**Casual Dining Trends**

**What are current/new casual dining trends?**

* [What should restaurants charge for?](https://modernrestaurantmanagement.com/to-charge-or-not-to-charge/#google_vignette)
  + Article encourages professionals to carefully consider charging practices, involving management and staff in decision-making.
  + Suggestion to balance fee charges like credit card fees, no-show reservations and overbooking with increases in food and beverage pricing, highlighting the significance of these decisions.
    - Encouraged to avoid deceptive charges like temporary or health care fees and maintain tranperancy/fairness.
* [Increase in proprietary technology](https://www.nrn.com/consumer-trends/32-trends-watch-2024/gallery?slide=1):
  + “In 2024, expect more restaurant chains (especially larger companies) to announce investments in proprietary technology. Despite the upfront expense, the unobstructed access to data and custom builds could be worth it in the long-run — especially with restaurants that can invest in the necessary personnel”
* [Happy Hour as Dining](https://www.restaurantbusinessonline.com/food/these-are-big-menu-trends-watch-2024):
  + Many restaurants offer discounted happy hour menus with chef-driven food, substituting for pricier dinners3.
* [Food Transparency:](https://www.webstaurantstore.com/blog/2582/fast-casual-dining-trends.html)
  + Consumers are showing more interest in fair trade and food transparency, wanting to know the origin and story behind their food2.

**What is being reported on and where?**

* The New York Times: shares [reviews and features](https://www.nytimes.com/section/food) on new and notable restaurants in New York City, along with food-related stories and trends.
* The Washington Post: [restaurants and bars](https://www.washingtonpost.com/goingoutguide/restaurants/) section includes reviews, food trends, and stories about the local dining scene in the D.C. area
* The Wall Street Journal; [food section](https://www.wsj.com/arts-culture/food-cooking) covers a range of topics from cooking and recipes to restaurant news and food industry analysis
* [Food & Wine](https://www.foodandwine.com/about-us-6373913): offers rigorously tested recipes and trusted coverage on restaurants, drinks, culinary travel, and home, inspiring readers to explore the food and drink scene
* Bon Appetit: features a [restaurant section](https://www.bonappetit.com/restaurants) that highlights where to eat, with a focus on creative American baking, the evolution of the smash burger, and anticipated restaurant openings
* [Nation’s Restaurant News](https://www.nrn.com/) (UVM: 400K): provides information to operate restaurants more efficiently, covering operations, finance, design, and marketing.
  + [Nation's Restaurant News 2024 Restaurant Technology Report](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bQCywpKK2ZsKPsElo4XV4o8IQLyZPJls/view?usp=sharing)
* [Restaurant Business](https://www.restaurantbusinessonline.com/) (UVM: 331K): leans more towards the financial and insurance-related aspects of restaurant operation.
* [Modern Restaurant Management](https://modernrestaurantmanagement.com/dining-trends-for-2024/) (UVM: 8.6K): offers a blend of operational guidance with a focus on management practices and adapting to industry changes.
* [Food & Beverage Magazine](https://www.fb101.com/)(UVM: 18.2K): provides a more diverse range of topics, including lifestyle and culinary trends, making it a more comprehensive resource for the food and beverage industry.

**Any new relevant consumer insights out there?**

[2024 is well underway, but industry forecasters are still predicting what's ahead](https://www.restaurantbusinessonline.com/consumer-trends/2024-well-underway-industry-forecasters-are-still-predicting-whats-ahead)

Q4 2023 Trends:

* Catering orders surged by 71% year over year, with 30% attributed to online ordering.
* Large restaurant parties (eight or more guests) saw only a 2% increase year over year.
* Zero proof cocktails are trending upward, according to a survey by [Les Dames d’Escoffier International](https://www.fb101.com/les-dames-descoffier-international-releases-highly-anticipated-trends-report/), identities an “integral part of the increasing array of options available for making balanced choices during special occasion dining.”

Retro Revival:

* Mafia nostalgia, spurred by the 25th anniversary of "The Sopranos," is influencing dining trends.
* Tableside preparation, such as flaming desserts and tableside decanting of wines, is making a comeback.

Blurring of Restaurant and Retail Sectors:

* Quick-service and fast-casual restaurants are preferred for everyday catering events by 45% of consumers.
* Restaurant chefs are curating grocery selections and shopping lists, aiming to recreate restaurant flavors and dishes at home.
* More chef-prepared meals are expected in supermarket cases, along with restaurants inside supermarkets.

Compelling campaigns?

* Brands like [Chic-Fila and Sweetgreen](https://www.nrn.com/consumer-trends/32-trends-watch-2024/gallery?slide=1) expanding their loyalty programs with life style lines including plushies and apparel.

**Outback + Competitors (**Longhorn, Texas Roadhouse, Chili’s, Applebee’s, Buffalo Wild Wings and Red Lobster)2q

**Review Outback comms (press releases, owned content):**

* [Press releases](https://www.outback.com/press-room) focus on:
  + Promotions: [OUTBACK STEAKHOUSE IS BRIBING PEOPLE TO CARE ABOUT RANKING #1 IN CUSTOMER SATISFACTION WITH FREE BLOOMIN’ ONIONS](https://www.outback.com/press-room/outback-steakhouse-is-bribing-people-to-care-about-ranking-1-in-customer-satisfaction)
  + Menu items: [OUTBACK STEAKHOUSE CELEBRATES ITS 35TH ANNIVERSARY WITH BOOMERANG MENU](https://www.outback.com/press-room/outback-steakhouse-celebrates-its-35th-anniversary-with-boomerang-menu)
  + Philanthropy:
    - [OUTBACK STEAKHOUSE ADDS COLLEGE BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL ATHLETES TO THE TEAMMATES PROGRAM ROSTER](https://www.outback.com/press-room/outback-steakhouse-adds-college-baseball-and-softball-athletes-to-the-teammates-program-roster)
    - [OUTBACK STEAKHOUSE ADDS 12 COLLEGE BASKETBALL ATHLETES TO THE TEAMMATES PROGRAM ROSTER](https://www.outback.com/press-room/outback-steakhouse-adds-12-college-basketball-athletes-to-the-teammates-program-roster)
* Social media insights:
  + Photography and graphics: Photos oscilate from appearing to be shot by a [professional camera](https://www.instagram.com/p/C3njbQTOwWL/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==) and an [IPhone](https://www.instagram.com/p/C2qc-Nrs5bu/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==).Will utilzie [influencers](https://www.instagram.com/reel/CvFiHBogOXa/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==) to post directly on social pages and take part in [social media trends](https://x.com/Outback/status/1744483441528225997). [Graphics](https://www.instagram.com/p/C3IfapDsvSf/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==) could use a bit of an [upgrade](https://www.instagram.com/p/CyzK65luzLS/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==).

**What have they focused on over the past 1-2 years?**

* Over the past couple of years, Outback Steakhouse has been focusing on growth and innovation.
  + In 2022, they introduced a new, smaller restaurant design that’s [16% smaller than traditional](https://www.restaurantbusinessonline.com/financing/outback-steakhouse-plots-return-unit-growth-behind-smaller-restaurants) Outback locations but maintains the same number of tables due to an optimized layout, possibly contributing to the closing of [older locations and franchises](https://www.macombdaily.com/2024/02/29/outback-steakhouse-closes-its-roseville-location-after-29-year-run/).
    - Remodeled [over 100 locations](https://www.eatthis.com/outback-steakhouse-accelerating-2024-restaurant-openings/) in 2023 and plans to continue in 2024.
  + They also made improvements in steak preparation, portion sizing, and restaurant ambiance through a remodel program to invest in the overall customer experience rather than relying on discounting.
* Despite these efforts, there was a report of a slight decline in same-store sales in the [third quarter of 2023](https://www.restaurantbusinessonline.com/operations/outback-sales-fall-against-softer-backdrop), attributed to a softer industry backdrop with fewer transactions and decreased spending.
  + Bloomin’ Brands, the parent company of Outback, plans to spend between [$270 million and $290 million](https://www.eatthis.com/outback-steakhouse-accelerating-2024-restaurant-openings/) in 2024 to upgrade its assets and assist in closing 41 underperforming restaurants while opening 45 new locations in 2024.
    - Reflects a greater trend of franchise optimization and cycling in the industry with [three major Burger King](https://www.thestreet.com/restaurants/fast-food-chain-closes-restaurants-after-chapter-11-bankruptcy) franchises filing for bankruptcy in March.
  + Their parent company Bloomin Brands promoted former CFO of Outback and CEO of Bonefish Grill Michael Healy on [Thursday](https://www.restaurantbusinessonline.com/leadership/outback-steakhouse-parent-bloomin-brands-promotes-michael-healy-cfo).

**Any major campaigns? Crises? Partnerships?**

Campaigns

* Sports teams and College athletes:
  + [Steak It To the House](https://www.outback.com/press-room/outback-steakhouse-launches-steak-it-to-the-house-campaign-with-top-college-football-athletes)
  + [Outback Steakhouse expands NIL partnerships for latest campaign](https://www.marketingdive.com/news/outback-steakhouse-nil-partnerships-campaign/634870/)
* [Menu innovation](https://www.outback.com/press-room/outback-steakhouse-debuts-its-new-sweet-heat-season-menu):
  + Introducing new and innovative menu offerings can help Outback Steakhouse stay relevant and attract a broader range of customers.
  + By continuously experimenting with flavors and incorporating food trends, the company can appeal to changing consumer preferences and expand its customer base.
* [The Rise of Fast Casual Dining](https://www.openpr.com/news/3429924/fast-casual-restaurants-market-worth-293-80-billion-by-2030)
  + By capitalizing on the rise of casual dining, Outback Steakhouse can attract customers who value a comfortable, family-friendly atmosphere while enjoying high-quality food and service.

Crises/Issues

* Sensational Stories and Mishaps:
  + [12-year-old served alcohol at Outback Steakhouse in Livonia](https://www.fox2detroit.com/news/12-year-old-served-alcohol-at-outback-steakhouse-in-livonia)

**Quick look at competitors:**

**Major campaigns/promos over last year**

Longhorn

* Founded in 1981 in Atlanta Georgia, emphasizes popular menu items, mainly [steak](https://www.longhornsteakhouse.com/about-us) as well as fan favorites like the [lamb chops](https://sumnercountysource.com/longhorn-steakhouse-welcomes-back-beloved-grilled-lamb-chops/).
* Takes a conversational approach using words like “[fellow carnivores](https://www.longhornsteakhouse.com/nutrition)” in messaging and [social](https://twitter.com/LongHornSteaks?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor).

Texas Roadhouse:

* Emphasizes connection to [local communities](https://www.2news.com/news/tip-a-cop-fundraiser-at-texas-roadhouse/video_b87fb961-8bf1-5c00-9ffa-eefd1a5e40f2.html) and [sustainability initiatives](https://www.texasroadhouse.com/about-us).
* Recently, the company is focusing on:
  + Strategic shifts including reacting to inflation and supply chain issues with a 2[.2% rise in menu prices](https://www.eatthis.com/texas-roadhouse-major-changes-2024/), leveraging technology enhancements like [digital kitchens](https://www.eatthis.com/texas-roadhouse-major-changes-2024/) and [diversifying revenue streams](https://shoptxrh.myshopify.com/collections/gifts) have contributed to this success.
  + New Texas Roadhouse restaurants are [10% larger](https://www.eatthis.com/texas-roadhouse-major-changes-2024/) than previous builds, focusing on practical improvements such as dedicated to-go areas and expanded back-of-house space.
* Campaigns focus on philanthropic ideals and connecting to customer base.
  + [MakeAWish](https://wish.org/nj/texas-roadhouses-paper-stars-campaign)
  + [Tip-A-Cop Fundraiser](https://www.2news.com/news/tip-a-cop-fundraiser-at-texas-roadhouse/video_b87fb961-8bf1-5c00-9ffa-eefd1a5e40f2.html)
  + [Hey Dude! Shoes and Texas Roadhouse fundraiser](https://texasroadhousemenuwithprices.com/texas-roadhouse-hey-dudes/)

Chili’s:

* Offers a variety of Fresh Mex dishes and a new tableside guacamole presentation.
* Focuses on providing value [utilizing television ads](https://www.restaurantbusinessonline.com/financing/chilis-push-value-first-tv-ads-more-3-years) (especially post-pandemic) to be added back into the “consideration set” and pushing discounts.

Applebee’s:

* Provides a [diverse menu](https://www.mbaskool.com/marketing-mix/services/18130-applebees.html) with a focus on classic combos and American cuisine.
* [Marketing Vanguard podcast with AdWeek](https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/applebees-reinvented-marketing-strategy/)
  + CMO Joel Yashinsky highlights the significance of collaboration with franchisees in driving the brand’s success, and teases upcoming announcements and partnerships aimed at further enhancing Applebee’s guest experiences.
    - Upcoming announcer
  + Recently collaborated with aron Paul and Bryan Cranston’s Dos Hombres Mezcal and Dwayne "The Rock" to create signature cocktails with their new brand [Johnson's Teremana Tequila](https://www.applebees.com/en/news/2024/dos-hombres-debut-at-applebees).
  + Takes advantage of TikTok to target younger guests, including a “natural evolution” to connect music to their marketing
    - Collaboration with [Fancy Like by Walker Hayes](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTVPiQwMGBs)
  + Utilizes marketing strategies that emphasize familiarity and a sense of belonging.

Buffalo Wild Wings:

* Best known for its Buffalo-style chicken wings and a variety of sauces.
* Offers a [sports bar experience](https://www.mashed.com/1407770/buffalo-wild-wings-success/) with live sports, beer, and an energetic atmosphere.
* Focus on creating a mobile app experience and rewards program like Texas Roadhouse and Red Lobster and [offering rewards for use and interaction](https://www.buffalowildwings.com/mfa-faqs/)
  + Offers an element of [game play and prizes](https://play.buffalowildwings.com/?_ga=2.118790732.437317471.1712574619-1329982976.1712574619&_gl=1*cqd95d*_ga*MTMyOTk4Mjk3Ni4xNzEyNTc0NjE5*_ga_42QQHVHNHH*MTcxMjU3NDYxOS4xLjEuMTcxMjU3NDYzNS40NC4wLjA.) on mobile app and leans into this element further with collaborations with companies like [BetMGM](https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20190905005537/en/%C2%A0Buffalo-Wild-Wings-Partners-BetMGM-Bring-Sports).

Red Lobster:

* Specializes in [seafood](https://www.redlobster.com/rewards/), including crab, fish, and their famous Cheddar Bay Biscuits.
* Offers a [rewards program](https://www.redlobster.com/rewards/) with exclusive discounts, coupons, and free rewards.
* Engages in sustainability efforts and sources seafood responsibly.
  + Previous collaborations with [HGTV](https://youtu.be/pzZeTBAG8_w?feature=shared) and [Animal Planet](https://youtu.be/xO9j1HLmoRM?feature=shared) to highlight sustainable seafood initiatives.
  + **Notable coverage:**
* Restaurant Business: [How Red Lobster got in over its head](https://www.restaurantbusinessonline.com/financing/how-red-lobster-got-over-its-head)