



# Managing the Front Door for a Better Guest Experience

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## How Waitlist Management Helps Restaurants Make the Most of Peak Hours

It has been said that restaurants and other customer-service businesses rise and fall on their performance during peak hours – the few hours a day when customers are lined up and waiting.

How many times can you turn the tables? Is every seat filled all the time? And, do customers go away happy or disappointed by the experience?

Often-quoted restaurant management consultant, Brandon O'Dell, estimates that 80 percent of revenue – and 100 percent of profit – is earned during those busy times.



In simple terms, the business operates at a loss during slow hours because of fixed costs. But peak hours are the time when it's easiest to make revenue exceed fixed costs, crossing over the “break-even” point. Every dollar over that point is close to pure profit.

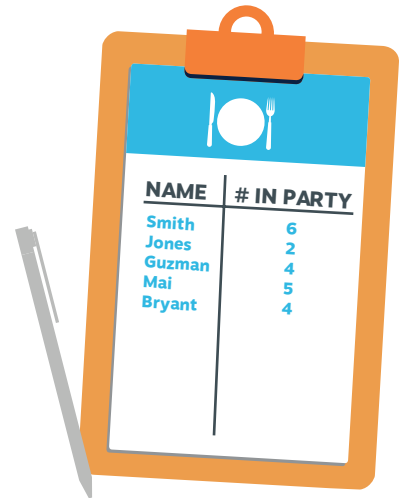
The figures certainly vary depending on business type, location and many other factors, but this much can't be denied:

**An awful lot is riding on a business' ability to wring the greatest possible revenue out of “the rush.”**

## Front-Door Management is Key to Maximizing the Rush

That's one reason front-door management – the process of managing the guests stacked up at the front during peak times and helping them get seated quickly – is so important. It's an area where many businesses have failed, not only to achieve the efficiency and insights needed to improve revenues day-to-day, but also to enrich customer experiences in ways that promote loyalty and long-term revenue.

Even today, many full-service restaurants engage in one of the archaic, manual forms of guest management, either the pen-and-clipboard method or the table-schematic-and-grease-pencil method. Manual waitlists offer no simple way of matching party sizes or other preferences with available seating in order to maximize all seats. Guests have no idea where they stand in queue. And, your host's mode of communicating with them is, basically, to yell. It's messy, loud and chaotic. Both table turnover and guest experience suffer.



Still other businesses have adopted one of the many technology solutions on the market that offer somewhat better results, but may still be lacking in utility or completeness. Either they lock you in on how you'll be alerting guests – by buzzer pager or SMS text, but not both – or they include waitlist applications that are unnecessarily complicated, actually making life harder for the host instead of easier.



## Front-Door Management is Key to Maximizing the Rush (cont.)

Another ability lacking for many businesses is a way to analyze patterns of customer preference – say, the size of parties, seating preferences, average wait times and other data – that could help you improve the customer experience.

What’s needed is a solution that does all of the above – and more. In the following pages, we’ll talk about ways that customer-oriented businesses can leverage technology to improve front-door management.

**You know the old saying about “making hay while the sun shines?” Well, in the case of restaurants and other hospitality operations, it’s “earning as much revenue as you can while the place is packed,” and today’s waitlist management solutions can help.**



## The Customer Comes First

The maxim that customers come first is one of the oldest in business, and most owners and managers would buy it as a solid rule of thumb for success. However, when it comes to front door management, customer-centric is not always the first phrase that comes to mind. “Cattle call” might be more like it.

Think about how a jam-packed, noisy waiting area feels to customers when the business has a clipboard-style manual waitlist. Not only are guests tethered to the host stand area for fear of missing their opportunity for a table, but they also have no idea how long they’ll be there – could be 15 minutes, could be 45.



They feel helpless, uncomfortable and uninformed – a dynamic not exactly conducive to developing warm-and-fuzzy feelings for any place of business.

Many businesses that have moved on from manual processes have adopted solutions that might free customers from the host stand but also eliminates their freedom of choice about how to be notified. It’s either “Here, take a pager,” or “Give me your phone number and we’ll text you.”



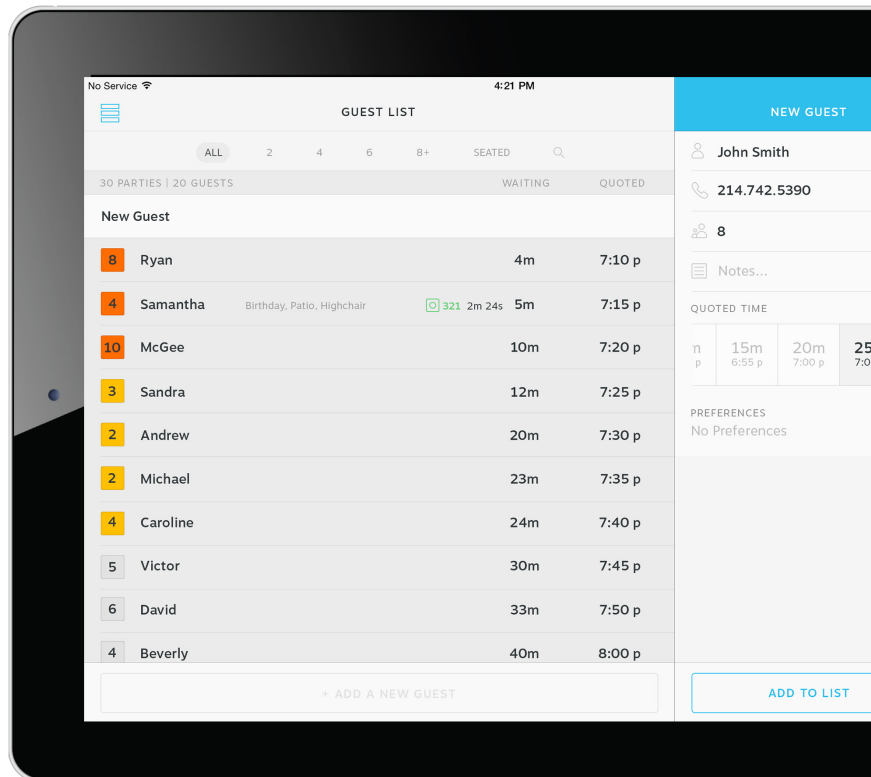
Well, what if you’d rather carry one device (your phone) instead of two (a phone and buzzer)? Or, what if the customer doesn’t want to be required to pay close attention to their phone while waiting, or is reluctant to give you his cell number? (About 7 percent of customers will refuse to give their number out of fear of marketing overload.) Shouldn’t you offer a choice?

## Today's Technology Frees Guests from the Host Stand Blues

Today's waitlist technology frees guests from the old waiting-around-the-host-stand doldrums and allows them to choose notification via classic restaurant pager or by SMS text to their phones. The host or hostess can easily enter guests' details into a waitlist app, such as party size, smoking preference, and even accurately quote wait times.

With the added certainty that they're on the list and will be notified with the method of their choice, guests are then free to wait in the bar, peruse nearby shops or even run a quick errand instead of staring at the host stand. All the while, they know they haven't lost their spot in line, and they have a good estimate on their wait time.

When a table is available, communicating with guests takes just a few keystrokes (or a swipe on an tablet device). The host is never out of contact with patrons, and can send either a page or SMS text from the same app.



## Today's Technology Frees Guests from the Host Stand Blues (cont.)

Guests who choose to remain in the waiting area will experience less chaos, congestion and noise. There'll be no more shouting out guest names or disruptive and annoying PA announcements.

Putting customers first means delivering them from the tedium of a crowded waiting area, and doing so in a way that accommodates their own communication needs and preferences. By adopting a flexible solution allows both pagers and SMS texting to be operated from a single interface, you offer the best of both.

The customers will know they come first, and they'll appreciate it.



## Waitlist Management Should Be Simple, Not Complex

It has been said that hosting is a charter job in the League of Underappreciated Workers. The work can be difficult and, often, thankless.

Hosts are saddled with knowing the layout and table configuration of every server's station; greeting all guests as they arrive; getting them all seated in order; rotating the guests among stations; seeing that there are enough place settings for each guest; and on occasion even refilling drinks or clearing a table.

And, the host must do all that with a smile. After all, he or she is both the first and last contact with customers and could easily trigger the dreaded rant on Yelp if things go wrong.



So, if a restaurant is going to adopt a waitlist management solution, why would that solution be more complicated than is required to get the job done? We have no idea. Better to ask the many businesses using solutions with far more bells and whistles than are needed to effectively manage the front door.

Excessive complexity in a software app does several things, none of them good. Mostly, they intimidate and overwhelm the user and overcomplicate the product. Products shouldn't require a user manual as thick as a now-obsolete telephone book, nor a lengthy training class to learn.





## **What Simplicity Looks Like in Waitlist Management**

The best bet is to opt for a waitlist management app that is robust and scalable and yet simple enough that using it doesn't become a burden on the host stand. The best app will provide the ability to:

- Quickly and intuitively enter guest information and preferences, in only two or three steps.
- Easily communicate with guests via cell phones SMS text, guest pagers, or a combination of both through a single interface. Why force the host to juggle dual systems?
- Easily and intuitively match party sizes with available tables to maximize seating during peak periods.
- Customize messages to guests to offer that extra customer-first, personal touch.
- Quote wait times for guests more accurately.
- View a guest history.
- Quickly and easily re-page guests. In the pursuit of turning as many tables as possible during the rush, every minute counts.
- Know which tables are open vs. those that are used, and easily update those statuses on the fly.

The goal of simplicity in a waitlist management system is not merely to ease the host's workload. The right app, free of clutter and easy to use, also helps turn tables faster and frees the host to do other, important work that enriches the customer experience.

## Is Your Business Run By Intuition or Fact?

Not so long ago, restaurants were run mostly by intuition. You'd put together a menu you thought would work. You'd serve the customers and hope they liked it. You'd estimate how many waiters and dishwashers you needed and hope they were enough – but not too many.

Usually, any changes you made to improve your business were based on either crises that erupted or hunches that you had. Really, you were just guessing, based on your experiences, and hoping for the best.

Today, all that has changed with the arrival of real-time analytics tools that empower restaurant owners and managers with facts to solve their problems. It's intuition on steroids.



## Today's Guest Management Tools Inform and Enlighten

Today's waitlist management tools do a lot more than manage the wait in an orderly fashion and free customers from waiting around the congested hostess stand. They also help restaurants begin to compile a rich database that arms managers with actionable intelligence on critical questions, such as:

- What is the optimal time to start offering early-bird specials or happy hour to fill more tables? How effective are the special's you're offering?
- What is the optimal configuration of the restaurant, as reflected in wait times? Are too many two-tops sitting empty while parties of four wait for a table? Do you need more large-party configurations?
- How much is wait time reduced, and how many more tables can be turned, by adding additional waiters or kitchen staff during busy times? How do you maximize that ratio?
- What special requests do guests have – i.e. a seat by the window or a private corner that you can't accommodate?
- Who is your guest? Is it their first visit? Are they celebrating a special occasion? How did they hear about you?



## Today's Guest Management Tools Inform and Enlighten (cont.)

With today's real-time analytics, the possibilities are bounded only by your imagination. Virtually any question – any intuition – you have about making your restaurant more profitable, from operational efficiencies to what customers really think of your product, can be answered by consulting the right set of data.

Next time you hear the phrase Big Data – and you certainly hear it a lot these days – that's what people mean.

**Analytics takes the guesswork out of intuition.  
If you aren't using it, then chances are your  
competition will soon be using it against you.**



## Conclusion

Restaurants have had waits as long as they've had menus. Try as they might to entice customers with off-hour specials, waitlists will persist – and they'll continue to be a prime source of revenue.

For restaurants – and other customer-service oriented businesses, from bowling alleys to nail salons – the best option for wringing the most profit out of peak hours is in perfecting the art of waitlist management.

Today's next-generation technology makes the wait more pleasurable for guests, all while communicating with them in ways they prefer and creating opportunities for engagement and new revenue. And, they help businesses gather insights that were never possible in the past.

If those benefits sound good, we invite you to consider [On Cue](#), a complete solution for waitlist management now available for download in Apple's app store.

Based on uniquely-integrated technology, it's the only waitlist management app on the market that allows single-platform notifications via pager and text, and it includes all the features needed to help businesses make the most of peak times.



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