

toast

# 5 Ways QSRs Are Building Faster, Smarter, More Human Drive-Thrus



Would you like to make it a combo?

I'll try the Classic Burger.

What would you like to order today?





**Ken  
Neeld**

VP, Delphi by Toast



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Founder & CEO, Incept AI

# 5 Trends Shaping the Future of Drive-Thru

*(and what leaders  
should do about it)*

1

Rise of the Omnichannel Lane

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2

The Live Menu Era

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3

AI Leaves the Lab

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Drive-Thru Value Redefined

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5

Tech Stack Unification

**Drive-thru isn't new  
so why does this  
moment matter?**

# 75%

of all restaurant traffic now happens off-premise

# 42%

of US adults use a drive-thru at least once per week

## Growth in off-premise share of total customer traffic (2019-2024)

 QSR Growth: 76% → 83%

 FSR Growth: 19% → 30%



# More than just a lane for onsite orders, drive-thru is becoming a fulfillment hub

**50%**

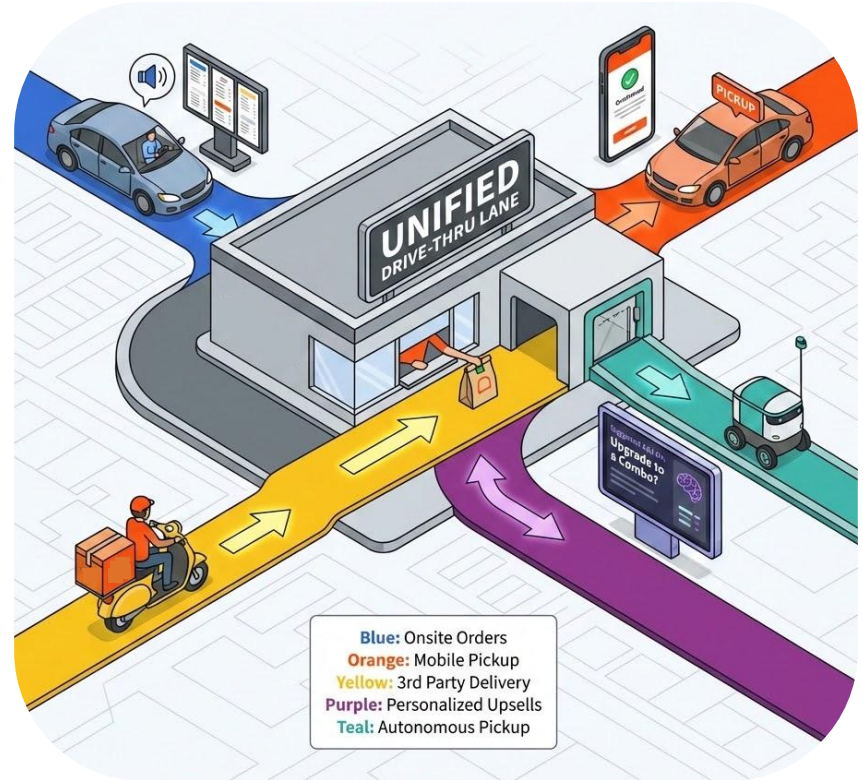
of operators expect off-premise dining to increase in importance to their bottom line.

Source: [2024 Toast Voice of the Restaurant Industry Survey](#), Toast

**57%**

of customers have used a mobile app to place an off-premise order in the past 6 months.

Source: [2025 Off-Premises Restaurant Trends Report](#), National Restaurant Association

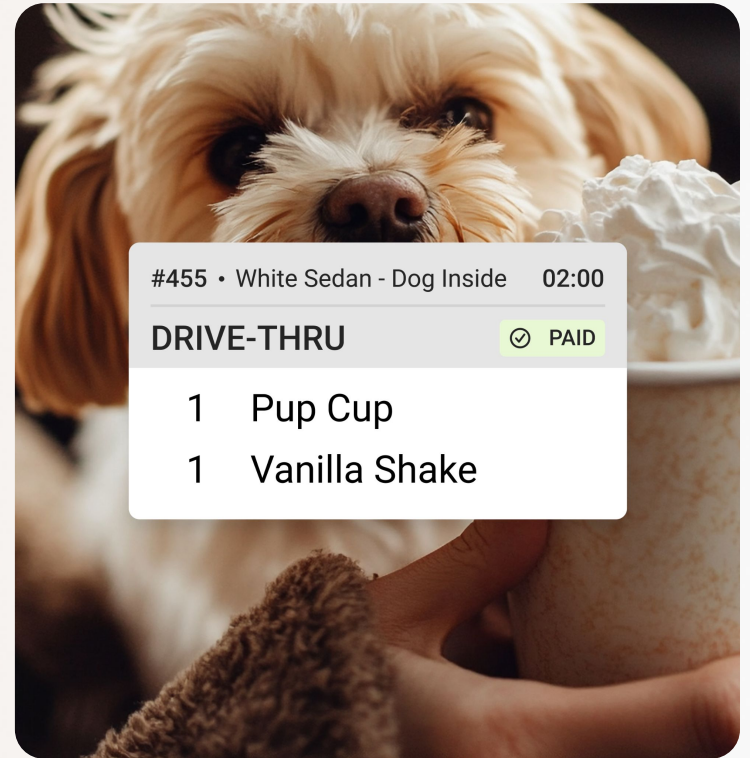


# Operator Tactic: Building Drive-Thru for Omnichannel

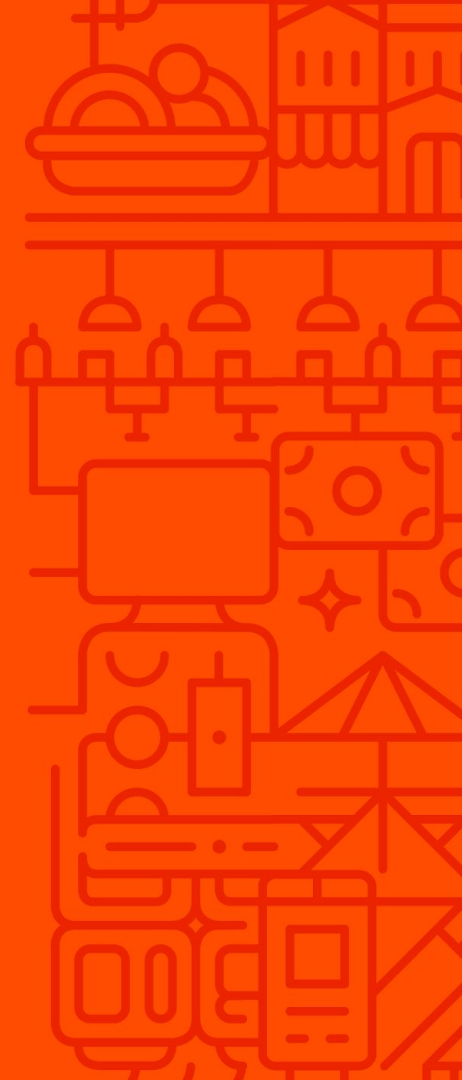
**Separating workflows by channel:** Creating distinct paths for on-site orders, mobile pick-up and delivery where possible.

**Designing for the handoff:** Defining clear rules and processes for on-site, order ahead and delivery drivers.

**Building future flexibility into the system:** Avoid being locked in by physical configuration and hardware decisions that can't easily adapt to changes in tech or guest behavior.



Trend 2:  
**The Live Menu  
Era**



# Guests are influenced by value, while operators look for ways to make menus more dynamic

9/10

guests say they use limited-time in-app offers to help make menu decisions.

Source: [2025 Off-Premises Restaurant Trends Report](#), National Restaurant Association

70%

of restaurant operators are highly interested in implementing dynamic pricing and live menu adjustments.

Source: [2024 Toast Voice of the Restaurant Industry Survey](#), Toast

40%

of operators plan to leverage AI to optimize menu performance in real-time based on inventory and sales trends.

Source: [2024 Toast Voice of the Restaurant Industry Survey](#), Toast

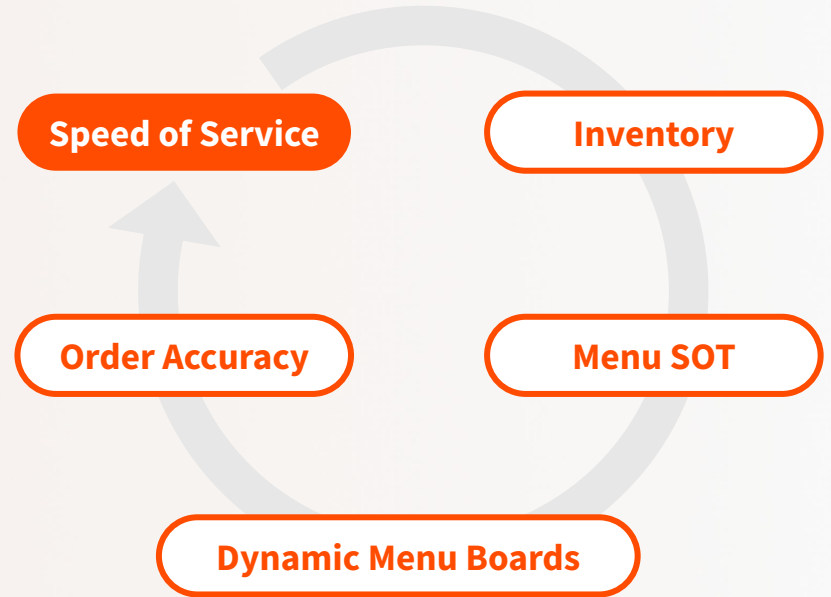
# Operator Tactic: The Drive-Thru Menu Control Loop

**One Menu Source of Truth:** Keep menu items, pricing, availability and modifiers aligned.

**Real-Time Menu Updates:** Push stock-outs and prices changes directly from the POS to menu boards and digital surfaces.

**Streamline Modifier Complexity:** Manage risk of too many customizations or modifiers that slow down service.

**Use Promos to Drive Incremental Loyalty:**  
Personalized offers > more offers.





# Guests and operators alike are increasingly comfortable with AI

**50%+**

of Millennial and Gen Z adults say they would be comfortable placing an order by talking to an AI persona.

Source: [2025 Off-Premises Restaurant Trends Report](#), National Restaurant Association

**86%**

of restaurant operators feel comfortable using AI.

Source: [2025 Toast Voice of the Restaurant Industry Survey](#), Toast

**81%**

of restaurant operators say they plan to use AI more in the future.

Source: [2025 Toast Voice of the Restaurant Industry Survey](#), Toast

## Voice AI continues to show operational benefits

AI voice ordering has been shown to cut drive-thru ordering time by **25%** while handling **90%** of orders automatically.

*Source: [Voice-Automated Drive-Thru: How Artificial Intelligence Speech Recognition Transforms Quick Service Restaurant Operations](#), Deepgram*

# 95%

Drive-thru AI voice ordering solutions are capable of over 95% order accuracy.

*Source: [Conversational AI Reinvents Drive-Thru](#), Intel*

# 33%

of guests add an item when prompted by VoiceAI systems.

*Source: [The Improvement & Impact of Voice AI in Drive-Thru](#), Presto*

# Operator Tactic: Designing an AI-Ready Drive-Thru

Moving from AI pilot to successful deployment requires a systems-based approach.



## Technical Foundations

Hardware and networking ensure AI can hear and respond with low latency.



## Data Integrity

Clean POS and menu data give AI strong training foundation and reduce errors.



## Human Centricity

Proper training helps staff execute AI efficiency AI handoffs and know when to lean in.



**Network Infrastructure**



**Menu & Data Optimization**



**Team Change Management**

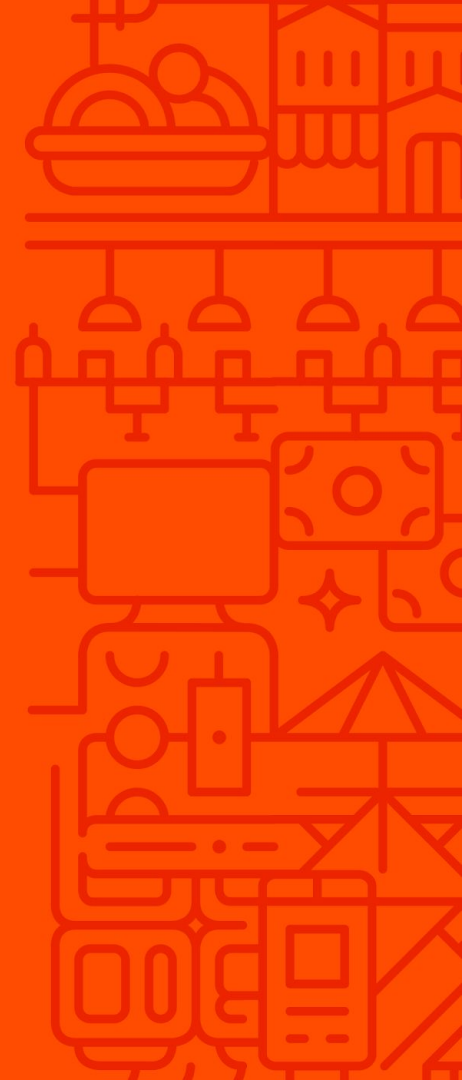


**Acoustic & Hardware**



**POS & API Integration**

Trend 4:  
**Drive-Thru  
Value  
Redefined**



# Drive-thru is a habit and value means more than just price to frequent guests

## 42%

of US consumers use a restaurant drive-thru at least once a week.

Source: [2025 Off-Premises Restaurant Trends Report](#), National Restaurant Association

## 92%

of adult drive-thru customers say having food arrive quickly is important to them when choosing a restaurant.

Source: [2025 Off-Premises Restaurant Trends Report](#), National Restaurant Association

## 80%

of drive-thru customers say a special, discount or value promotion is important when choosing a restaurant.

Source: [2025 Off-Premises Restaurant Trends Report](#), National Restaurant Association

## 81%

of drive-thru customers say they would take advantage of discounts for visiting during less busy times of day.

Source: [2025 Off-Premises Restaurant Trends Report](#), National Restaurant Association

# Operator Tactic: A Modular Drive-Thru Value Framework

Technology enables operators to engage drive-thru guests with personalized value drivers.



## Budget Conscious

Sees value in low cost options and discounting.



## Time Starved

Sees value in speed of service and fulfillment time.



## Seamless Seeker

Sees value in low-friction digital experience.



## Brand Super Fan

Sees value in unique brand experiences and connection.

Time-based Discounts

Drive-Thru Express Lanes

Geofenced Arrival

Secret Drive-Thru Items

Aggressive Lead-in Pricing

Fastest-Item Tags

Plate Recognition

Early Access LTOs

App Exclusive Coupons

Zero-Prep Add-Ons

Smart Order Corrections

Gamified Achievements

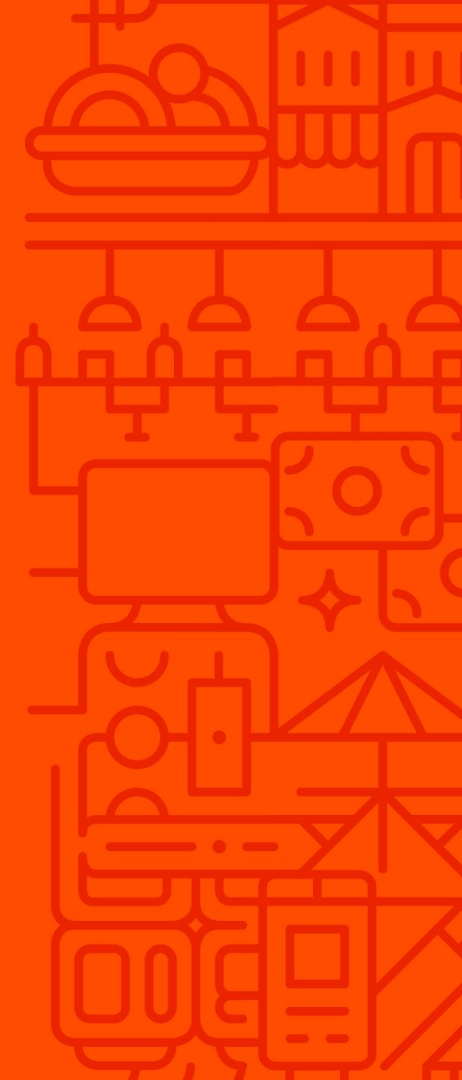
Drive-Thru Value Menus

Wait Time Alerts

Touchless Payments

Personalized Item Drops

# Trend 5: **Tech Stack Unification**



# First, a quick recap...

- 1 Rise of the Omnichannel Lane**  
Adapt by **separating workflows** by channel and designing your drive-thru to flex with future tech.

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- 2 The Live Menu Era**  
Adapt by maintaining a menu control loop that keeps inventory, items, pricing and LTOs in-sync.

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- 3 AI Leaves the Lab**  
Adapt by building the right technical, data and staff training foundation for successful AI development.

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- 4 Drive-Thru Value Redefined**  
Adapt with a modular drive-thru value framework to engage guests with personalized value drivers.

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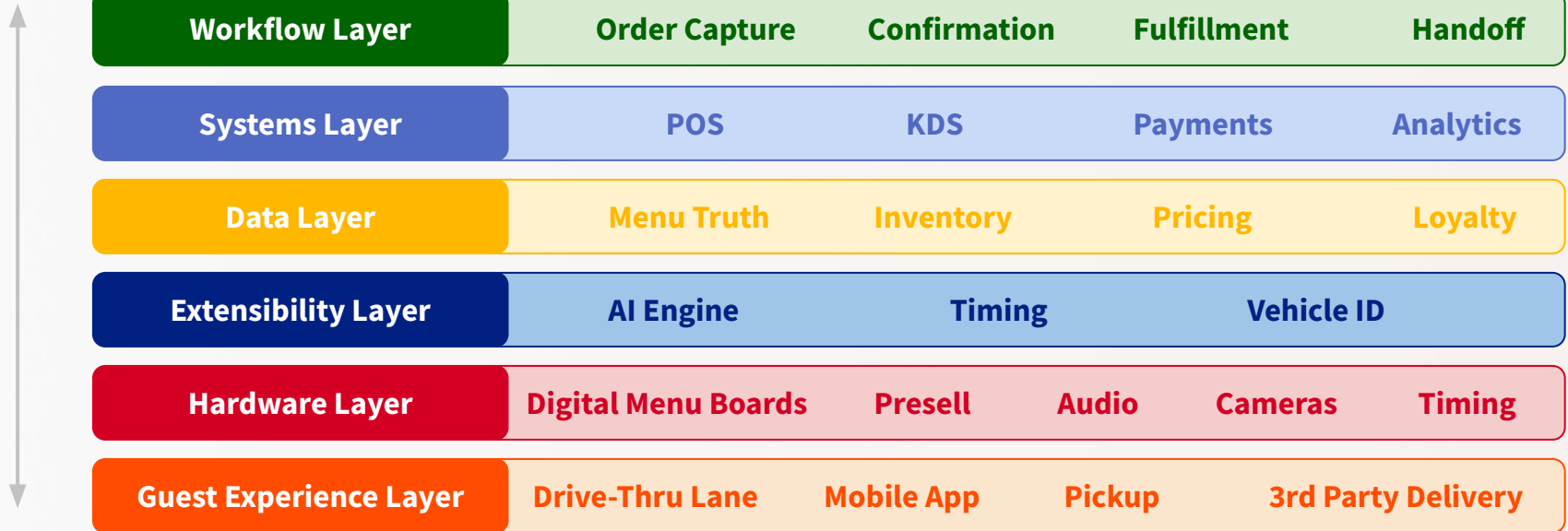
- 5 Tech Stack Unification**  
Implement a unified drive-thru tech stack that enables your brand to adapt to trends 1-4.

# Operator Tactic: Unifying the Drive-Thru Tech Stack

A unified drive-thru tech stack helps brands adapt to guests needs and new technologies faster



## Drive-Thru Operators



## Guests

# Q&A

