

What Really Makes a Drive-Thru Feel *Fast*

We surveyed 1,750 North American drive-thru customers across two national studies to understand what shapes a quick, low-friction visit: from automated greetings, to being offered upgrades, to how guests prefer to place a multi-item order.



Why is this *important*?

The drive-thru is the primary transaction point for most multi-brand QSR portfolios, and it depends on moving quickly and feeling easy. Every extra second of friction, real or perceived, is a chance for a guest to reconsider or simply drive off.

This study looks at three operational levers brands can actually control: how the automated greeting-to-associate handoff is scripted, how upselling is paced, and how the ordering sequence itself is structured. Guests told us clearly which of these build speed and which build frustration, and the difference between a script that works and one that doesn't is often a single extra ask.

The wait after the greeting is where *frustration* builds

64% of guests feel at least moderately frustrated waiting for a team member after an automated greeting plays.

Not at all frustrating

8.3%

Slightly frustrating

27.3%

Moderately frustrating

26.0%

Very frustrating

18.0%

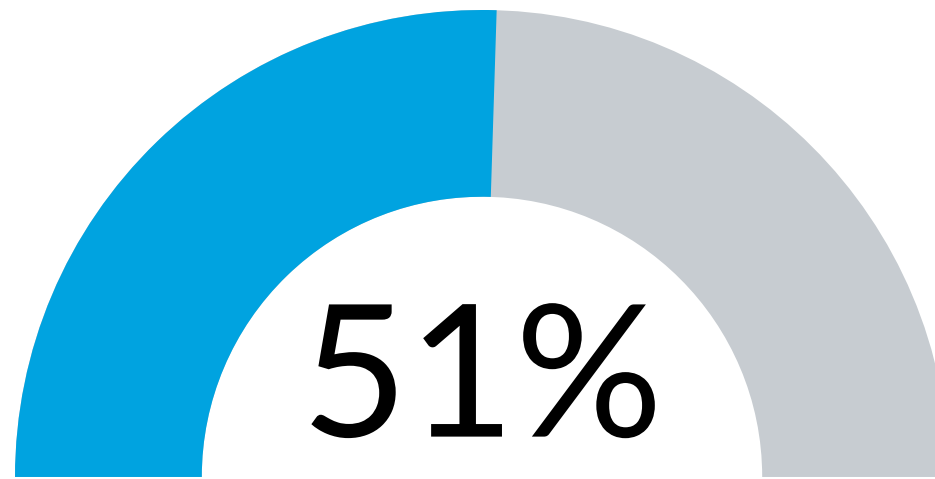
Extremely frustrating

20.3%

How frustrating, if at all, is it when you hear an automated greeting at the drive-thru order point but then must wait before a team member comes on to take your order?

n =1,033

Automated greetings themselves don't sit well either



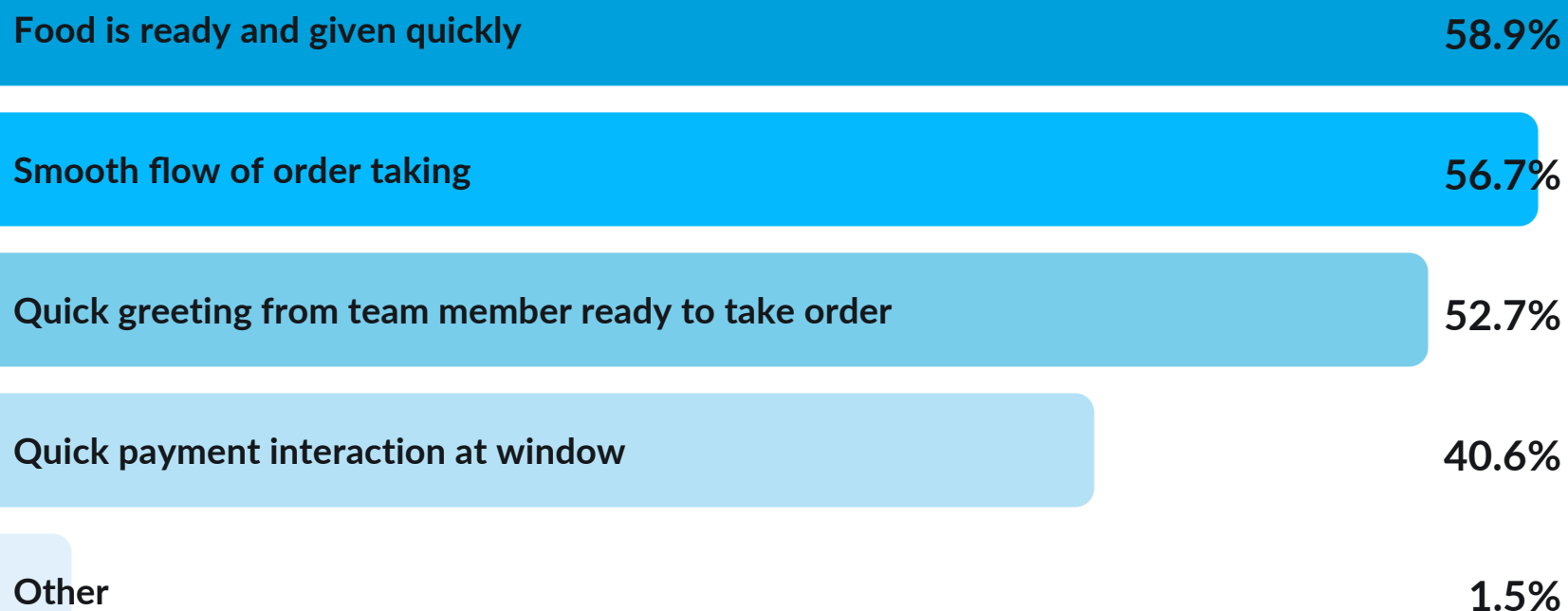
of guests **dislike auto-greeters outright** (22.7% strongly, 28.6% somewhat): the automated message that plays before a live associate comes on.

Another 33% feel neutral, while just 16% like them (10.9% somewhat, 5.3% strongly) .

What is your opinion on autogreeters (not AI order takers but rather the automated message that plays prior to being greeted by a live person)?

n =1,033

What guests say actually *moves the line*



Which parts of your drive-thru journey do you feel has the most impact on helping to move you through quicker? (select all that apply)
n =1,033



One offer lands. A *second one* doesn't

40%

dislike being offered one additional item or upgrade

26% like it, 34% feel neutral: sentiment is genuinely split.

80%

dislike suggestive selling done more than once

Only 8% like it, and just 12% feel neutral.

Asking a second time roughly doubles the dislike rate: sentiment moves from split to overwhelmingly negative.

How much do you like or dislike being offered additional items or upgrades when placing a drive-thru order? / Rate how you feel about suggestive selling done more than one time?

n =1,033

A structured, one-meal-at-a-time order flow tests *very well*

We asked guests to imagine ordering three combo meals, where an associate asks for the side and drink before moving to the next meal:

95%

called it a natural way to order

93%

found it easy to keep track of
what they still needed to order

92%

said the process felt efficient

92%

were not at all frustrated by the
back-and-forth

16%

worried something might be missed
or entered incorrectly

Imagine you are ordering three combo meals. After you name the first meal, the employee asks you to choose the side and drink before you can tell them the second meal. Rated across five dimensions.

n =1,161

Guests already default to the order flow that *tests best*

Finish one meal completely before starting the next 69.0%

Give the entire order in whatever sequence I have it planned 12.4%

No preference 10.0%

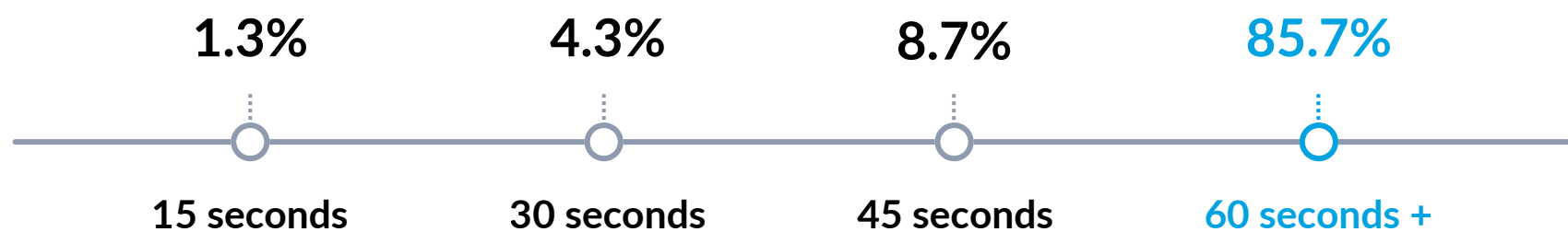
Give all main items first, then sides/drinks 8.6%

When ordering multiple meals at a drive-thru, how do you prefer to give your order?
n =1,161



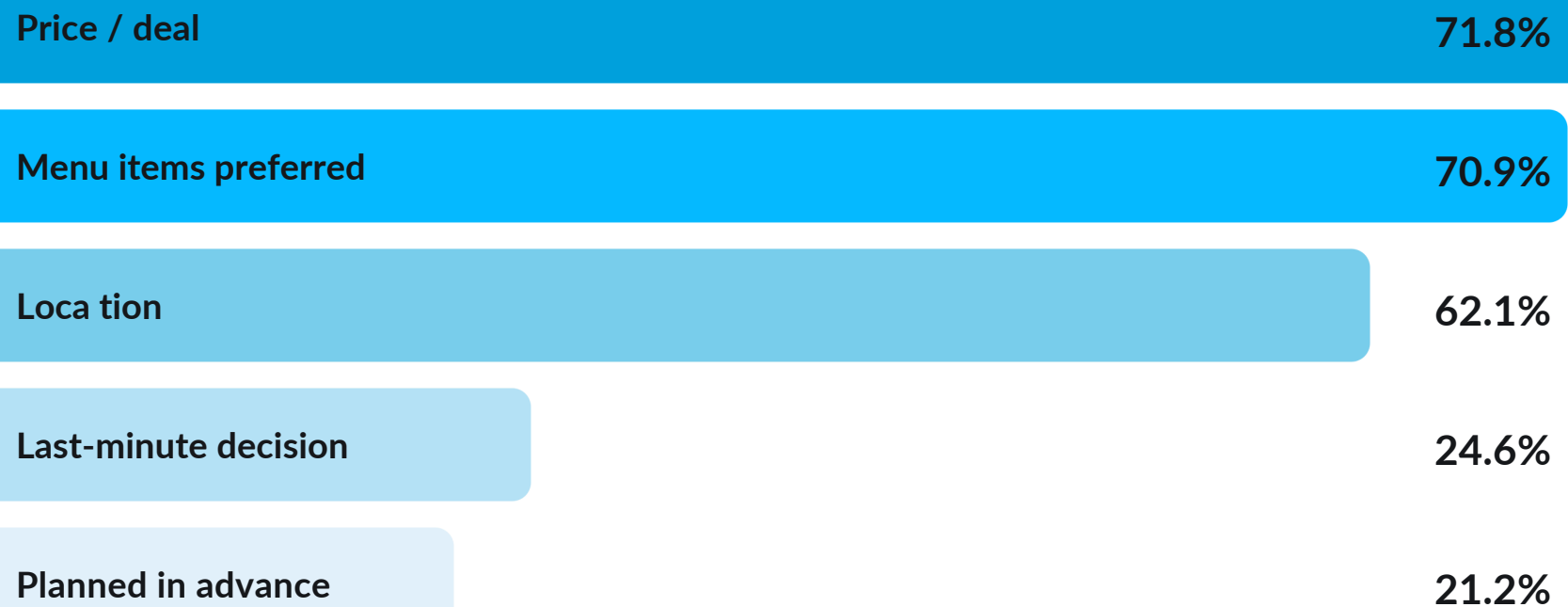
Guests give a stalled line real patience, up to a point

When in line at a drive-thru that isn't moving, how long before you consider leaving to go elsewhere?



n = 1,161

Price and menu get guests in the door. *Speed keeps them*



When visiting a QSR restaurant, what typically makes you decide to eat at a specific brand? (select all that apply)
n =1,161

What this means for *your brand*

1

Fix the handoff, not just the tech.

The wait after an automated greeting is the single biggest friction point measured: 64% of guests feel at least moderately frustrated by it. Whatever plays first matters less than how fast a live associate follows.

2

Cap upselling at one attempt.

A single upgrade offer splits guests evenly (40% dislike, 26% like). Asking a second time roughly doubles the dislike rate to 80%. Scripts should protect the first ask and drop the second.

3

Let the order come out in steps.

Guests already default to finishing one meal before starting the next (69%), and a structured, sequential ordering flow tested as natural, efficient, and low-worry. Associate scripts that reinforce this habit work with guests, not against them.

About *Intouch Insight*

At Intouch Insight, we specialize in helping multi-location brands achieve operational excellence, exceed customer expectations, and build long-term customer loyalty, and we are proud to deliver growth solutions to over 300 of the world's most beloved brands.

Our solutions are designed to streamline operations, maintain brand standards, and provide actionable insights to help our clients enhance their CX. With over 40 years of CX expertise, we excel in providing our clients with top-notch CX, customer surveys, mobile forms, mystery shopping, as well as operational and compliance audit solutions.

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