

Cornell Study Finds Guests Prefer Restaurant Reservations

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During busy times, guests at casual-style restaurants end up waiting for a table, but they don't like it. Given the choice, a Cornell study finds that most of them would prefer to make reservations.

The study, 'Customer Satisfaction with Seating Policies in Casual-Dining Restaurants,' by Sheryl E. Kimes and Jochen Wirtz, gave respondents the choice of making reservations, calling ahead for a place on the waitlist, or a simple first-come, first-served waitlist. Reservations won hands down. The report is available at no charge from Cornell's Center for Hospitality Research website, <http://www.hotelschool.cornell.edu/research/chr/pubs/reports/2007.html>.

'The most impressive finding involved business meals,' said Kimes, a professor at the Cornell School of Hotel Administration. 'Fifty-seven percent of our respondents would never choose a restaurant that uses waitlist seating for a business dinner. These customers want to be certain that they can be seated when they arrive.'

Participants in the survey had a higher opinion of restaurants that accept reservations, giving those restaurants higher marks for customer service, caring about customers, and respecting their time. Wirtz, who is an associate professor of marketing at the National University of Singapore, pointed out that even allowing guests to call ahead for a table was preferable to the typical waitlist.

'Based on our study, we recommend that casual restaurants seriously consider taking reservations or, at minimum, offer informal call-ahead arrangements,' said Kimes. 'Given these findings, we wonder why so many chains do not accept reservations during busy times. We know that reservations have operational problems, such as no-shows and late shows, but our findings indicate that reservations still might be worth the effort, given this survey.' Kimes plans a study to further address this issue.

Meet and interact with Dr. Kimes, an active member of the executive education faculty at the School of Hotel Administration, when she presents sessions in the Professional Development Program:

<http://www.hotelschool.cornell.edu/industry/executive/pdp/>.

Thanks to the support of the partners listed below, all Cornell Hospitality Reports and Tools are made available free of charge from the center's website, www.chr.cornell.edu.

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