

# RESTAURANT ASSOCIATES



## How AI will Transform the Workforce and Guest Experience by 2030

By Gavin Goody, Director of Marketing,  
Digital & ESG

Restaurant Associates



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Corporate hospitality is entering a new era. By 2030, artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and intelligent digital ecosystems will materially reshape the way organisations nourish, energise, and engage their people. This shift is not theoretical. It is unfolding now - across our corporate restaurants, cafés, meeting suites, and workplace food experiences.

At Restaurant Associates, we have seen firsthand how technology can elevate - not replace - the craft of hospitality. From digital café models and AI-enabled menu optimisation to intelligent guest platforms, our operations today bear little resemblance to those of even five years ago.

This white paper sets out where the industry is heading, what is driving the change, and how organisations can unlock competitive advantage through future-ready hospitality. It draws on Restaurant Associates' lived experience, industry-defining research from leading institutions, and insights from global innovators shaping the future of work.



## 1. The Drivers of Change

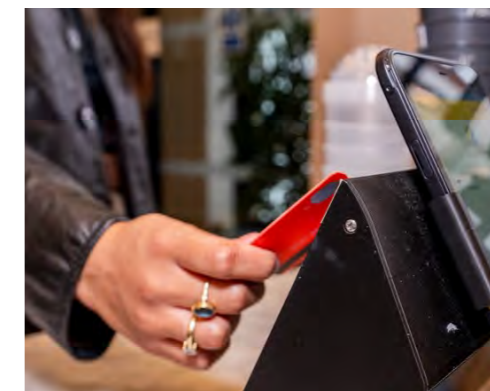
Guests are more informed, more health-conscious, and more time-poor.

### Agility and Flexibility in a Post-Pandemic Landscape

Across Deloitte's "Future of Work" <sup>2</sup> research and the World Economic Forum's skills forecasts, a constant theme emerges, organisations must offer experiences that feel convenient, curated, and meaningful. Technology is becoming central to meeting those rising expectations.

The pandemic accelerated digital adoption by more than seven years <sup>1</sup> (McKinsey). For hospitality, the aftershocks were clear: unpredictable demand, labour shortages, and a workforce with new expectations around flexibility and purpose.

Corporate clients now require environments that support wellbeing, productivity, and a frictionless return-to-office culture.



## 2. The AI Revolution in Hospitality

### 2.1. Risk Management

AI isn't removing frontline roles - it's augmenting them.

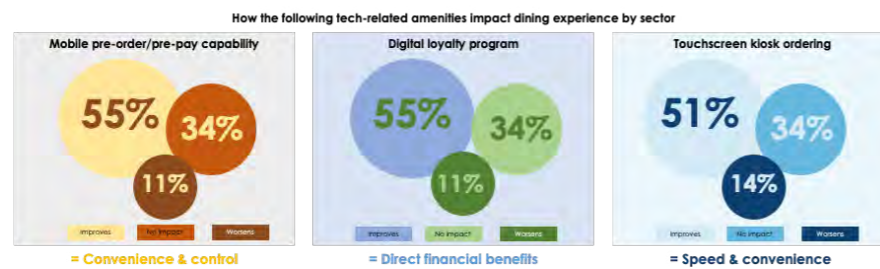
Soon, we will see teams become more empowered when assisted by:

- AI-driven scheduling that matches demand and skills to the hour
- Predictive maintenance tools that reduce operational friction
- Knowledge copilots providing real-time guidance and compliance prompts

The result will be a shift away from repetitive tasks toward supervisory, guest-facing, and experience-led responsibilities - mirroring forecasts from MIT and the Cornell Hospitality Institute.<sup>3</sup>

According to the UK Eating at Work Survey 2025<sup>6</sup>, a strong majority of UK consumers - including 94% of Gen Z and 88% of Millennials - really value restaurants that embrace the latest technology.

#### Mobile ordering, digital loyalty and kiosk ordering improve the customer experience by an average of 55% across all sectors



These technologies are arguably already widely familiar to consumers, and they are not just accepted but widely seen as beneficial. This makes them a low-barrier efficiency solution that can be rolled out at scale across industries and markets.



## Case Study: Feedback on the Ground

At the London head office of one of our leading banking clients, the transition is already complete. AI-powered scanners have been seamlessly integrated into the checkout experience alongside traditional tills, delivered through a successful three-phase rollout. The impact has been strongly positive, aligning with broader industry trends. The UK Eating at Work Survey shows that 57% of customers believe digital loyalty programmes enhance their experience, while 54% say digital kiosk ordering improves the overall customer journey.<sup>6</sup>

Our frontline teams provide deeper insight into how the change has been received.

*“We live in a world where technology feels second nature, and our guests have found the new scanners really easy to use. They simply place their tray of food down and the scanner automatically photographs each item and calculates the price. Of course, there’s still a need for a human touch. Guests may have questions during the process, so we have a dedicated team member on hand to assist.”*

*“Previously, we were dealing with customer frustration from long queues, while also juggling the admin of putting products through the tills. Now, by reducing wait times, we’ve built trust and created an experience where guests can focus on enjoying their meal instead of worrying about the checkout process. There will always be moments when personal communication is needed, but by integrating technology, we’ve ensured those interactions are positive and intentional, strengthening our connection with guests.”*

**Ligita Zachareviciene, Supervisor**

*“Breakfast and lunchtime can be extremely busy and demanding. We operate two tills for guests using our Neal Street Rewards app alongside seven AI scanners that significantly reduce queue times. Previously, guests could wait up to five minutes to pay - now the process is so much faster.”*

*“This creates a far nicer experience for our guests and allows us to spend more time engaging with them in a more meaningful way. While there was initial hesitation when the scanners were introduced, they ultimately drove increased traffic and curiosity, as people realised they could enjoy a quicker service.”*

*“The AI scanners also make our jobs easier by providing richer sales data. They generate detailed reports and mean we can work more efficiently. The time saved we redirect to other areas of the restaurant, ultimately enhancing the overall guest experience.”*

**Cristina Laslau, Dining Operational Manager**

**2.2 Data-Driven, Proactive Operations**

Facilities management is evolving from reactive to highly strategic.

Operations are beginning to leverage:

- IoT sensors and energy analytics to optimise building consumption
- AI-driven equipment monitoring to prevent failures
- Digital command centres that give clients instant visibility of performance

This shift improves uptime, reduces cost, and strengthens ESG outcomes - supporting hospitality teams to make more sustainable choices.

**2.3 Personalised Guest Experiences**

- Restaurant Associates’ digital cafés and omnichannel platforms - including our flagship **Time2Eat** pre-order and personalisation engine — are redefining what tailored workplace dining looks like.

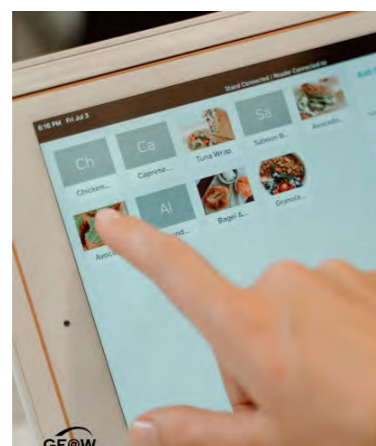
Our ecosystem brings together:

- **Personalised menu engines** that recommend dishes based on dietary needs and time-of-day habits

- **Real-time sentiment dashboards** that monitor guest satisfaction and prompt proactive service recovery
- **Time2Eat’s predictive ordering and queue-avoidance tools**, offering guests a seamless, stress-free experience while giving operators granular insight into demand patterns.

With Time2Eat, guests can pre-order, customise meals, and collect at the moment that suits them — eliminating friction, reducing wait times, and improving flow across busy corporate environments. The platform learns individual preferences over time, enabling more relevant menu suggestions, healthier choice prompts, and well-targeted offers that feel thoughtful rather than algorithmic.

This is **personalisation at scale**: technology provides the intelligence, but the hospitality remains unmistakably human. Our teams can focus on meaningful interactions, confident that the digital layer is simplifying complexity and elevating every touchpoint.



**2.4 Automation of Low-Value Tasks**

- Leading studies (Deloitte <sup>2/3</sup>, WEF) estimate that 40–60% of FM admin tasks are automatable. In our own estate, automation has already released teams from manual logging, temperature checks, and routine paperwork - allowing talent to focus on what truly counts: service, connection, and creativity.

**2.5 AI-Enabled Safety & Compliance**

Artificial intelligence is redefining safety and compliance standards across hospitality environments.

By integrating:

- Real-time hazard detection that proactively identifies risks before they escalate
- Automated compliance reporting to ensure regulatory requirements are met with precision and efficiency
- Intelligent audit trails that provide transparent, tamper-proof records for every critical process

AI empowers organisations to achieve greater accuracy, reduce the likelihood of incidents, and foster a culture of transparency. These advancements deliver the robust assurance that today’s corporate clients demand, strengthening trust and supporting long-term operational excellence.

**2.6 Empowering a Knowledge-Enhanced Workforce**

Our digital knowledge engines and copilots will soon give teams instant access to:

- Standard operating procedures
- Recipe specifications
- Guest interaction prompts
- ESG reporting requirements

This reduces skill variance while increasing quality and consistency.





### 3. The Guest Experience of 2030

#### Ultra-Personalisation at Scale

AI will enable tailor-made workplace dining experiences—real-time nutritional insights, personalised offers, menu recommendations, and location-aware service. Every visit will feel crafted, yet still unmistakably human.

#### Frictionless, Queue-Free Journeys

Our Time2Eat omnichannel platform and digital cafés demonstrate how AI forecasting and digital pre-ordering can materially reduce wait times and smooth peak operations.

#### Predictive & Dynamic Menu Engineering

Restaurant Associates uses machine learning to analyse consumption patterns, reduce food waste, and design menus that adapt daily supporting both ESG targets and commercial performance.

#### Emotionally Intelligent Service

AI monitors satisfaction signals, enabling timely human intervention. Technology guides: people build relationships.



### 4. Case Studies: Innovation in Action <sup>7</sup>

#### AI Transforming Corporate Restaurants

Across our estate, AI is reshaping how workplace dining operates. At one major global bank, the introduction of AI-powered tray scanners, paired with our Time2Eat pre-order platform, has delivered a step change in performance.

Queue times have been cut dramatically, dropping from an average of 15 minutes to just 3–5 minutes during peak periods. This efficiency boost has driven revenue growth, with net sales up 13%, hot beverage sales rising 15%, and cake and pastry sales soaring by an impressive 33%. Thousands of labour hours have also been released from manual tasks — enabling teams to focus on hospitality rather than administration. What once required multiple touchpoints is now a seamless, data-driven journey.

#### Digital Cafés: A New Operating Model

Our digital café ecosystem — incorporating mobile ordering, dynamic menu engineering, and real-

time performance dashboards - is redefining speed, convenience, and control for our clients. Sustainability dashboards provide clear visibility of energy use, food waste, and operational emissions, strengthening ESG reporting accuracy and supporting corporate sustainability strategies.

When our digital café technology is combined with personalised promotions it has driven double-digit sales growth across bakery, hot food, and beverage categories. The data signals are consistent: when guests are supported with personalised, frictionless journeys, they engage more frequently and spend with greater confidence.



## 5. Pros and Cons of AI in Hospitality

### Opportunities

- Improved guest experience
- Operational efficiency and reduced waste
- Enhanced workforce support through AI copilots
- Stronger compliance & safety
- Data-driven decision making
- Competitive differentiation for early adopters
- Skills gaps requiring continuous learning
- Upfront investment
- Data governance and ethics
- Cybersecurity dependencies
- Cultural resistance from traditionalists
- Successful adoption requires clear communication, transparent principles, and thoughtful change management

### Risks & Challenges

- Over-automation risking loss of warmth



## 6. The Future Workforce: Skills for 2026 – 2030

According to the World Economic Forum <sup>3</sup> the top emerging skills align directly with modern hospitality:

- Digital fluency & AI literacy
- Human-centred service excellence
- Data interpretation
- Creative experience design
- Change agility
- Cross-functional collaboration
- ESG & sustainability understanding
- Supervisory expertise for human-AI teams

The future hospitality professional is digitally confident, emotionally intelligent, commercially aware, and creatively driven.

## 7. Conclusion: Balancing Technology and Humanity

AI is not the future of hospitality. People are.

AI is simply the accelerator - removing friction, sharpening insight, and creating the space for teams to deliver service that feels generous, human, and memorable.

By 2030, the organisations that thrive will be those that:

- blend technology with craft
- invest in digital and human capability
- build cultures of trust and transparency
- make hospitality central to employee experience

The future is bright.

The future is intelligent.

The future is people-powered, tech-supported hospitality.

### References

<sup>1</sup> McKinsey Global Institute: “Future of Work”

<sup>2</sup> Deloitte Insights: “Human-Centric Workplaces”

<sup>3</sup> World Economic Forum: “Workforce 2030 Outlook”

<sup>4</sup> MIT Sloan Management Review: “AI & Human Collaboration”

<sup>5</sup> Cornell Hospitality Institute: Front-of-House Automation Research

<sup>6</sup> The UK Eating At Work Survey 2025

<sup>7</sup> Internal case studies and proprietary data from Restaurant Associates

<sup>8</sup> EP Vision 2030

**[restaurantassociates.co.uk](https://restaurantassociates.co.uk)**