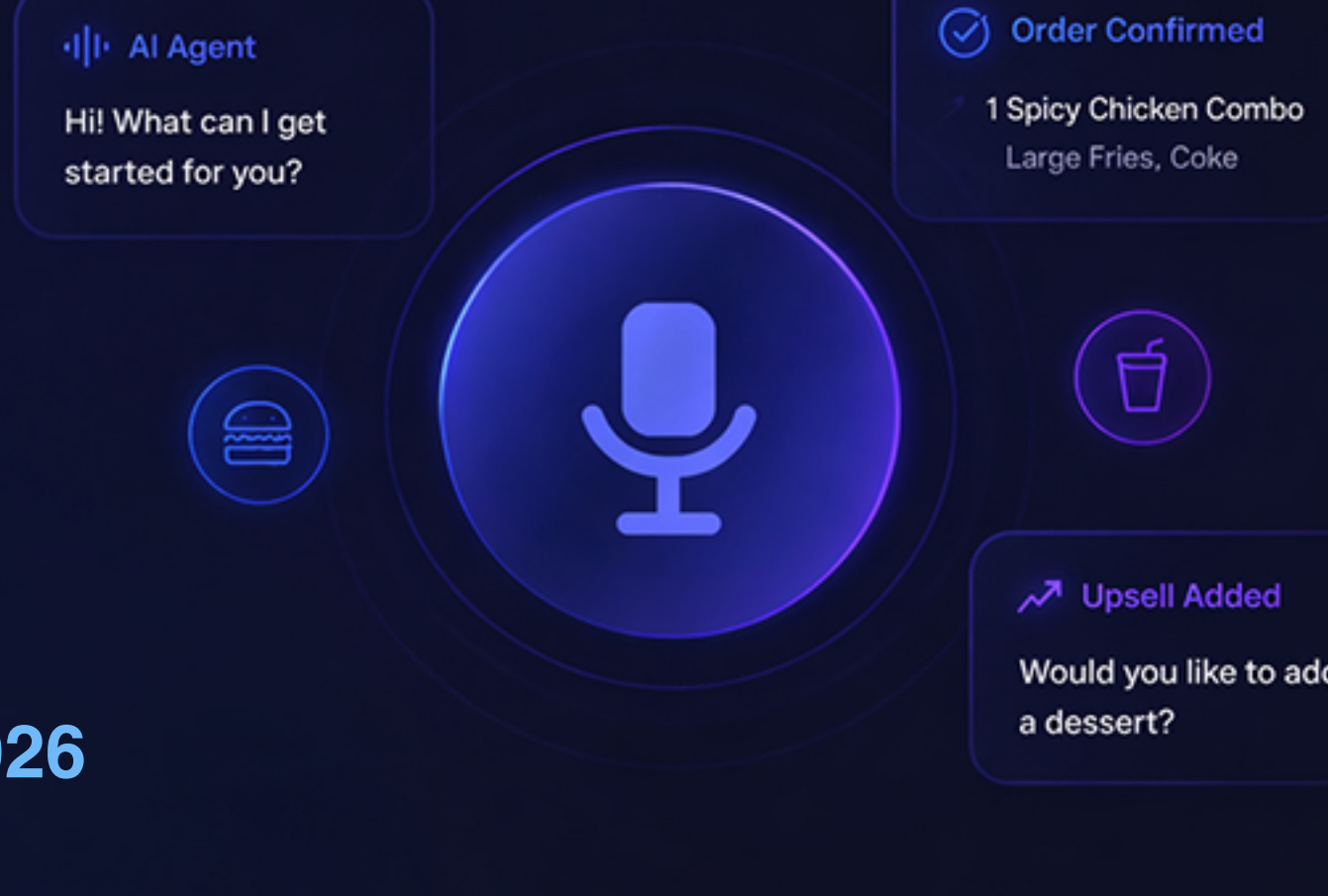


AI in Order-Taking & Call Centers:

What QSR Operators Need to Know in 2026



Why AI Is Now Core to Customer Experience

Artificial intelligence is no longer a futuristic add-on for restaurant operators; it is rapidly becoming the backbone of how customer-facing interactions are designed and delivered. Across every industry, AI is moving from pilot program to operating model, and the quick-service restaurant (QSR) sector is no exception.

The numbers tell the story: CCW Digital research shows that 99% of organizations are maintaining or increasing their AI investments in 2026.

Customers are forming opinions about brands faster than ever, and the quality of each interaction, whether at the drive-through speaker, on the phone, or through a digital channel, shapes loyalty.

For QSR operators, the question is no longer whether to adopt AI. It is where to start, and how to do it in a way that creates real, measurable impact.

99%

of organizations increasing or maintaining AI investment

84%

of leaders prioritizing workflow automation

1 in 3

customers already notice AI improving their experience

The Shift to AI-First (Not AI-Only)

Balancing Automation with the Human Touch

One of the most important distinctions operators need to understand is the difference between an AI-first strategy and an AI-only approach. These are not the same thing and confusing the two is a costly mistake.

An AI-first model means that technology handles the routine, repetitive, and transactional work: taking a standard order, confirming customizations, processing a payment, routing an inbound call. Human team members, meanwhile, are freed to focus on exactly what they do best; resolving complex situations, showing empathy, building real connections with guests.

AI Handles

- Routine & repetitive work
- Standard order taking
- Payment processing
- Call routing

Humans Focus On

- Complex situations
- Showing empathy
- Building connections
- Guest relationships

Customer concerns about AI are real: research shows 60% of consumers worry they will have a harder time reaching a human as AI adoption increases, and 91% feel companies are pushing them toward self-service. These concerns are valid and they are also exactly why AI-first, not AI-only, is the right framework.

When AI acts as the first line of response and humans remain available for what matters most, the result is a faster, more consistent experience that still feels personal. The goal is not to remove people from the equation; it is to make sure people are deployed where they have the greatest impact.

Where AI Is Creating Real Impact in QSR Operations

1

Faster Order Processing

AI-powered order-taking systems can process customer requests in real time, without hold times, without miscommunication, and without the variability that comes with staffing fluctuations. Voice AI handles simultaneous orders across drive-through lanes and phone lines, cutting wait times and improving throughput during peak hours.

2

Improved Accuracy

Order errors are expensive in food cost, in re-work, and in customer satisfaction. AI systems trained on menu data, common modifications, and upsell logic consistently outperform manual order-taking in accuracy. They do not mishear. They do not skip a step. Every order is captured completely the first time.

3

Reduced Pressure on Staff

Labor is the QSR industry's most constrained resource. AI handles the high-volume, repetitive interaction layer so that employees can focus on food preparation, guest service, and situations that genuinely require human judgment. The result is a less overwhelmed team, lower turnover drivers, and a better in-store environment for everyone.

What's Already Working

Real AI Use Cases in QSR



Voice AI for Drive-Through & Phone Order-Taking

Conversational AI systems now handle complete drive-through and phone order interactions, taking orders, repeating them for confirmation, suggesting add-ons, and routing to payment. These systems are trained on brand-specific menus and can handle complex modifications, combo customizations, and upsell prompts without hesitation.



Automated Call Handling

Inbound calls to restaurant locations for orders, hours, catering inquiries, and complaints are a significant operational burden. AI-powered call handling routes routine calls automatically, answers common questions instantly, and escalates to a team member only when the situation genuinely requires it. This keeps phone lines from overwhelming already-busy staff.



Smart Routing & Escalation

Not every customer interaction should be handled by AI. Smart routing logic identifies when a guest needs a human, based on sentiment, issue complexity, or explicit request, and transfers the conversation seamlessly. The key is that this escalation feels effortless for the customer, not like being handed off or ignored.

What Operators Should Be Thinking About Now

The organizations that will benefit most from AI are not the ones that move fastest, they are the ones that move most intentionally. Here are the practical priorities for QSR operators evaluating AI in 2026:

Identify your friction points.

Start with your highest-friction touchpoints. Where are orders being lost, delayed, or getting errors? Where is your phone line creating staff overload? These are the right places to begin.

Look for platform integration, not point solutions.

AI only delivers value if it integrates with your POS, ordering platform, and customer data systems. Standalone tools create new silos rather than solving old ones.

Design for trust from day one.

Customers need to feel confident that AI will get their order right and that a human is reachable when needed. Systems that clearly confirm orders, handle corrections gracefully, and escalate smoothly build that trust.

Measure what matters.

AI generates data on order patterns, peak times, accuracy rates, and customer behavior. Use it. The operational intelligence available through AI-powered systems is as valuable as the automation itself.

Train your team alongside the technology.

Automation works best when your team understands how it complements their role. Train staff on what AI handles, how to manage escalations, and how to use the time AI creates for higher-value work.



How Bajco Is Enabling This Shift

Bajco Group operates at the intersection of scale and hospitality, running high-volume QSR locations where every second and every order matters. The AI transformation happening across the customer experience industry is directly relevant to how we operate, how we staff, and how we serve guests.

By thoughtfully integrating AI into order-taking and call-center workflows, Bajco is positioned to lead this shift rather than react to it. That means investing in systems that reduce friction for guests, reduce burden on team members, and give operators clearer visibility into performance across every location.

The trends shaping customer experience in 2026 will become the table stakes of 2027 and beyond. The operators who build the right foundation now; AI-first, human-centered, and grounded in measurable outcomes, will be the ones who define what great QSR service looks like in the years ahead.

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