



Proper design will assure you don't over-promise and under-deliver

Many companies are experimenting with new fast-casual versions of their quick-service or casual-dining concepts. This means that quick-service restaurants will need to design a service system that now employs more table service, while casual brands will have to get savvy about counter ordering and faster throughput.

Deterministics, a chain restaurant consulting and design firm based in Kirkland, Washington, is testing a further hybrid of these service concepts with good success in London. In this hybrid, which is known as “High Street Casual” (high-volume, full-service), the guest places an order at a counter, food and beverages are delivered to their table by a server who then provides full service (assigned sections) with refills, desserts and cash out. With many options for slicing and dicing service delivery depending on your brand’s throughput objectives, an understanding of the 10 Commandments of Service Design will assure your success.

Configure your service framework around three objectives. First, the number of meal courses the guest will choose which determines the duration of service time (i.e. how the guest will use the experience, and the frequency and scope of service you must therefore provide). Second, the maximum throughput time (cooking duration) of meal orders. Note that this is not the “average” throughput time. It makes no sense to use a throughput target that is only attainable 50 percent of the time. And third, the peak volume you wish to target in peak hourly sales or tables per turn.

Step one determines the length of the service cycle and the service labor required. Step two determines the length of the production cycle, breadth of menu you can handle, type of equipment and cook labor required. Scaling steps one and two to meet the peak volume in step three will determine the optimum Service Delivery System (SDS), as well as dimensions of facility, equipment and number of staff necessary to assure a successful service experience.

The successful **Coordination** of service steps will determine the quality of guest service. Rhythm, tempo and timing – like lines delivered in a play – dictate the smoothness of the performance and ultimately, the audience’s enjoyment. If the tempo is too slow, the audience grows restless; too fast and their understanding and sense of participation is jeopardised. Hence, “timing goals” established for each step of service is critical. Common standards for full service include: one minute to greet, four minutes to take the order, eight minutes for appetizer throughput and 15 for entrees. By contrast, quick-service throughput times are one minute, and fast

casual is four minutes. Counter order taking should not exceed one minute for both styles.

The perception of time – their time - is essential to the positive fulfilment of every guest experience. Time is to be savored, and an intuitive server will stall runaway service to prevent the guest from feeling rushed. Time is also precious (and expensive!) – achieve the perfect balance throughout the service cycle and the guest experiences a seamless event. A smooth ride engenders feelings of enjoyment within the guest and ultimately, the sense that they are in control.

To enable the guest to feel in **Control**, the scene must be set for their benefit. However, in rehearsing their performance and orchestrating the setting, the server is, in reality, seizing and maintaining control for themselves. To achieve the perfect balance (guest feels in control – server maintains control), it is essential that the server has license to improvise – either in response to a particular event, mood or guest make-up, or when expectations are not met and service recovery steps are required. Creative license on the part of the server is vital in bringing the central illusion to life – that the guest is in complete control.

The offering of **Choice** across menu and service deliverables is key to the guest feeling in control. The server presents each alternative, the guest acknowledges or dismisses it. As the guest is given the latitude to customize the service sequence to suit their needs, they feel in control of their experience. Guest perception of self-control is directly correlated with guest satisfaction.

The SDS must be structured enough to guide the server who enters the realm of “control” role play; in allowing the

guest to assume control, (making choices “outside the box”) and in actively seeking to anticipate their needs (in order to exceed expectations), the server needs the security of brand boundaries. The server only truly retains control when he fully understands how far he can go – and this must be known in advance (trained). Such an accommodating and confidence-building approach to service can only succeed if underpinned by the bedrock of service continuity.

Both the server and guest will gain confidence through the **Continuity** of service – and this state of mind is best achieved by building a relationship with a single server. This then becomes the basis for a reciprocal understanding between server and guest: the guest knows who and where their server is; they feel reassured by this. The server, working within the structure of the SDS and using his own insight into the needs of each individual table, is aware of their position in each stage of the service cycle and makes decisions accordingly. If the server is seen to be available by the guest and can also prioritize tasks with the bigger picture in mind (the section as a whole, the performance of other departments) he can maintain control. In this way, service continuity will allow the server to provide anticipatory service and an element of subtle surprise.

To dilute this relationship (by using separate order takers, or an over-reliance on “runners for everything”) confuses and upsets the status quo. Consequently, the security and assumption of control experienced by both parties, is undermined. Additionally, continuity of service coverage has its own physical limitations, and is only assured when the capacity to offer service has been measured and understood.

Service **Capacity** is measured based on the service style, the steps involved and the duration of the service cycle. Having performed hundreds of such studies, we note that service capacity is frequently misjudged and often the root cause of service failure. With accurate measurements in hand, however, the server is armed with the knowledge and confidence that helps to determine “What is my full potential?”

This is important for planning the physical size of service areas: number of tables per section for full service, number of point-of-sale’s channels for quick service, and both tables and channels for fast-casual. This knowledge can then be used to clarify the realistic boundaries for server and guests; and becomes a valuable tool with

which to not only meet, but to exceed expectations.

It’s crucial to avoid the temptation to over-promise and then under-deliver. The rewards gained from understanding service capacity can only be reaped if the guest receives a consistent performance.

In order to consolidate the relationship between server and guest, **Consistency** in role responsibilities and service method is paramount. Every performance must be as good as the last – and set the standard for the next. The server has the knowledge, capacity and support to tailor the experience according to guest requirements, understanding exactly what role to play within the framework of the SDS. Control for the server is therefore assured, based on his confidence in the consistency of other team members and the structure within which they play. The result is a relaxed, intuitive performance where the server can focus on exceeding expectations.

Meanwhile, the guest is confident that any given service occasion will be consistently executed and feels in control of his experience. Consistency and choice are enabled through a set of prescribed service steps, with clearly defined boundaries, communicated within and between every department.

The power of **Communication** cannot be underestimated. Without it, the success of the guest experience hangs on a knife’s edge, no matter how superb the performance of an individual. Communication between departments oils the cogs – with the host (has the guest been waiting long for a table?): with the bar (is there a tab?); and with the kitchen; (order timing can be customized to reflect the guest’s time restrictions, anxiety levels or requests).

One-to-one communication between the guest and his dedicated server builds their relationship: the server, as a player within a well designed and measured service system, is able to build time to solicit guest feedback. The guest is confident and, bolstered by the level of communication established, can be reassured – particularly when a problem arises. Service recovery in this case is straightforward – the server has the information and the status (in the eyes of the guest who trusts the server) to transform the situation. The relationship can even be enhanced if the guest, thriving on the camaraderie and “insider information,” actually enjoys a bumpy ride! Communication can also be improved with ongoing feedback outside the “real time” service cycle, gained from structured exit interviews and “mystery shopping” by off-duty staff.

Successful service delivery is rewarded via financial **Compensation** in the form of guest gratuities. While tips are positively related with good service, scientific studies have shown interpersonal gestures that put the guest at ease will bolster tips still further. Use of such “chummy” behaviors may appear patronizing and unnatural and requires careful judgement for appropriate use. Well received, however, they reinforce the bond between server and guest and include: introducing oneself by name, hunching down beside the table to take the order, gently touching the guest’s shoulder when presenting the check, and writing the server’s name and a “Thank You!” on the receipt. Even the use of mimicry has been proven to raise tips in which the server repeats the order back precisely as it was delivered by the guest.

Gratuities provide a financial incentive, clearly, but rewards for good service also come in the form of the guest’s request for a specific server, and a repeat performance. Such requests, along with the sharing of sales success stemming from server sales contests and other motivational programs provide the basis for **Celebrating** a service culture and inspiring the team to excel day in and day out!

From our vantage point on the dining room floor and quick-serve order counter, we could argue that the proliferation of fast-casual restaurants is in part due to the decline in service at quick-serve and casual-dining operations. Operators in all categories need a service support structure that does not over-promise and under-deliver. Careful implementation of Deterministics’ 10 Commandments of Service Design will assure a service system is in place that delivers as promised and exceeds the guests’ expectations every time. 🌍

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Deterministics' 10 Commandments of Service Design

- 1. Configuration** of Service Steps
- 2. Coordination** of Service Timing
- 3. Control** of Service Steps – By the Guest – By the Server
- 4. Choice** of Service Deliverables
- 5. Continuity** of Coverage
- 6. Capacity** Measurements of Service Steps
- 7. Consistency** of Roles and Methods
- 8. Communication** between Guests and Staff
- 9. Compensation** and Reward
- 10. Celebration** and Recognition

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