# How Restaurant Brands Can Succeed in Search

## "Hey Siri, where's the best pizzeria near me that's good for kids?"

## "Ok Google, where can I get a healthy salad from a restaurant open now with wifi?"

Just three years ago, virtually nobody was asking these questions. But today, everything has changed.

We are in the midst of a paradigm shift in the way we, as consumers, find and engage with local businesses. With the rise of voice assistants, chatbots, and the introduction of conversational search, the customer journey is more often starting with a question, a desire, a need that shows high intent to buy.

We are being trained to simply ask for something, whether we're typing in a box on a screen or speaking aloud to Alexa, Siri, Google, or Cortana. We have started to speak up and just ask for what we need. The good news for marketers is that natural language phrases like the questions above convert at 2.5x the rate of single keyword searches (like "pizzeria" or "curly fries").[1] As the most searched-for local business category, restaurants are already seeing the biggest impact of this evolution.

I remember as a kid, when my parents would take the family out for dinner, they would ask, "Where should we go eat?" Today, that *where* is now a *what* because how we decide where we want to eat has changed. We're searching for whatever we're craving (whether it's Mexican food or pizza) nearly twice as often as the name of a restaurant itself.[2] This trend includes every type of restaurant, from fine and casual dining to global restaurant chains with thousands of locations.

We expect direct answers to our search queries… and we expect those answers immediately. The competition for share of stomach in the food service industry is becoming more complex. Third-party on-demand delivery platforms, home-delivered meal kits, ready-made meals available in grocery stores, combined with the oversaturation of restaurants,[3] are making it more difficult than ever to compete in an industry where margins are already razor-thin.

For a restaurant to succeed — let alone, thrive — in this perfect storm, it's essential to have a strong search presence, and to attract consumers in their micro-moments of intent. Most consumers searching for a restaurant end up completing a purchase within 24 hours.[4] Restaurants need to make sure their online customer experience is optimised for the future of search and the customer journey that today's consumers expect — a quick and efficient path to purchase. It's simply the new table-stakes.

I hope our research gives you a greater understanding of this change in customer search behavior, and that it inspires you to leverage your assets in new ways so your business can adapt as both the search ecosystem and restaurant industry continue to transform.

**Lee Zucker**
Head of Industry,
Food Service & Hospitality,

# Leverage the rich details about your restaurants and menus to boost discoverability.

Today's world of connected devices, search experiences, voice assistants, and AI has expanded your restaurant brand's digital footprint far beyond your own website. The facts about your business — from hours of operation to menu information — now live in maps, voice search, conversational UI, knowledge cards, and so many more places that show direct, structured answers.

These AI-powered discovery services have generated a society of liberated, hyper-mobile consumers who perform searches in the moment. The surge in 'near me' searches we saw two years ago has become so commonplace that fewer people bother to search using those words at all — increasingly, the phrase 'near me' is merely implied.

Instead, searches for 'open now' are on the rise, tripling in the past two years.[5] It's expected behavior that search engines will factor in relevance, prominence, and proximity for every search a consumer performs.

This increase in searches that include terms like 'open now' demonstrates consumers' need for immediate answers — and it provides insight into their intention. On average, 74% of consumers eat at a restaurant within a week of researching it online and 32% go within a 24 hours.[6] This means when consumers are searching for food, they usually intend to dine right away.

**On average, 32% of consumers eat at a restaurant within 24 hours of researching it online.**

Consumers not only want things now, they want to be very well-informed before stepping foot into a restaurant. Consumers are making conventional, attribute-based searches, like 'restaurants good for kids' or 'dinner takes reservations' that suit their needs. Consumers want rich attribute information (like price range, meals served, and attire required) so they can choose the place to dine that's right for them. In fact, 76% of consumers say they're more likely to choose a restaurant that gives them in-depth attribute information in search results.

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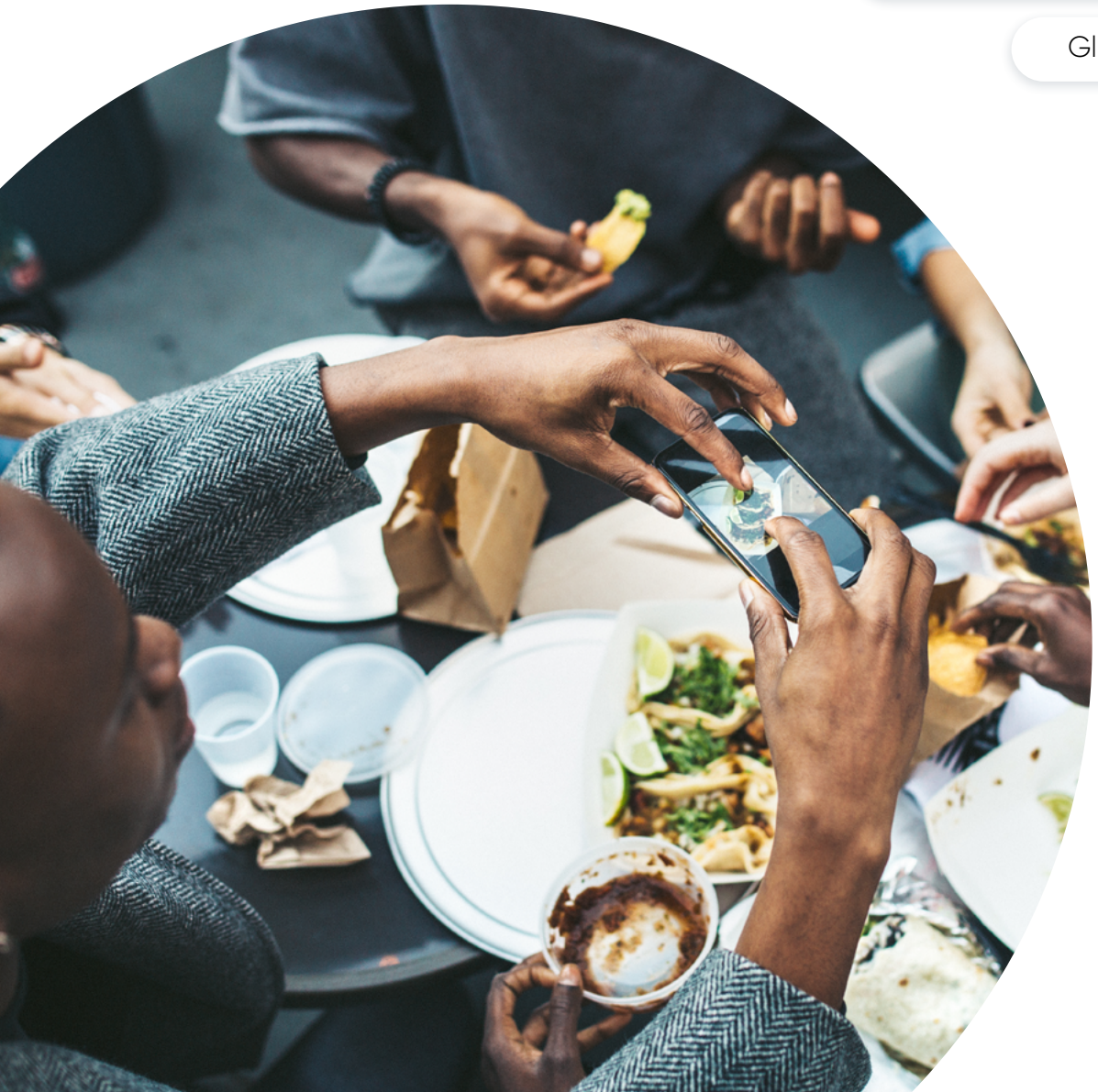


Quite simply, details matter.

Cravings matter too.

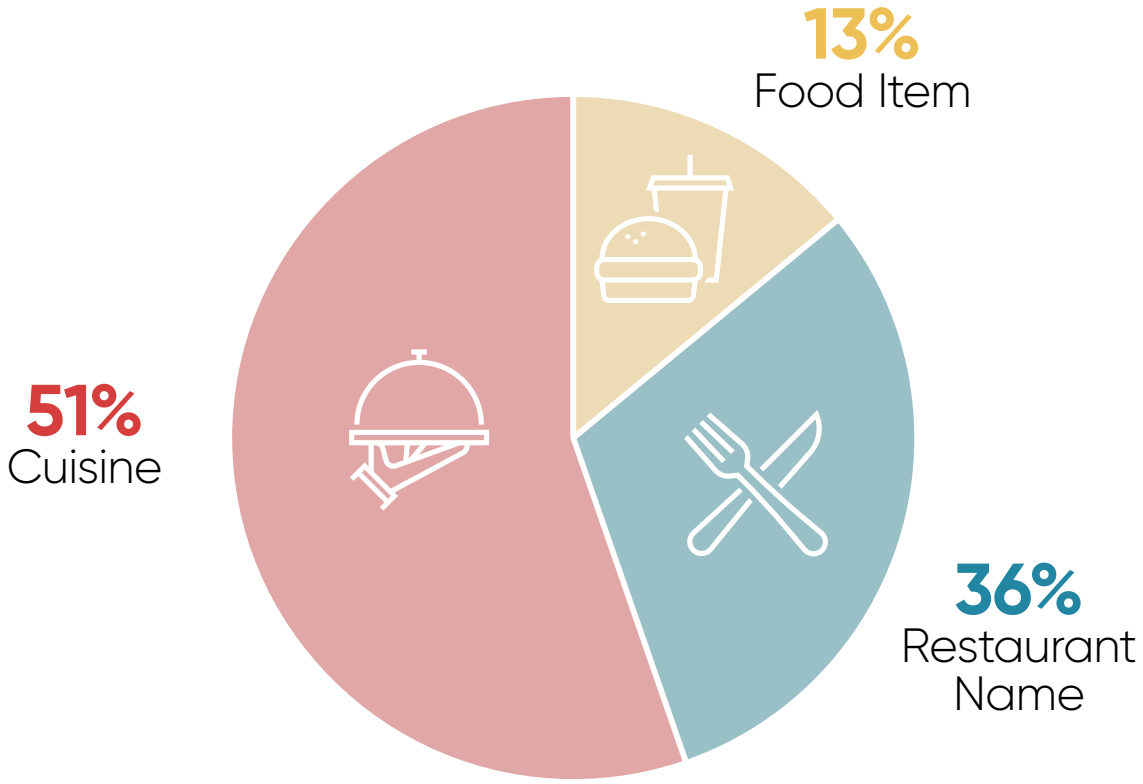
Consumers want to know if you have what they want to eat. Searches like 'pepperoni pizza,' 'fish tacos,' and other unbranded food searches are reigning supreme.

When searching for a restaurant online, 64% of consumers either search by cuisine or food item — not by restaurant name. When almost three-quarters of food searches are unbranded, it's clear that menus are more important than ever to a restaurant's search strategy.

What many restaurants brands don't realize is that the rich details consumers care about (like their menu and attribute information) are also their secret ingredients to showing up in search. AI-powered discovery services need these details — this structured data — because they want to be able to answer consumers' queries, like 'drive-thru open now' and 'burger has wifi.' Many of them have started indexing this menu and attribute data — simultaneously creating new opportunities for restaurant brands to optimize themselves for search, with the exact search terms consumers are already using.

**64% of food searches are unbranded.**

When searching for a restaurant online, consumers most often search by:



# Menu and attribute information is a restaurant's secret ingredient to appearing in search.

A menu is the backbone — some may even call it the 'identity' — of a restaurant. And great care is taken to craft the perfect one.

The menu matters to consumers too because the menu is what confirms whether or not a particular restaurant serves what they are craving.

61% of consumers say they're unlikely to visit a restaurant without seeing the menu — it's undeniable that the menu is instrumental to a consumer's selection process. And if a restaurant wants to be considered, they need to ensure consumers can easily find an up-to-date menu online.

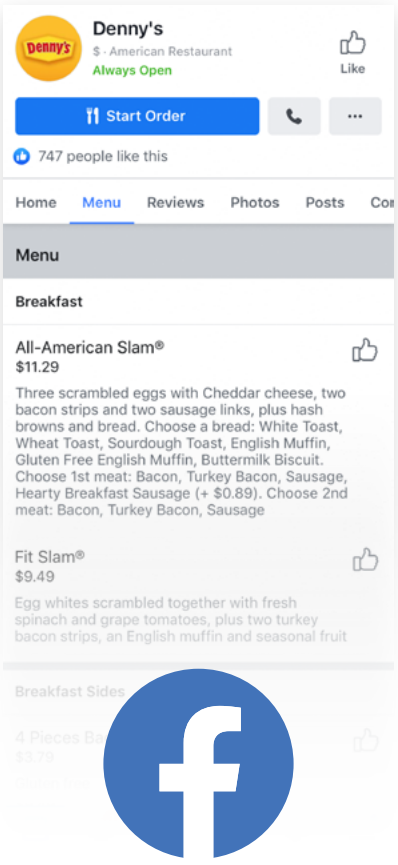
Consumers like to have options. 50% of consumers begin their search for a restaurant with a search engine like Google or Bing. This means that restaurant brands not only have to show up in search, they need to stand out if they're going to have a chance at being chosen as a consumer's next dining destination.

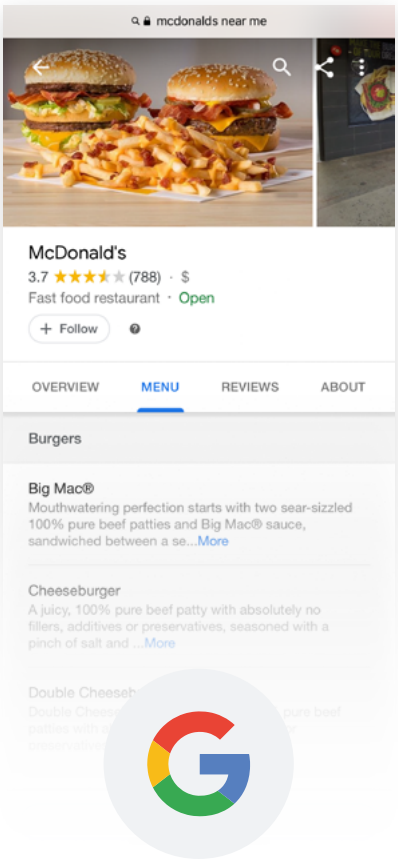
**Stephanie Esposito**
Director of Brand Marketing at Hard Rock International

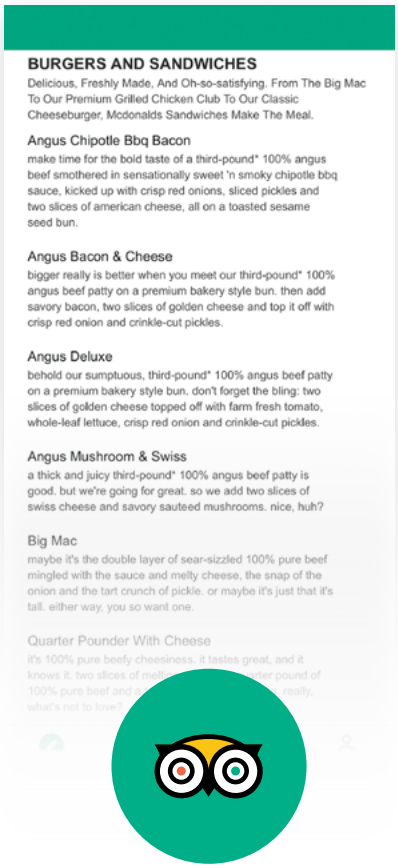
"The [Yext] platform gives us the opportunity to provide up-to-date information through various search engines, voice assistants, and maps about our innovative new menu that features award-winning Steak Burgers, Instagram-worthy Boozy Milkshakes, Sliders and Shareable offerings, as well as exciting entertainment experiences taking place at Hard Rock Cafe locations around the world."

AI-powered discovery services are intelligent, but they still rely on restaurant brands to provide them with this rich, structured menu and attribute data. A restaurant's menu and attribute information is constantly changing, and it's fragmented throughout the systems that power it. Menu data lives in POS, hours and specific location data are kept by local managers, photos live with marketing, address data is managed by HR or real estate, and so on. And unfortunately, the majority of a restaurant's data goes underutilized because it's nearly impossible to collect.

So how can a restaurant brand bring all of its structured data together? Ideally, all of the rich, structured information about its business lives in one place, with one source of truth powering internal systems. This unified foundation ensures that everything search engines and other discovery services need to serve consumers with the details they want to make a dining decision is accurate, and in front of them at their moment of intent — no matter where they're searching.



# Reviews matter more than ever for search.

Customers use reviews everyday to decide where they are going to do business. Among 18–34 year old consumers, 95% read online reviews for local businesses and 91% say they trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations.[7]

Reviews contain valuable information about what customers like, and don't like, about their experience with your restaurant. Harnessing this knowledge with scalable sentiment analysis can lead to better reviews in the future and possibly open up ideas for business innovation.

Third-party reviews are those on sites like Google My Business, Yelp, TripAdvisor, and Facebook — where your dining experience is on display to prospective customers. First-party reviews live on the website for your business. They are a powerful tool in driving customer advocacy and SEO benefits. Reviews of all types can help your local search ranking, and first-party reviews — those that you generate and publish via your own site — help you display your star-rating in search results. If you are generating and publishing reviews to your own website, you can see higher click through rates in organic search.

Restaurants have seen massive growth in reviews. In a study evaluating all of our restaurant clients, Yext found that 96% of partial service restaurants (QSR & Fast Casual) locations and 94% of fine and casual dining brand locations receive at least one review on a local listing on Google My Business, Facebook, Yelp, or TripAdvisor.

In 2011, Michael Luca at Harvard Business School completed a study that showed a rating increase of one star on Yelp correlated to a 5–9% increase in revenue per location. And now that Google's algorithm includes review ratings and review quantities as ranking signals, businesses can now see a direct correlation between increased star rating and click-through rate (CTR) on customer actions like "Order Online" or "Get Directions."

**Across all verticals:**

- Businesses with 4–5 star average ratings see higher positions within the local map pack on Google.
- Locations with 4–5 star average ratings and at least 50 reviews see a +.5% CTR for "Get Directions" on their GMB listings than those with an average rating of 2–3 stars.
- Such locations with more than 100 reviews see a +.8% CTR for "Get Directions."
- Those with more than 500 reviews see +1% increase in CTR for "Get Directions."[8]

Clicks for directions are deemed the highest conversion metric for in-person visits to restaurant brands. Similar trends correlate to click-through rate to websites. Businesses with 500+ locations and a 4–5 star average rating see almost +2% CTR from Google search results than those with 2–3 star average ratings.

The actual language written within a review can also have a positive impact on unbranded search queries like "ice cream near me" or "restaurants with coffee open now." Fazoli's, a Yext client since 2016, saw a 43% increase in share of local search results for "pasta" within six months of implementing a reviews management program.

As customer reviews become increasingly prevalent in these industries — and directly influential on foot traffic — the time to get a solid reviews strategy in place, is now.

# Yext for Food helps nourish restaurant brands for the intelligent era.

A single system of record for all the details and facts about your restaurant brand is achievable — with Yext. Enhance your discoverability by making your restaurant and menu details visible across the AI-powered services of today and tomorrow, to drive more consumers from phone to fork.

## Knowledge Graph

A single source of truth for the public facts about your business.

Your centralized hub to manage all the facts consumers seek about your restaurants — from locations and hours of operation to seasonal menus and nutritional information. The customer journey starts with a question, and your Knowledge Graph has the answer.

## Pages

Built for discovery and conversion.

Yext Pages put your marketing team in control of your restaurant's landing pages — ensuring customers can find optimized, accurate, and consistent answers about your restaurant no matter how they are searching.

## Listings

Get found. Everywhere.

With direct integrations across 150+ digital services globally, including Google, Amazon Alexa, Apple, Bing, Yelp, AllMenus, Facebook, and Postmates, Yext Listings puts you in control of the facts about your restaurant — everywhere consumers are searching.

## Reviews

Star in intelligent search.

Yext Reviews helps you to build a customer-centric reviews management program by monitoring and analyzing reviews across the Knowledge Network, engaging customers through response, and generating authentic reviews directly from your customers.

## Analytics

Bring customer engagement into focus — everywhere.

With information about your restaurant scattered across the digital ecosystem, it's never been possible to see a single, complete view of how customers are interacting with you. Yext Analytics brings customer interactions into focus — everywhere they occur.

## App Directory

Become a more intelligent enterprise.

With the Yext App Directory, leverage pre-built integrations with applications like Tableau, Salesforce, Hootsuite, OpenMenu, Trabon, HubSpot, and more to extend the power of your Knowledge Graph to the systems and processes you use every day. Become a more intelligent enterprise — and make Yext work even better for you.

## Competitive Intelligence

Understand how you perform in search based on specific keywords and in your online reputation compared to your local competition. Track this over time to see where digital marketing efforts are improving your share of search.

## Franchise Controls

Empower local franchisees, while maintaining corporate control, with sophisticated approval workflows and user permissioning.

## Sources


1. Conductor. "The Long Tail of Search: Why the Fastest Path to More Traffic Might Not be Where You are Looking." http://ww2.conductor.com/rs/conductor2/images/Conductor-Research-Long_Tail_of_Search.pdf

2. Yext Local Search Behavior Study, July 2019

3. Abrams and Gebeloff. "Thanks to Wall St., There May Be Too Many Restaurants." The New York Times. Oct. 31, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/31/business/too-many-restaurants-wall-street.html

4. Unless otherwise noted, all statistics in this white paper reflect the results of a Yext survey on local search behavior conducted in July 2019.

5. Gevelber, Lisa. "Micro-Moments Now: Why expectations for 'right now' are on the rise." Think With Google. August 2017. https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/consumer-insights/consumer-immediate-need-mobile-experiences/

6. Yext Local Search Behavior Study, July 2019

7. BrightLocal. Local Consumer Review Survey. December 2018. https://www.brightlocal.com/research/local-consumer-review-survey/#Q7 Accessed 7/25/19

8. Yext Proprietary Study, December 2018

The customer journey starts with a question. And consumers expect answers. Yext puts businesses in control of their facts online with brand-verified answers in search. By serving accurate, consistent, brand-verified answers to consumer questions, Yext delivers authoritative information straight from the source — the business itself — no matter where or how customers are searching. Tesco, Marriott, Jaguar Land Rover and businesses around the globe use the Yext platform to capture consumer intent and drive digital discovery, engagement and revenue — all from a single source of truth. Yext's mission is to provide perfect answers everywhere.

Yext has been named a Best Place to Work by Fortune and Great Place to Work® as well as a Best Workplace for Women. Yext is headquartered in New York City with offices in Amsterdam, Berlin, Chicago, Dallas, Geneva, London, Miami, Milan, Paris, San Francisco, Shanghai, Tokyo and the Washington, D.C. area.

Learn more at **yext.co.uk**