

**REPORT**

# **Customer ‘order anxiety’ is costing quick-service restaurants**

Here’s what to do about it

Dive into our breakdown of what 2,000 QSR customers in the US revealed about stress, spending and the ordering moment.



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# The pressure is on

You pull into the drive thru of your favorite lunch spot. There's a car or two behind you. The menu board is packed with options.

Your eyes dart between the new limited-time offers or bundles. But then the car ahead of you inches forward.

Flustered, you order what you always order. And then you pull forward yourself.

**It wasn't a bad customer experience.  
It was order anxiety.**

Ordering at a QSR is **more stressful than public speaking or going through airport security** for about 20-30% of US consumers.

Order anxiety doesn't necessarily make customers walk away, but it can make them order less, play it safe and skip the upgrade.

This report shows where it's happening, why it's happening and what top-performing QSR operators are doing about it right now.



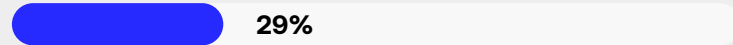
# Ordering can be harder than you expect

Here's how QSR ordering stacks up against some of life's most universally stressful moments.

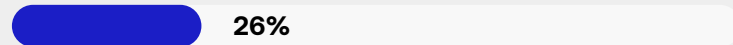


% of US consumers who say ordering at a QSR feels more stressful than each scenario below

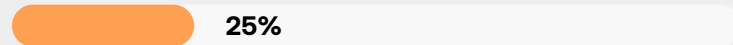
## Public speaking



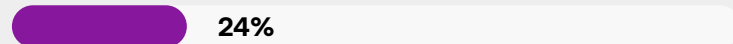
## Attending a job interview



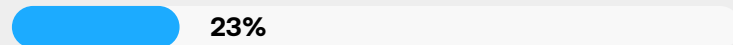
## Taking a test



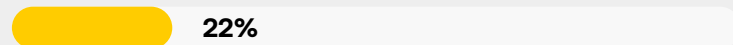
## Visiting the dentist



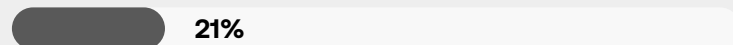
## Going on a first date



## Selecting a gift for a loved one



## Going through airport security



# Navigating the menu maze

Ask QSR operators what drives customers and most will say the menu — variety, value and customization. But data tells a different story.

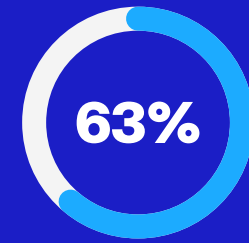
- **Overly large menus create decision paralysis in real time**
- **Customization options spike anxiety under time pressure**
- **Features built to grow check size are the ones creating friction**

## Key takeaway

**Consider a smarter menu, not necessarily a smaller one.**

Control what customers see and when they see it with digital menu boards.

Surfacing fewer, better-placed items and rotating by time of day or past performance can reduce cognitive load and move customers toward more confident orders.



63% of US consumers find large menus moderately, very or extremely overwhelming

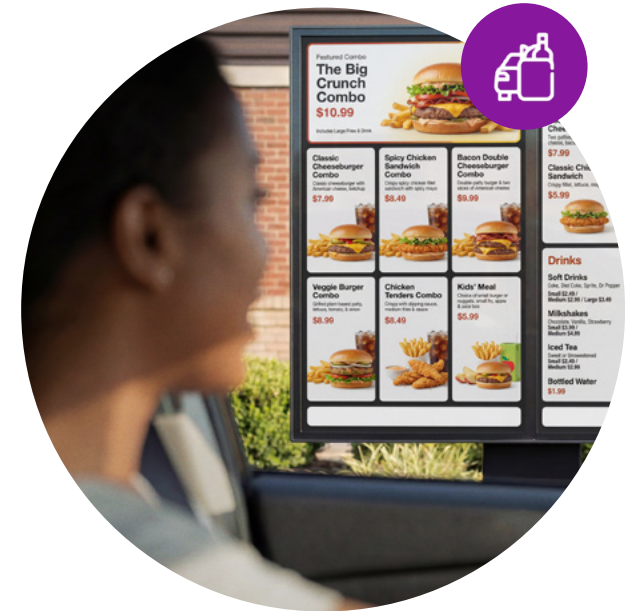


# Bridging the channel gap

Topping the list, **drive thru is the most-used ordering channel in the US** — and where customers feel the least in control. Only 15% say it's where they make their best decisions.

According to 35% of consumers, **in-store counter and drive-thru orders are tied as the most stressful channels.**

On the other side of the spectrum, mobile ordering was consistently reported as the least stressful channel across the board.



## Key takeaway

Using elements that make mobile less stressful — clear layout, time to decide and no social pressure — can be built into physical channels too.

Start with cutting the clutter:



**Simplify the board** with fewer featured items at the window for faster decisions and less hesitation.



**Reduce in-lane pressure** with pre-ordering and app-based flows that let customers arrive already decided.



**Design for calm, clear visual hierarchy** and lots of digital white space that can do more for throughput than adding more staff at the window.



# Feeling the social squeeze

The top source of ordering stress isn't the menu or the technology. 48% of consumers said a long line behind them was their number one stressor.

## Key takeaway

You can't eliminate the line, but you can shorten the time customers spend deciding in it.

Helping with faster menu comprehension through clearer digital boards, highlighted bundles and top sellers, and pre-ordering options like line-busting tablets reduces the decision window before social pressure builds.

64%



of US consumers are extremely or very aware of the people waiting behind them in line. That awareness alone — before anyone says a word — changes what they order.

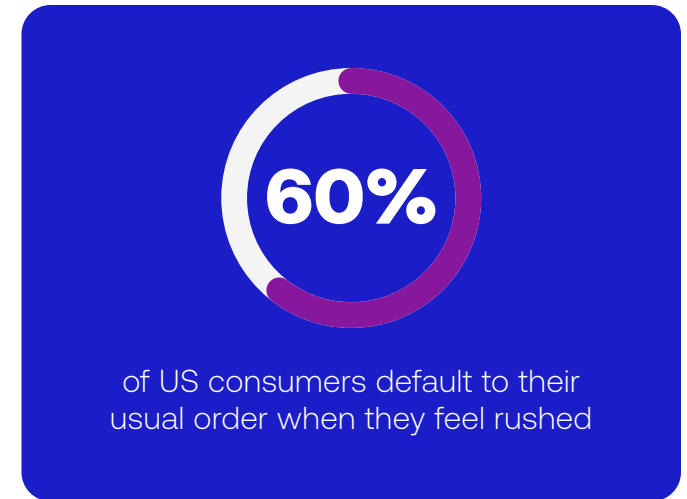


# Playing it safe

So, how does order anxiety actually impact revenue?

Feeling rushed or stressed causes customers to stick to their usual order, skipping the add-ons and new items.

This revenue loss is invisible and doesn't show up as an abandoned order. Dropping the extras, the upgrades that never happened and skipping the new flavors goes completely uncoun-



## Key takeaway

“Safe” order choices may seem like a marketing challenge, but it’s actually a UX challenge.

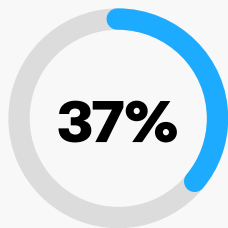
Creating clearer menus, smarter item placement and guided ordering flows at the counter and drive-thru window give customers the confidence to explore something new.



# Ditching the playbook that isn't working

Adding more promotions, bundles or options can instinctually feel like the move when add-ons stall.

But here's what customers actually say restaurants should change to make ordering less stressful: Consolidate the menu, simplify the deals and make it easier to read.



37% of US consumers have walked away from an order because the process felt rushed, unclear or uncomfortable

Consider some of the top complaints we received from our respondents, and reevaluate how a modern POS platform can improve your customer service.

**“When staff asks too many questions about add-ons”**

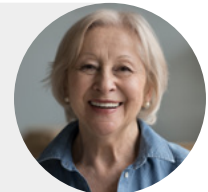


**“Confusing menus”**

**“Not knowing what you want”**

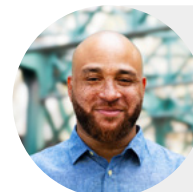


**“Prices not indicated on certain menu items”**



**“When the staff seems rushed”**

**“Too many options”**



# Maximizing the demand that's already there



We've unpacked the cost of friction. Now, let's get to the powerful upside of fixing it.

Only 1 in 5 consumers said nothing would change if ordering felt easier. Put another way, that means **80% of your existing customer base wants to spend more, explore more and come back more often.**

One thing is standing between you and that revenue — the ordering experience.



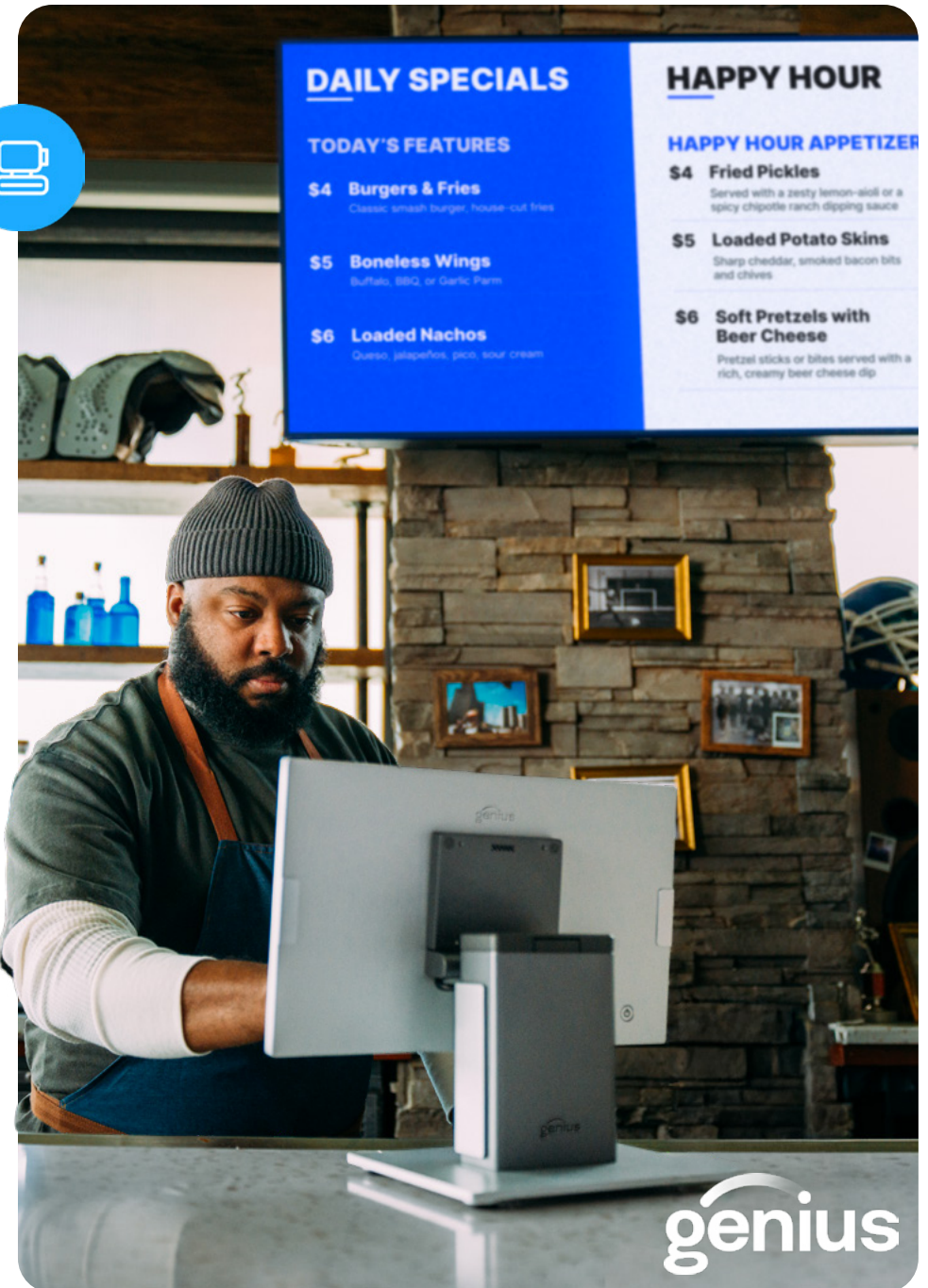
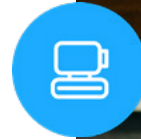
# Want ordering technology built for the way QSRs actually run?

Genius™ from Global Payments brings together indoor and outdoor digital menu boards, point of sale solutions, kiosks, kitchen display systems, drive-thru tech, back-office integration and real-time menu management in one platform. Surface the right items, reduce decision friction and move more customers through the line with confidence.

Push menu changes across all locations in seconds. Feature high-margin items at the right moment. Connect your boards directly to your POS so what guests see always matches what rings in.

## Key takeaway

If order anxiety is costing you revenue at the counter, kiosk or drive-thru window, Genius can give you the tools to take it back.



# Methodology

This research is based on a quantitative survey of 2,000 US consumers who had eaten at or ordered from a quick-service restaurant in the past six months, conducted in March 2026 by Global Payments Consumer Insights. Respondents included a broad, representative adult sample with balanced distribution across ages 25–64 and an even gender split, with income skewing toward lower-to-middle tiers reflecting typical QSR behavior patterns.



Disclaimer: While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information contained herein, Global Payments makes no representations or warranties as to the completeness or accuracy of the data or any conclusions drawn from it.

# Thank you

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Get started today with one of our Genius experts and see how Global Payments is delivering a complete worldwide commerce ecosystem.

