

INDUSTRY WEEKLY DIGEST

YOUR WEEKLY DIGEST OF CONTEMPORARY INDUSTRY TRENDS



I FEEL THE NEED, THE NEED FOR SPEED!

And accuracy!
And personalisation!

A recent study by [Intouch Insight's on drive-thru speed and accuracy across Quick Service Restaurants \(QSR\)](#) found that brands generally improved speed of service from 2022 to 2023, with average time falling from 373 seconds to 343 seconds, driven mostly by a reduction of the number of cars in the drive-thru. The research also found new prototype store formats, like Taco Bell's Defy in Minnesota, were significantly faster than segment averages.

In this digest, [Mark Ashton](#) picks up on previous digests covering [experimentation with QSR store formats](#) and [how restaurants should redesign their servicescapes to cater for diverse delivery models](#). Here he looks at how store design and technological innovation may continue to help deliver on customers need for even greater speed, accuracy and personalisation from this sector.



IN SEARCH OF EVER GREATER SPEED, ACCURACY AND PERSONALISATION FROM QUICK SERVICE RESTAURANTS

Mark Ashton

The recent research by [Intouch Insight's on drive-thru speed and accuracy across QSRs](#) and suggests future improvements in speed and accuracy may be born out of increased use of new drive-thru units. They found brand prototypes, specifically [McDonald's Texas test unit](#) and [Taco Bell's Defy unit](#) in Minnesota, had much faster service times than system averages, with McDonald's about 62 seconds faster and Taco Bell about 54 seconds faster.

Undoubtedly the growing levels of automation and the promise of AI are also in operators minds. In the past few weeks the Industry Press has reported on [Donino's](#) has [partnered with Microsoft to use generative AI technology](#) and cloud computing to enhance the ordering process with personalization and simplification. [IHOP](#) are also reported to have added Google Cloud AI technology to enhance the online ordering experience as over 20% of sales now coming from off-premises orders. [Chipolte](#) also continue on their automation journey and is testing an automated makeline for its bowls and salads citing that 65% of its digital orders are bowls or salads.

Recent and ongoing innovation with QSR store formats as covered in [previous Digests](#) may also be key to delivering to diverse delivery formats and the customers' desire for ever greater personalisation. Recent press in this space suggests a move to [embrace modular buildings](#) allowing for cost efficiencies, greater real estate availability, and faster speed-to-market as major benefits and McDonald's announcing a new store format for its [CosMc](#) sub-brand, suspected to be another small footprint prototype.

The complexity of delivering ever greater personalisation in both orders and delivery format, coupled with the need to maintain (or improve!) speed and accuracy poses very real challenges to the QSR sector. The need for multi-modal solutions which will inevitably involve greater automation and further refinement of store formats is evident with a small part of the business case for this quoted below.

“Incremental improvements in speed of service can yield measurable sales boosts, according to Intouch. Assuming a drive-thru remains busy, a five-second speed up in total time could yield over \$8,000 in sales per unit per year.”