



WHAT DINERS *REALLY* WANT FROM RESTAURANT WEBSITES

Is Yelp More Reliable
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Most Restaurant Websites
Turn Away More Visitors Than
They Capture... Find Out Why.

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OVERVIEW



Just having a website isn't enough for a restaurant to convert online visitors into diners.

Your website must be versatile enough to attract different types of diners at various stages of their decision making process. In a matter of seconds your website needs to educate, capture information, convince, and convert those virtual eyes into bona fide butts in seats.

If you think your website may not be attracting as much traffic as it could, or if that traffic isn't being routed through your doors, this ebook is intended to help you diagnosis the problem.

We'll provide statistics from Angelsmith's first restaurant website study and an in-depth look at what diners really want when they visit your website. We conducted this research after analyzing the results of our previous [Dining Decision](#) study in which we found that restaurant websites play an extremely influential role for potential customers.



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WHAT ARE CUSTOMERS LOOKING FOR WHEN THEY GET TO THE WEBSITE?

Let's face it, restaurant websites get a bad rap. There are thousands of tweets, Facebook posts, and feature stories in design magazines, all expounding on the shortcomings of restaurant websites. Many are regarded as nothing more than a sadistic tool to frustrate would-be diners.



Photo credit: Maichin
Dessert from Hopscotch Oakland



So outsmart your competition. If you can give online visitors an ideal experience, you'll increase revenue, capture interest, and move towards the ultimate goal of converting the digital window shoppers into actual diners and lifelong advocates.

As website developers and designers, some of the most common complaints we hear about restaurant websites include:

- The blanket statement: 'restaurant websites suck'
- The vague: 'I can never find what I'm looking for'
- The specific: 'The reservation link doesn't work'
- The frustrating: 'It took three clicks to find the restaurant's hours.'



"IF YOU JUST USE YOUR WEBSITE AS A PRETTY BROCHURE, YOU'RE LIKELY MISSING OUT ON MORE THAN 90 PERCENT OF THOSE WHO VISIT."



Our study reveals the reality isn't quite THAT bad, but it's not that far off the mark either. If you just use your website as a pretty brochure, you're likely missing out on capturing more than 90 percent of the people who visit.

CONSUMER BELIEFS

Consumers are fairly evenly split: 37.1 percent say, restaurant websites are 'awful' while 36.8 percent believe they are 'okay'. For a restaurant already fending off tons of competition for market share, at a fundamental level, your website should not impede your revenue stream. Unfortunately, most restaurant websites do exactly that - turn diners away.



**UNFORTUNATELY, MOST
RESTAURANT WEBSITES
DO EXACTLY THAT -
TURN DINERS AWAY.**

Why Restaurant Websites Turn Guests Away

All of the public relations, great word of mouth, and positive blogger reviews are wasted if the consumer lands on your website and is unable to find what they need. After analyzing the data we received from this survey, we estimate that an ineffective restaurant website loses more than 9 out of every 10 visitors. This is totally unacceptable.

With more than one-third believing restaurant websites are inadequate, that equates to millions of potential diners who are not finding what they want on restaurant websites every day.

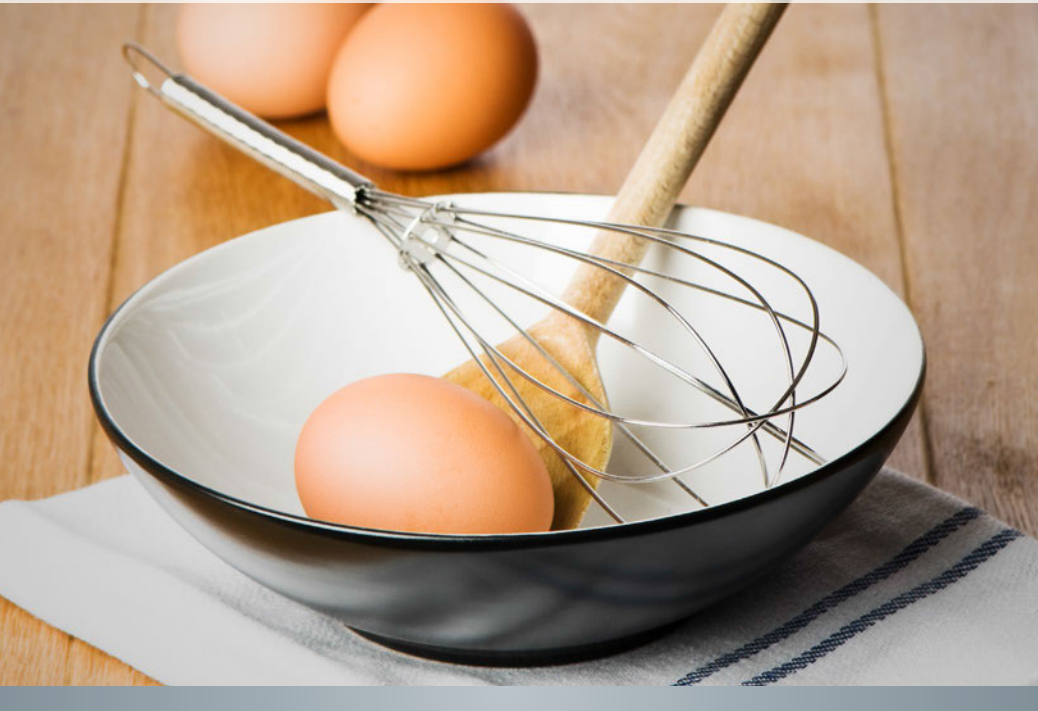
If you're in the 'awful' camp there's a big opportunity to improve the return on investment (ROI) with your website. If your restaurant already has a great website, kudos, but don't stop reading. There are still lots of ways to improve its ability to capture a larger share of diners with a few simple tactics.

But then the question remains: What makes an awful restaurant website?



HOW IMPORTANT IS YOUR WEBSITE IN YOUR MARKETING MIX?

YOUR WEBSITE MUST SUPPORT YOUR PUBLIC RELATIONS, WORD OF MOUTH MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA EFFORTS.



Is your restaurant website really important in the dining decision making process?

Before spending time looking further into these survey results, it's worth asking:

For a potential diner in the position of evaluating multiple restaurant choices for drinks with the boss, entertaining clients, a hot date, taking mom out for her birthday, or any number of dining events, all your restaurant website needs to be is better than your competition's website and more reliable than Yelp. Take a hard and honest look at how your website performs against your competitors and if it's faster and easier to get information from Yelp. To help you review your site and how it stacks

up to both your competition and to the information consumers find on Yelp start by asking yourself these questions:

- Does it take less time to make a reservation from Yelp than your own website?
- Is it easier to find your competitors' menu on their site than yours? How about their hours? Directions?
- Does your competitors sites load faster? Is it easier to navigate? Is the phone number on every page?
- Can you see your site on a mobile device? What does your competitors look like?
- Is your Yelp listing easier to find than your own website?
- Do your competitors have more or better reviews?

According to our survey data, more than 53 percent of respondents "always" or "frequently" visit restaurant websites to find information, while 42.5 percent say they only do "sometimes" because its often easier to find the information elsewhere.



What we learned from our [Influencer Survey](#) early last year and what this study makes crystal-clear is most potential diners research three or more restaurants before making a final choice. They visit multiple restaurant websites to compare and contrast. So you can imagine, what happens. A time-stressed diner, having narrowed the field to a few choices, goes with the restaurant whose website most quickly and easily provides the information they need.

You can dramatically increase your conversion rate (from web visitor to restaurant patron) by providing the information they are hoping to find in expected locations on your site. We don't discuss the science of heat mapping (super geeky, but fascinating) and where the eye travels on the site in this ebook, but if you're curious, let me know and I'll send you some articles. For now think of 'expected locations' like items in your kitchen. Nobody looks for milk in the dry storage.

When asked what they do if they're unable to locate what they're looking for on the restaurant website, 98.2 percent say they seek out another restaurant. Yikes!!!

This is VITALLY important, because this means not only are you losing customers, you're actively driving them to your competitors! Gah!

Additionally, if information is missing or virtually invisible from your site, people will not do any further research to get it. 24.1 percent say they never call the restaurant for the info. And 35.4 percent say they never look at Yelp or other sites for the info. More than 57 percent say they never phone a friend for the information.

Illustrating the point, more than 92 percent, **more than 9 out of 10**, say they will veto the dining choice if they can't quickly find information on the **restaurant's website**.



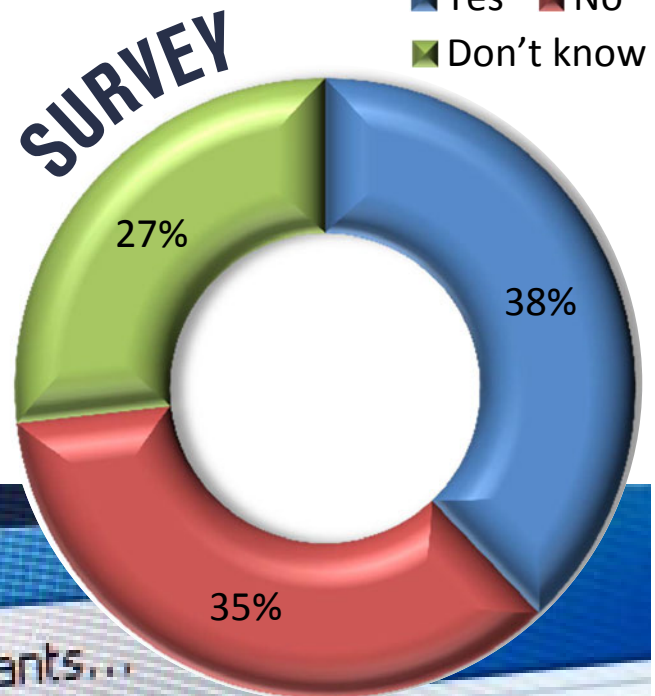
All the effort, time and money you've put into driving positive awareness about your restaurant goes up in flames when your website doesn't deliver. You can make your marketing dollars work harder for you with some simple changes.

The bottom line: If your website does not quickly provide the user experience and information your potential diners are looking for, you're straight up losing revenue EVERY day. If you're scratching your head wondering where to find additional business, look at your website first. Its ultimate role is to seal the deal. If it's not doing that, it's dead weight.

Nearly all customers will go to competitors. You can't rely on your Facebook, Yelp, Twitter or other social media sites to fill in the blanks. Consumers simply won't hunt the information down if they can find it more easily for one of their other choices.

Question: Do you consider the information on the restaurant's website to be more reliable than Yelp, blogs, newspaper reviews or search?

■ Yes ■ No
■ Don't know



WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT TO DINERS?

Now that we know how important your website is in getting consumers to choose your restaurant, what do you need to serve up on your site?

SIMPLE: Consumers Want:

View The Restaurant's Menu
It's all about the food for consumers. Potential diners want to know if your restaurant is going to have food they like.



SURVEY SAYS

This is the number one item consumers want to see on your site: More than 6 out of 10 (64.5) cite the menu as the number one item they look for first when visiting a restaurant's website.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

Make the menu as obvious and accessible on your website as possible. Spend some time or hire a copywriter to lovingly craft the descriptions of the menu items. From our work with celebrity-filled restaurant's such as Dominick's in West Hollywood to chains including Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar and Outback and others, great descriptions of the menu items can increase sales significantly.

Easy to find contact information
One of my favorite San Francisco restaurants buries its contact information. I receive quite a few emails from friends and colleagues asking for restaurant recommendations.



I would like to provide this one as an option, but I sometimes leave it out because it takes me 3 clicks to get their contact information. I can never remember where it is because of their funky navigation!

SURVEY SAYS

This is the number two most requested element on a restaurant website. Our survey indicated that 18.3 percent want contact information.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

Put your contact information on each page, don't assume consumers will either remember where it was located or be willing to take the time to find it. Don't make them scroll to the bottom of the page to find it either. You may lose their business on the tall but narrow screen of a smartphone.

Specials, Coupons, Seasonal Menu, Happy Hour - This may provide a competitive advantage when consumers are looking at a short list of restaurant considerations, your special events could give your restaurant an edge.



SURVEY SAYS

8.8 percent of the survey respondents listed specials, coupons, and seasonal menus as the most important element they were looking for when visiting a restaurant's website.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

We don't see too many restaurant websites with a "Specials" or "See What's New" sections as part of the navigation, but putting this information in an easily accessible and visible portion of your site will help you convert website visitors into diners.

Because specials change regularly, a content management system like WordPress, can facilitate your ability to have someone in the organization make updates to the site without having to either call a developer and pay them a hefty fee or wait until someone can get to it. Just about anyone with opposing thumbs can make the updates, freeing other staff like yourself, for more mission critical activities.



DESIGN DO'S

DESIGN DOS

Menu On The Website

Do make sure you have your menu accessible on your website AND as a PDF. Most (92.4 percent) diners responded that they want the menu on the page. However, 33.5 percent also would like to see the menu as a PDF. You really don't have to choose one or the other, you can have it all!



Although menu as a PDF was not a top design choice, if your restaurant relies on lunch or dinner delivery, a downloadable menu can help the meal time coordinator accurately take and record the orders. To be super helpful to your lunch customers, you could offer a downloadable order form with a check box that allows them to include their previous order.

Minimal Text On Site



Although we were surprised that this was one of the top design elements listed by 22.6 percent of diners, it does make sense. When looking for information on a restaurant website, it stands to reason that diners would not want to wade through large blocks of text to find the information they need to make a dining decision.

Large Photographs

More than 4 out of 5 diners surveyed mentioned 'large photographs' as desirable design elements on restaurant websites. While food photography is specialized and can be expensive, it's well worth the investment.

See the difference in the two photos below and keep in mind that they are the same dish from the same restaurant. One is from a professional food photographer and the other is from an amateur. Which one would you rather eat?

WALLE'S RESTAURANT - NEW YORK



This one...



...or this one by amazing photographer, Peter Medilek



& DON'TS

DESIGN DON'TS

Music



For the love of everything good at your restaurant, cancel the music on your website. According to our research data, most consumers HATE it. Less than 5 percent of those polled responded that they like music on restaurant websites and almost half (49.3 percent) list it as one of their major pet peeves.

Additionally, many people do their restaurant research while at work. By having music on your restaurant's website, you are blowing your potential guests 'I'm really working' cover with the blaring-techno-thump music. Many restaurateurs tell us that they are attempting to recreate the restaurant's atmosphere in a digital environment. While you can give website visitors an idea of what their experience at your restaurant is going to be like, you won't really be able to recreate that immersive experience for them while they are sitting at their desk, dodging their boss, and researching dining options.

Q. When you are on a restaurant's website what kind of design elements do you like? (choose all that apply)

Animation



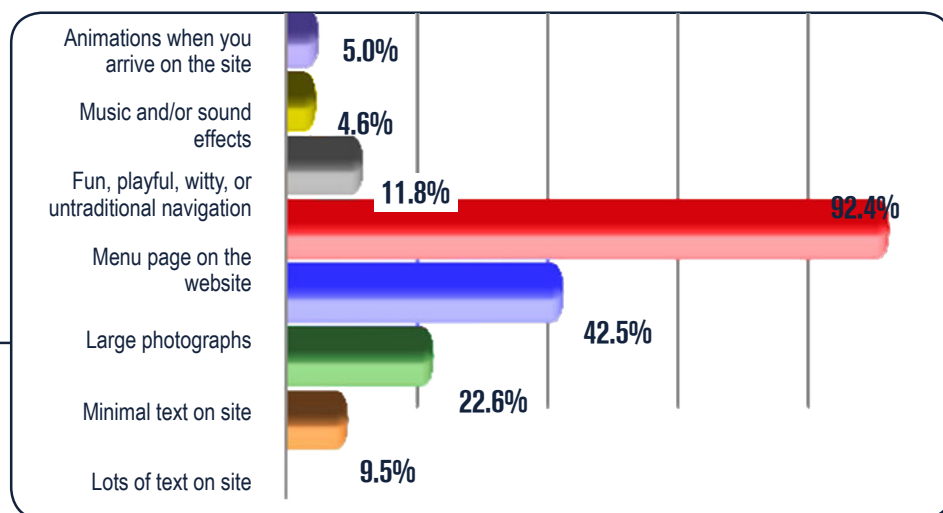
Don't spend money on fancy flash animation, the majority of customers (95 percent) don't care about it. Further, animation can slow down the user experience, and all they really want is the menu and/or contact information.

Flash animation also gives you a big fat zero for search engines and renders that portion of your site invisible on mobile devices. We're sad to see flash go, but let the diner be heard!

Navigation



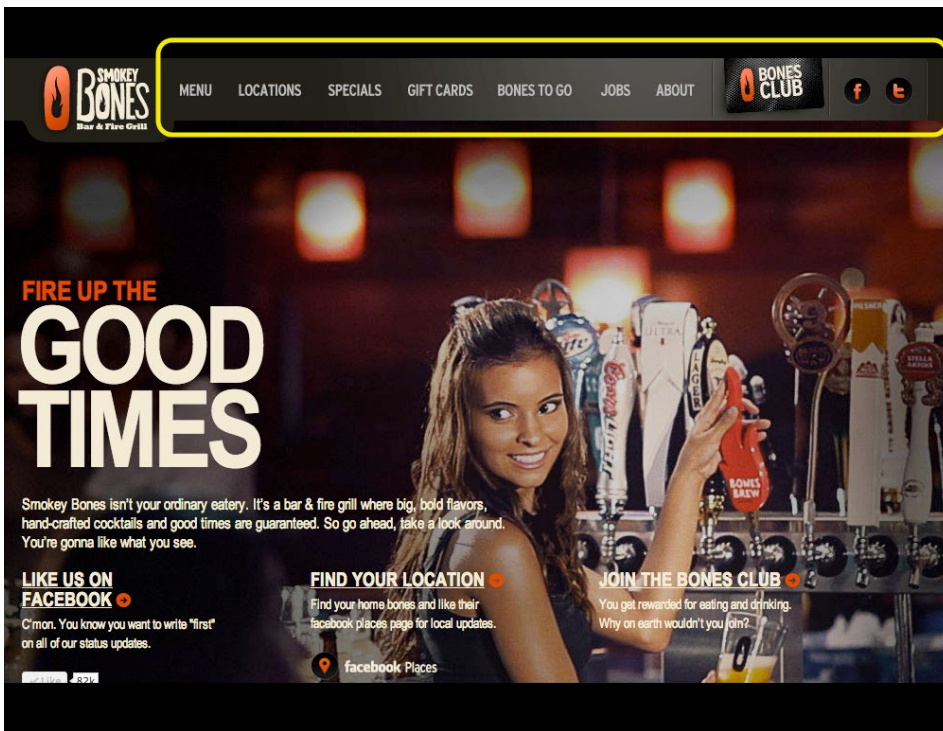
Untraditional navigation can impede the user experience, making it challenging for your website visitor to understand where to look for the information they seek. As both website designers and restaurateurs, we need to refrain from using the navigation as a spot to showcase innovation and creativity. Only 11.8 percent of those polled listed untraditional navigation as a desirable design element on restaurant websites. Additionally, more than half of diners listed it as one of their biggest pet peeves. Which leads us to...





FUNCTIONALITY DINERS EXPECT

CLEAR NAVIGATION



The number one function that most (82.2 percent) restaurant website visitors want is clear, straight forward navigation. Again, most of what we understand from the research is that consumers are extremely time strapped and they want to get what they need quickly. They don't want to spend much time on your site and don't want to click through layers of pages to get information.

Although Smokey Bones has some untraditional elements to its site design, they still do a great job providing a traditional navigation at the top.

The navigation is easy to find right at the top of the page.

Which takes us to our next example.



An example of a really challenging navigation is to the right. It took me about 10 minutes to find all the navigation. There is not a chance in @\$% that this site converts ANYONE. EVER. And yes, it is a real home page. Many thanks to Eater NY for the heads up on this one. The name of the restaurant isn't even clear from this design, although in an effort not to 'out' anyone, we've blurred it out. While it may be great art, it doesn't perform as a website home page.



LINKS TO DIRECTIONS

A majority (58.2 percent) of consumers want links to directions to your restaurant. Google maps is a fairly straightforward and easy integration, particularly if your site is on WordPress, and it's free for you to use. Again, don't make people hunt this information down, you want to eliminate as many barriers to the purchase as possible.

Additionally, in urban environments, providing cross streets is a good idea as well. Many thanks to San Francisco's fabulous restaurant consultant [Michele Mandell](#).

MOBILE FUNCTIONALITY

The ability for diners to view your website from their mobile device was the 3rd most expected functionality, cited by nearly half (49.5 percent) of respondents. However, before investing in a mobile optimized site, check your website analytics to determine whether you really need it. We address this issue in more detail in the mobile section below.

CONTACT INFORMATION

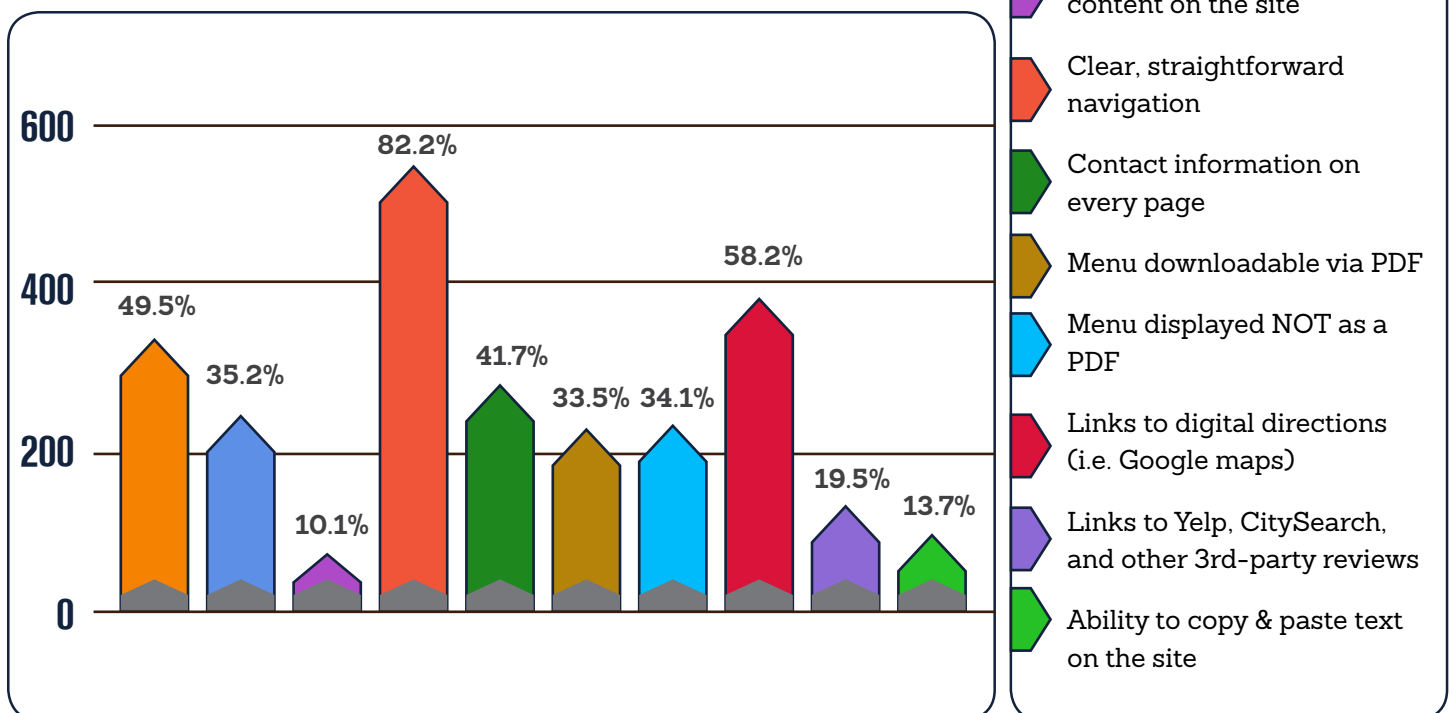
Consumers are on your site because they are considering dining at your restaurant. Again, eliminate barriers to dining by listing contact information on each page. This was the 4th most listed piece of functionality desired by more than 4 out of 10 (41.7 percent) diners.

ONE CLICK RESERVATION

36.2 percent of survey respondents listed the ability to make a reservation with one click as an important function to have on a restaurant website.

If your restaurant's website is developed on WordPress, this is a fairly simple integration with a number of the reservation services including OpenTable, SeatMe, UReserve and others.

Q. When you are on a restaurant's website what kind of functionality do you expect? (choose all that apply)





BIGGEST PET PEEVES

Most websites are designed and developed by creative, yet misguided individuals who don't fully understand the role a restaurant's site plays in the overall marketing plan. While there are many beautifully designed sites, they simply don't provide the user experience that diners expect.



Before developing or redesigning your website, we recommend taking a holistic, 30,000 foot view on how your site supports your other restaurant marketing efforts. Decide what actions you want consumers to take on your site and use this data to deliver a website that doesn't irritate your potential diners.

CONSUMERS # 1 PET PEEVE WITH RESTAURANT WEBSITES

Almost 7 out of 10 (64.8 percent) of survey respondents listed minimal information as their number one pet peeve. Out of five San Francisco restaurants that we randomly checked, four of them we had to search long and hard to find basic information. And only one of them listed the address, phone number and hours on the front page. It's no coincidence that the one with the contact information on the front page is also one of the most financially successful restaurants in San Francisco.

SLOW LOAD TIME

This was the second most irritating restaurant website element listed by more than 6 of 10 diners. So it's crucially important that your site load quickly. A number of elements can affect the speed of your site load, including (but not limited to):

- Large graphics, video files, audio files, or Flash files that are improperly loaded or otherwise not optimized
- Missing graphics, videos, audio files, etc.
- The number of files that need to be loaded for a given page (lots of different graphics files, javascript files, etc. can slow down a page)
- The way that your site was coded (excessive or buggy code can slow down a page)
- Your server (shared servers - which are the most common type of web hosting -- are often slower than dedicated servers)

There are a ton of other tricks that a quality development group can employ to tune your site for speed, but these are the biggest offenders.

3RD BIGGEST PET PEEVE

Almost (59.3 percent) 6 out of 10 diners listed 'difficult navigation' as a major pet peeve.

4TH BIGGEST PET PEEVE

Nearly half (49.3 percent) of the survey respondents listed music and/or sound effects as a top restaurant website element that irritated them the most. By placing music on your website you have a significant chance to offend someone, turn them off and drive them to another restaurant. Save the music selection for the restaurant.

5TH BIGGEST PET PEEVE

Approximately 1/3 (33.2 percent) is frustrated by a restaurant's website that is incomplete or doesn't work properly on mobile devices.





MOBILE OPTIMIZATION

33 PERCENT SAY THAT IT'S A FRUSTRATION WHEN A SITE DOESN'T WORK ON MOBILE

If we take a look at the data points in the survey relating to mobile optimization, it does indicate that mobile is important to your restaurant business. But there may be exceptions to that. Read on.

Recently, one of our clients was witnessing a sharp increase in visits from mobile devices. And while the percentage of total visits was fairly low, the trend was alarming, particularly because their site was not optimized for mobile. As we were planning their new website, it was obvious that mobile, while not yet hugely important, was quickly rising in importance to their business.

If you are already thinking about a new website redesign, it is mostly likely to be beneficial to develop for mobile visits as well.

That being said, we're not big fans of spending money when you don't have to or BEFORE you must. Although more than

33 percent say that it's a frustration when a site doesn't work on mobile and nearly half expect mobile functionality from a restaurant website, our recommendation is that you look at your analytics to see what percentage of your website visitors are accessing your site from a mobile device. And make the right decision based on the requirements of your customers.

But, do know that you most likely will have to mobile optimize your site at some point. Another of our client's noticed that those visiting their site from mobile devices was doubling each month. At that rate their mobile-unfriendly site would have quickly become obsolete to most visitors. However, one of our classic restaurants, is experiencing a slight increase in mobile access, so at this point, why spend the money.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ERIC OLIVER

I am the founder and president of Angelsmith where I head up a team of intrepid web developers, content creators, social media managers, marketing pros and one rather large, hungry Chocolate Labrador.

I have more than 20 years of web development and digital marketing experience on brands including CKE Restaurants, West Restaurant, Mojo Yogurt, Four Peaks Brewery, Gloria Ferrer Caves & Vineyards, Rodney Strong Wine Estates, Pinot Patch, Romililly Wines, Qantas Airways, Sony Pictures, Buena Vista Pictures Marketing and a whole host of entertainment brands.

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If I'm not around, I'm probably BBQ-ing or coming up with some other wild creation in the kitchen.

CARIN OLIVER

I fell in love with food as a 16 year old when I traveled with my gymnastics team to Asia and was introduced to sushi. A year later I was introduced to wine in Sorrento on Italy's Amalfi Coast by a Vespa-driving waiter.

I head up the engagement and optimization marketing side of Angelsmith that includes when content marketing, blogger outreach, word of mouth marketing, public relations, inbound marketing, social media marketing and a few other things.

Some of my food, wine and spirits experience includes Black Angus Steakhouse, California Pizza Kitchen, Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar, Johnnie Walker, KFC, Outback Steakhouse, Rodney Strong Wine Estates, Romililly Wines, Pinot Patch, Palms Casino Resort Las Vegas, Tanqueray, Taco Bell Foundation,, Zodiac Vodka and others.

I'm happy to answer any questions, just shoot me an email or hit me up on Twitter.

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ABOUT ANGELSMITH

Angelsmith, Inc is a full service digital marketing agency based in Sausalito, California. Since, 2001 we've provided marketing solutions for both Fortune 500 as well as start up brands in entertainment, gaming, wine, beer & spirits, restaurants, travel, and technology.

We develop websites that convince and convert visitors; create marketing programs to activate your biggest advocates, find influencers to sing your praises and amplify your voice across all channels.

For more than 12 years, the senior level team has brought personal attention, passion and affordability to its clients projects.