

Food for Thought: Hoteliers Debate Customers' Changing Tastes in Dining

Hotels are being forced to face up to changing customer tastes that could spell the end for room service food.

Industry thought-leader, EP Business in Hospitality, recently hosted a topical business forum featuring world-class hoteliers, alongside guest experience management firm HGEM.

The event focussed on the idea that the delivered-in food model could actually replace hotel room service in the near future. This follows a growing trend of millennial guests snubbing hotel food and wanting to order in their favourite takeaway brands and have them delivered direct to their room.

In a lively debate that raised a number of thought-provoking questions, leaders from the hotel industry listened to new research from HEGM's latest consumer survey, which revealed that two thirds (66 percent) of hotel guests had used a delivery service to order food to their room.

In fact, 71 percent of guests aged between 26 and 35 years say they order-in food while staying in a hotel. This is due to a combination of personal preferences, quality, and cost, with 48 percent of consumers saying they find hotel food unappealing and 35 percent arguing that hotel food is too expensive.

The debate, which led to a heated discussion on whether hotels should embrace the offer of collaborating with external food delivery brands or risk causing embarrassment to their customer, was led by Alberto Lo Bue, Head of Business for Deliveroo, and Paul Fitzgerald, Director for Bespoke Hotels.



On the table: Could hotels soon provide dine-in space to eat takeaway food?

Suggested ways forward presented at the debate included delivery brands creating their own kitchen spaces in hotels; the provision of spaces to eat delivered food; and partnering with delivery firms to cater to guests.

Chris Sheppardson, CEO at EP Business in Hospitality, said: "This is a fascinating topic and one that has left many wondering if hotels will adjust and raise the bar of what is offered to their customers while looking at new ways to increase their profit lines. The general consensus was that this is a fast-paced evolution that is becoming an accepted norm today. It's a growing trend that won't go away, in fact one of the attendees recounted how they will often 'order in' food in a five-star London hotel and walk downstairs in their pyjamas to collect the food, almost to make a point to the hotel of the need to diversify their services or lose their future custom."

He continued: "This debate does however lead into a wider question as to 'what does the customer really want?'. What will be the next stage in the evolution of what constitutes the service provided to a guest?"

"It wasn't long ago that hotels charged for wifi and other in-room services that have all been eroded – phone calls, film streaming, room service etc. One thing is clear, hotels will need to look at how they can provide new services if they are to engage and retain their guests in the future."