

4 key trends shaping the success of SA's restaurant industry in 2024

Despite challenging economic conditions, the South African restaurant industry is displaying resilience, with Dineplan, a restaurant reservation platform, recording 4.3 million reservations in 2023. Although not all restaurants are included in the data, insights from over 2,000 South African establishments using the reservation software offer a positive indication for the industry. The sector is expected to maintain this trend in 2024.



Source: Sandra Seitamaa via [Unsplash](#)

Referring to the platform's recently released [2024 Trends Report](#), Dineplan founder and director, Greg Whitfield explains that this translates to 22.6 million guests dining at eateries nationwide, an increase of 27% from the previous year. On average, each restaurant served 3% more guests in 2023 compared to 2022. "These results are encouraging, especially when one considers that 2023 was a year marred by financial challenges for both consumers and businesses alike, as we contended with rising food and fuel prices, inflation, and record-level load shedding."

Below, he unpacks the top four trends to have emanated from the Report that restaurateurs should embrace for success in 2024:

1. **Online bookings preferred:** The percentage of bookings made over the phone continues to decrease as diners are more inclined to book via online channels. The rate of online bookings increased by 9.3% compared to the previous year, with the Dineplan reservation app experiencing a 50% surge in both users and bookings throughout the year.

What this indicates is that diners are increasingly opting for booking channels that make the reservation process faster and more convenient, and if restaurant owners aren't offering them, they could lose bookings.

2. **Diners plan in advance:** On average, reservations were made eight days in advance with Thursdays at noon being the most popular time for planning and making bookings, while 6 pm on Fridays emerged as the preferred time for dining out. Insights like these can help restaurateurs adjust their marketing efforts, plan their menus and specials, schedule their staff more efficiently, and better manage their inventory, ultimately helping them to provide elevated service to their guests.

3. **Restaurants reap the rewards of reviews:** There was a 15% increase in the number of diners leaving reviews after their dining experiences compared to 2022, underscoring the changing landscape of diner behaviour, with people sharing more feedback online. This is crucial for helping restaurants identify areas for improvement.

Positive feedback can also be leveraged to give establishments a competitive advantage. It's reassuring to note that the average review score remains high at 4.4 out of 5 stars, reflecting consistently positive dining experiences amongst eateries around the country.

Regionally, the Western Cape reigns supreme with an average rating of 4.49 stars, followed closely by KwaZulu-Natal with 4.38 and Gauteng with 4.37. Tuesdays also tend to garner the highest scores with this particular day seeing top marks in ambience, food, service, and value.

4. **Booking deposits on the rise:** The Report highlighted a 42% increase in the volume of booking deposits in 2023 compared to those in the previous year. This is unsurprising, given that restaurants aim to keep costly no-shows to a minimum during these tough times.

The use of prepaid deposits along with automated booking reminders significantly lowers no-show rates to an average of 1.6%. This is in stark contrast to the industry-accepted average no-show rate of 20% (or one in five tables) at restaurants not employing these practices.

"Restaurants play a critical role in the upliftment of our country both through tourism and job creation while also providing locals and tourists alike with culinary and cultural experiences as well as settings in which they can come together and socialise.

"We are delighted by these results and how they have continued to improve year-on-year - highlighting the resilience of our restaurants as they navigate tough operating environments and challenges. I look forward to seeing how these numbers and achievements change in 2024," concludes Whitfield.

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