



Ideas and Insights for Full-Service Restaurants | July 2, 2014

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Full-Service Restaurants Score Higher in Customer Service than Quick-Service Restaurants

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The American Customer Service Index (ACSI) report, released today, shows full-service restaurants as a whole have scored higher in customer satisfaction than quick-service restaurants. As a whole, the full-service category has increased 1.3 percent, to an ACSI benchmark of 81, on a 100-point scale.

Customer satisfaction is relatively solid across the board. Most major full-service chains score between 81 and 83. Darden's Olive Garden and Red Lobster lead the pack with benchmarks of 83, Olive Garden saw a 4 percent increase in the past year, possibly a reflection of their new, affordable three-course menu option. Outback Steakhouse has kept the same score of 81 for the third straight year. Outlier Chili's Grill & Bar scored 78, a 3 percent increase from last year's score, but still a large gap from the other competitors.

But it was Applebee's that stole the show. Applebee's has seen an outstanding 6 percent increase, a positive correlation with their recent menu overhaul and promotional activities. Applebee's recently redid their look, making the brand sleek and modern, costing around \$250,000 per location. But it might have paid off, Applebee's saw the greatest improvement of all full-service restaurants, and received a score of 82, making them third overall. Applebee's also had top sales of their varied menu category for 2012 with a 1.9 percent increase, according to the 2013 Technomic Top 500 Chain Restaurant Report. Red Lobster and Olive Garden each had a 4.5 percent increase in sales.

As a whole, consumers think highly of their full-service experience, according to the report. On average, customers rate full-service restaurants' accuracy of orders at 89, and the helpfulness of the waitstaff at 87. Food was rated at 86 and beverage at 87. Website satisfaction for full-service restaurants scored 82, which was well above total website satisfaction, which was only 78.3.

Lagging behind the other areas of the full-service restaurant experience is the time it takes for the food to arrive, which was given the benchmark of 83. Surprisingly, quick-service restaurants received a score of 83 for speediness as well.

The ACSI report was a combination of nearly 9,000 customer surveys collected in the first quarter of 2013. ACSI is a benchmark of the customer experience, and its scores have also been tied to consumer spending and company financial performance. The ACSI's June report covers customer

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satisfaction with airlines, hotels, full-service restaurants, fast food chains, consumer shipping, and the mail services of the U.S. Postal Service.

By Kirsten Ballard

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