



# BOOK IT

GO Technology reveals online bookings have overtaken the telephone as the preferred choice for making a reservation. Read on to find the latest consumer stats on booking trends - and learn how to increase sales, improve customer satisfaction and maximise booking numbers.

GO  
TECHNOLOGY

Insight by Zonal, Powered by CGA

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## BOOKINGS: NUMBERS TO KNOW

**45%** 

OF CONSUMERS PREFER TO MAKE THEIR BOOKINGS ONLINE—COMPARED TO 20% WHO PREFER THE TELEPHONE

**49%** 

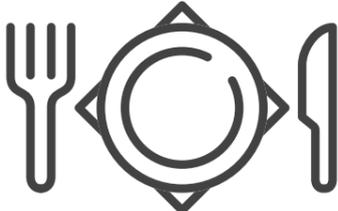
OF CONSUMERS SAY PRE-BOOKING IS IMPORTANT OR VERY IMPORTANT TO THEM WHEN GOING OUT

**14%** 

OF CONSUMERS STRONGLY AGREE THAT THEY ARE GENERALLY SATISFIED WITH THEIR EXPERIENCE OF BOOKING FOR LARGE PARTIES

**£87.83** 

AVERAGE MONTHLY SPEND ON EATING AND DRINKING OUT OF CONSUMERS WHO PRE-BOOK

**8.1** 

AVERAGE NUMBER OF EATING BRANDS IN THE REPERTOIRE OF PRE-BOOKERS — COMPARED TO 6.7 FOR THOSE WHO DON'T

**21%** 

OF CONSUMERS CITE THE NEED TO PAY DEPOSITS AS ONE OF THE BIGGEST ANNOYANCES WHEN BOOKING

**42%** 

OF CONSUMERS WOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO RESERVE SPECIFIC TABLES, BOOTHS OR AREAS WHEN THEY BOOK

**£6.63** 

AVERAGE DEPOSIT PER HEAD THAT PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO PAY TO BOOK A TABLE FOR 8+ PEOPLE IN A RESTAURANT ON A SATURDAY NIGHT

## TEN BIG MESSAGES ON BOOKINGS



### 1. Bookings are big business

Half (49%) of consumers say pre-booking is important or very important to them when they go out to eat or drink.



### 2. Reservations have moved online

Back in 2015, well over half (58%) of consumers said they preferred to make table bookings by telephone—but the latest GO Technology research shows this has now plummeted to a fifth (20%). Online booking is now preferable for nearly half (45%) of consumers. Of course, telephone availability is still important, especially for small group bookings—but the web is now the booking platform of choice.



### 3. Pre-bookers spend more

Consumers who say they have pre-booked tend to spend more on eating and drinking out. Their average monthly spend is £87.83—18% more than the £74.68 average of those who don't pre-book. Pre-bookers also tend to be more prolific, with an average of 8.1 brands in their repertoire. This highlights the risk that people who aren't satisfied with a booking have plenty of other brands to visit instead.



### 4. Satisfaction levels could be improved

Only one in seven (14%) consumers strongly agree that they are generally satisfied with their experience of booking for large parties. And when asked if everything was as they expected when they book, two in five (39%) either disagreed or were neutral.



### 5. Bookings can be stressful

Only one in eight (12%) consumers strongly agree that they find the experience of organising and managing bookings stress free—but 17% disagree or strongly disagree. Handling deposits and pre-orders are among the biggest causes of stress. Older bookers are more likely to encounter stress—perhaps because they are less familiar with online booking platforms than younger generations.



### 6. Deposits can cause frustration

One in five (21%) consumers cite paying deposits as one of their biggest annoyances when booking. The figure rises to 25% among 18 to 34 year-olds.



### 7. The importance of booking grows with group size...

Only 17% of consumers think pre-booking is very important for groups of between three to six people. But when the group increases to between seven and 12, the number who think it is very important to pre-book more than doubles, to 36%. Interestingly though, the number plateaus as the group size grows much further.



### 8. ... But bigger groups will pay bigger deposits

Consumers in a group of fewer than eight say they are willing to pay an average of £4.55 per head for a midweek restaurant table—but those in larger groups will pay £6.04. That indicates an acceptance that as group size grows, so should the deposit. It also suggests larger groups value the confidence that, by paying a deposit, their booking is secured.



### 9. Women are more likely to pre-book

GO Technology research shows that women make up 53% of those who pre-book. They are more likely than average to pre-book for celebrations and special occasions in particular, and also more likely to seek specific tables or areas in a venue—intelligence that is very useful when segmenting customer lists for marketing campaign activities.



### 10. Parents like the security of booking

Parents over-index when it comes to pre-booking. They make up a third (35%) of the booking cohort, but only a quarter (27%) of those who never pre-book. This is because family groups tend to be larger, and because parents are anxious for a smooth experience with children in tow.

## WHY BOOK?

Top four drivers for pre-bookings:

**53%** 1. Size of the group

**48%** 2. How busy the time of year is

**47%** 3. A celebration or special occasion

**45%** 4. Popularity of the venue

## BETTER BOOKINGS: SIX TIPS FOR OPERATORS



### 1. Invest in online platforms

Now that web booking platforms have overtaken the telephone in consumers' preferences, it is vital that brands have an efficient and customer-focused online facility. Operators that fail to invest here risk losing out on significant booking sales, and are in danger of compromising their brand reputation.

### 2. Be ready

For pre-bookers at pubs, bars and restaurants, the biggest annoyance is a venue not being ready for the booking (37%), closely followed by still having to queue to get in (35%) and spaces or tables being occupied when they arrive (34%). But all three frustrations could be easily avoided if a venue prepares properly. End-to-end booking management systems can help, by ensuring that everything guests have booked is taken care of. Operators that are not ready for guests—even when they have had days or weeks to prepare—risk losing customers for good.

### 3. Charge the right deposit

Setting deposit levels is a big challenge. Ask for too much and consumers may go elsewhere—but ask for too little and the risk of no-shows increases. But GO Technology research shows there is elasticity in what consumers will pay. They accept they should pay more on busy days or at peak times, and also on special occasions like Christmas or Valentine's Day. The ability to flex deposit levels according to demand is crucial.

### 4. Provide exclusive space

Asked what they would like to see when booking, the most popular choice by far is the ability to reserve a specific table, booth or area—picked by two in five (42%) consumers. Getting the space of their choice is also more likely to leave guests satisfied with their visit, and more likely to return.

### 5. Stay in touch

No-shows are a significant problem, but risk can be reduced by staying in touch after bookings are made. Emails and text messages can be helpful reminders, as well as chances to upsell—but nearly a third (31%) of consumers prefer the personal touch of contact by telephone.

### 6. Manage deposits and orders online

Technology can dismantle some significant barriers to pre-booking. A quarter (23%) of consumers would like to be able to access online bookings with deposits, while reasonable numbers would like to have the chance to split deposits online among friends (17%) or collect pre-orders (17%). Good booking platforms, tightly integrated with the till, can make life much easier for consumers and operators alike.



## The view from CGA

“Pub, bar and restaurant customers increasingly see booking as a necessary part of their eating and drinking experiences. Large groups, celebratory occasions and the fear of missing out on popular places are all fuelling the trend, and more and more people value the security and reassurance that a confirmed reservation and deposit provide. But as our GO Technology research shows, there is scope to improve the booking experience. Smoothing out irritations in the process and the execution of bookings can help brands exceed expectations, increase guests' spend and gain ground in a fiercely competitive market. Above all, booking management needs to be consumer-centric, and rooted in a deep understanding of what diners and drinkers want.”

*Karl Chessell, CGA Business Unit Director, Retail and Food*

## The view from Zonal

“For the first time, online bookings have overtaken the telephone as the preferred method to make a reservation and the gap is only set to grow. Making sure operators have an integrated online booking tool that is intuitive and provides a seamless booking experience is not an option but essential. There is still a place for human interaction, but consumers definitely expect to use technology to reserve, order and buy online. Operators that don't provide this facility run the risk of losing out on valuable custom to their competition.”

*David Charlton, Zonal Marketing Technologies, Commercial Director*

## About the data

This report is based on figures from Zonal and CGA's GO Technology survey, a sample of 5,000 nationally representative British consumers. All figures are taken from the February 2019 edition of the survey.