

From tips to clicks: restaurants try e-menus

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Restaurants in Europe, the United States and Japan are testing technology to let diners order their food direct from a screen at their table instead of depending on a fellow human being to note their choice -- sometimes grumpily or erroneously.

Besides cutting costs, companies that sell the "e-menu" argue the bytes-for-bites approach has a novelty value that can lure younger customers, and boost revenues as tantalising photographs of succulent steaks and gooey desserts tempt diners to order more.

It also could extend the TV dinner. How about a computer-game dinner?

The idea may be only the latest gimmick in a trade which is driven by consumer appetites and where fads help. But at least for now, it appears to be boosting business.

In Israel, privately owned start-up Conceptic has already installed e-Menu technology in sushi bars, pubs and family restaurants. The system is based on touch-screens already used in self-service canteens or for ticketing in airports and cinemas.

"It's about impulse-buying," said Adi Chitayat, Conceptic's chief executive. "If a person starts looking at pictures of chocolate cake, the chances are he'll order it."

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