



Irish Restaurant Industry Predictions 2026





INTRO

If 2025 taught us anything about running restaurants, it's that the only certainty is uncertainty.

So what does the next year hold for Irish hospitality businesses?

Whilst day-to-day activities like shift scheduling and inventory management will always remain a consistent part of the agenda, there's no crystal ball for the wider economic and strategic changes that are constantly taking place inside and outside of the industry.

So, we did the next best thing and surveyed 258 Irish restaurant

owners, asking them for their 2026 hospitality industry predictions.

Read this rundown to explore the key takeaways from the survey as well as the topics and challenges that are top-of-mind for operators and industry leaders in 2026.





6 KEY RESTAURANT INDUSTRY PREDICTIONS FOR 2026

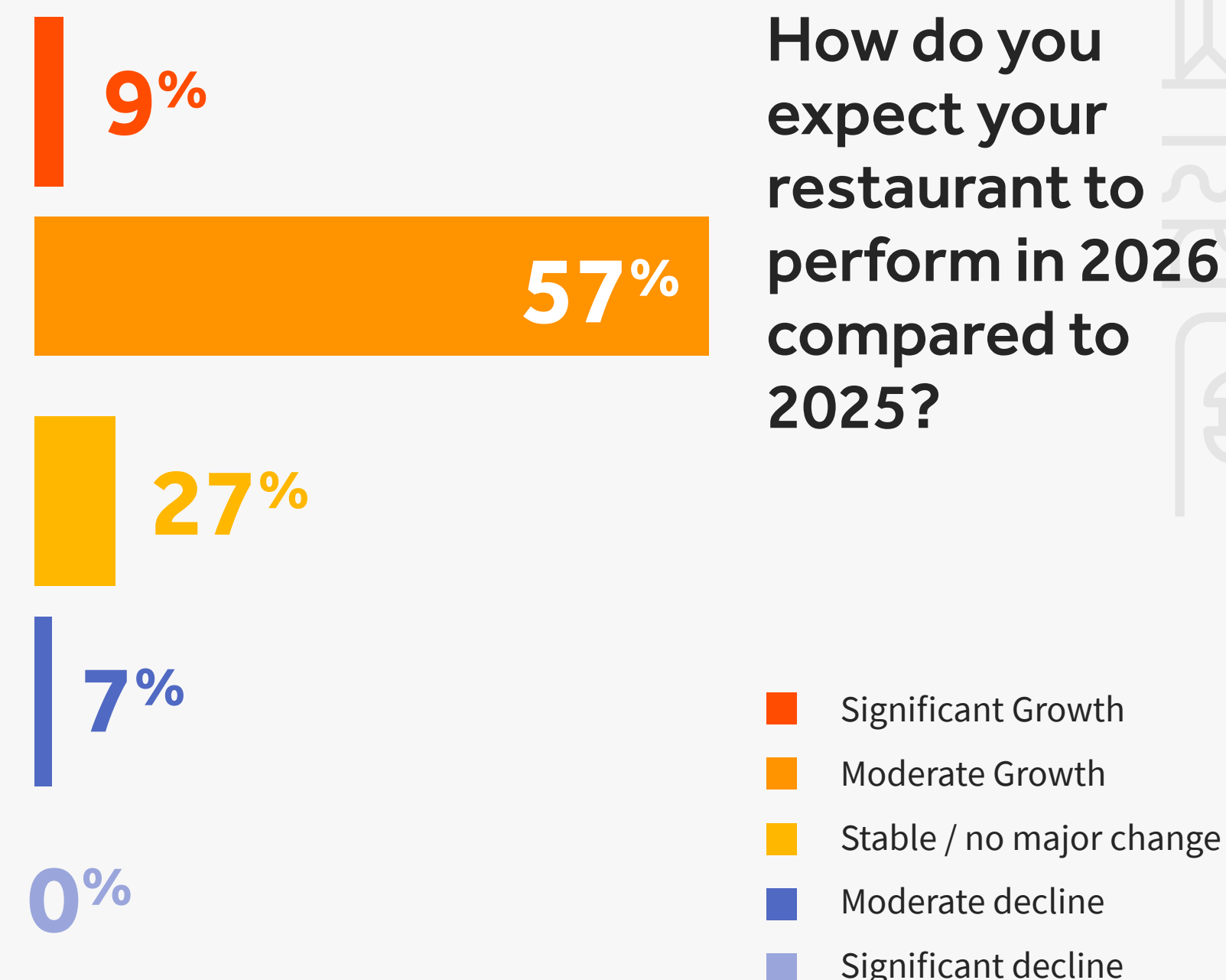
Prediction 1: Uncertain economic conditions will demand focus



After a turbulent 2025, which saw consumer inflation and the cost of ingredients rise across **Northern Ireland** and the **Republic of Ireland**, restaurant operators are approaching 2026 with optimism, tempered with economic concern.

While over 50% of restaurant owners think that rising ingredient and energy costs will be the biggest challenge that restaurants face in 2026, our survey also found that 66% are expecting moderate to significant growth for their business in 2026.

When asked which factor Irish restaurant owners thought would have the biggest impact on the restaurant industry in 2026, the most common callout was “economic conditions”, referenced by 33% of respondents. 17% of restaurant owners also called out “increasing costs and inflation” as a major predicted challenge over the next year.



Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding



Prediction 2: The customer experience can and will be elevated

In challenging economic circumstances, value and service will continue to be crucial differentiators for consumers with lots of choice. And, according to the Irish restaurant owners we surveyed, 2026 is the year that service gets an upgrade.

When asked which area of restaurant management they would be focusing on in 2026, 29% of operators said they would be making improvements to the customer experience, while 16% wanted to improve speed and efficiency at their restaurant.

Boosting customer satisfaction can take many forms. From creating the right mood and atmosphere with lighting, executing faultless, personalised service, to leveraging **POS technology** that makes ordering more efficient.

But one thing that Alvin Galligan, Operations Director at Oakberry Ireland, urges restaurant operators to remember is customer experiences in 2026 should feel effortless:

“Our priority at OAKBERRY Ireland is to create an experience that feels effortless to the customer journey but disciplined behind the scenes - balancing innovation with authenticity in our teams, and growth with integrity, in an increasingly competitive landscape those who are willing to learn and pivot will see the rewards.”



Alvin Galligan
Operations Director,
OAKBERRY Ireland



Prediction 3: AI and automation will be at the top table

According to our survey, 80% of restaurant owners report being at “fully” to “somewhat ready” to adopt new technologies. And it’s a good thing too, because AI is now fully mainstream in the restaurant space.

Artificial intelligence is already being leveraged in restaurants, with day-to-day tasks like tracking restaurant sales and inventory, or [crafting restaurant slogans](#), being made quicker and more efficient.

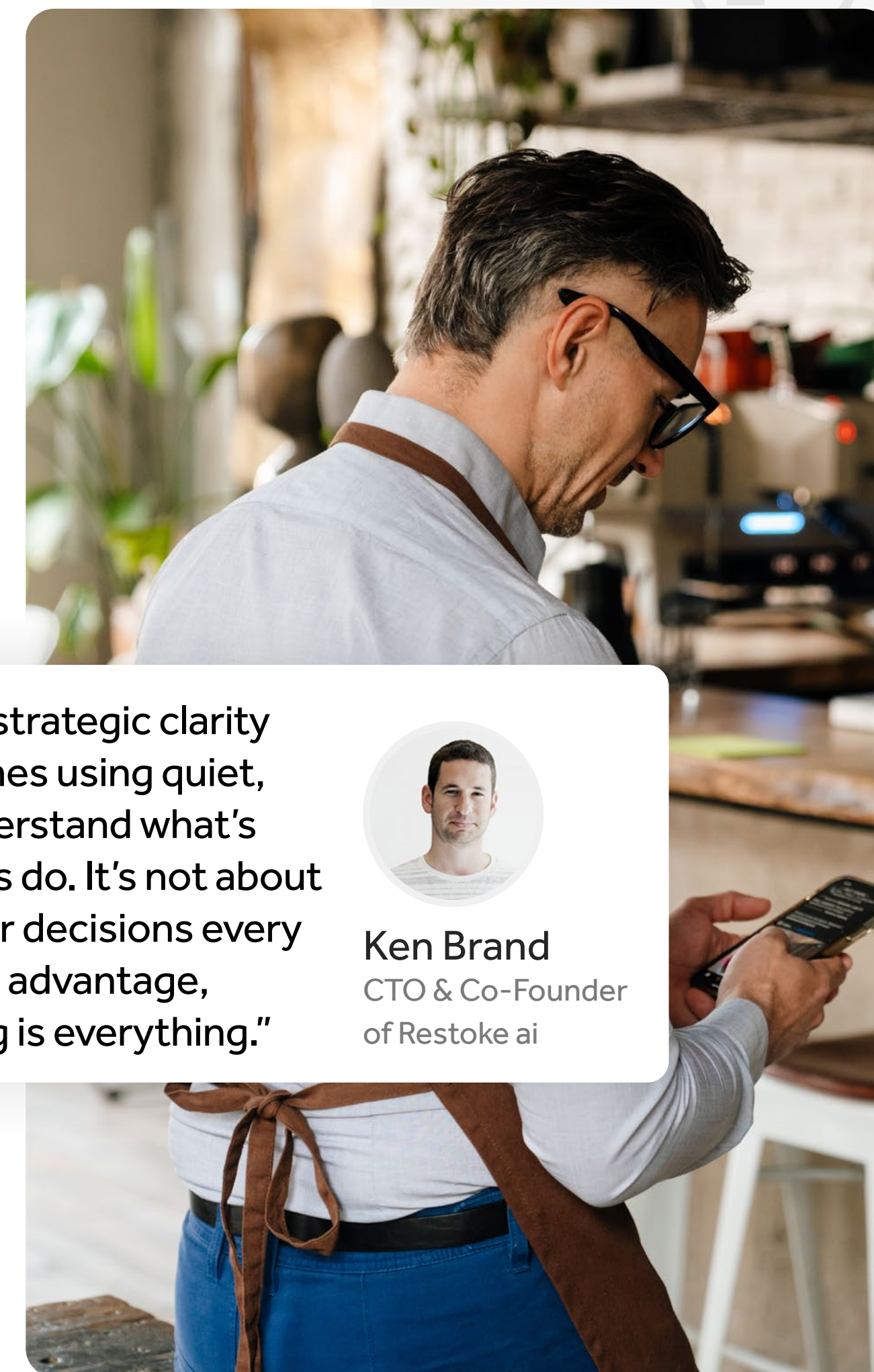
Our survey asked Irish restaurant owners to make a bold prediction about the restaurant industry in 2026, and the number of responses that centred around the significant integration of AI and automation we received was remarkable. Some operators suggested that AI would help increase personalisation and

customer orders, while others thought it would help reduce staff costs.

For Ken Brand, the CTO & Co-Founder of Restoke ai, it’s all about making better business decisions:

“The real value of AI in hospitality isn’t in novelty, it’s in the strategic clarity it gives operators. In 2026, the strongest venues are the ones using quiet, behind-the-scenes intelligence to see problems early, understand what’s driving their performance, and act before their competitors do. It’s not about replacing people or chasing trends; it’s about making better decisions every day. That kind of foresight becomes a genuine competitive advantage, especially in an industry where margins are tight and timing is everything.”

As the number of strategic use-cases for AI and automation in hospitality continues to grow, so does the excitement around what can be achieved with the technology.



Ken Brand
CTO & Co-Founder
of Restoke ai



Prediction 4: Labour challenges will continue to be top-of-mind in 2026



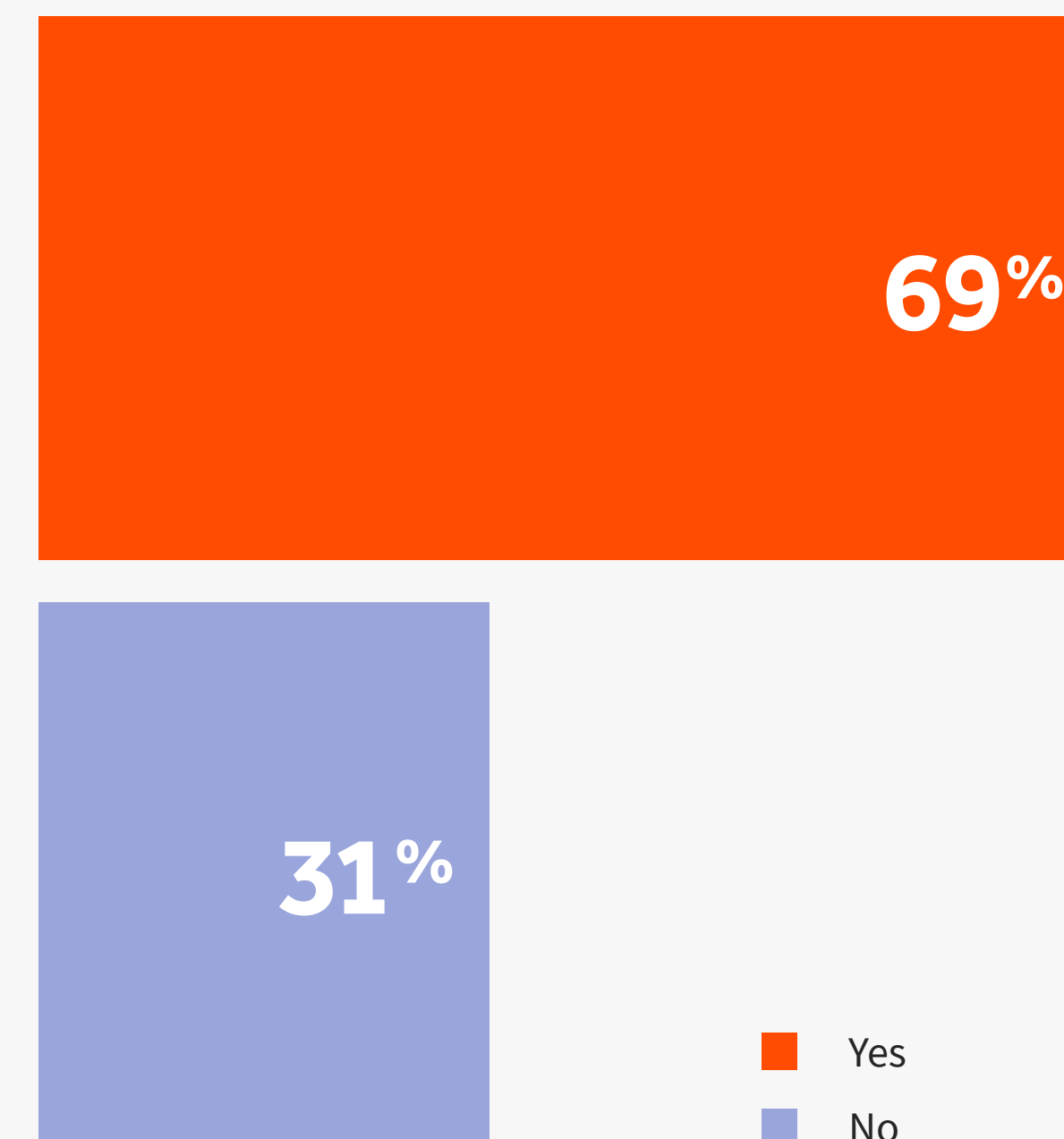
If you're looking to future-proof your staffing and hiring practices, you can find plenty of tips in our staffing and hiring eBook.

[Download Here](#)

Our 2026 predictions survey revealed that 69% of restaurant owners had concerns around labour shortages and staffing challenges. This is hardly surprising when you consider the impact of **rises in National Insurance** and VAT in Northern Ireland in 2025, and **rises in employer PRSI contributions**, mandatory sick pay, and pension contributions in the Republic of Ireland.

However, research into hospitality staff satisfaction has shown that happy staff are **five times more likely to stay the course**. To avoid high staff turnover when labour shortages are a certainty, **Toast research** indicates that factors like giving employees clear career development paths and offering a competitive salary and benefits like flexible working are key to retaining them long term.

Are you worried about labour shortages and staffing challenges in 2026?

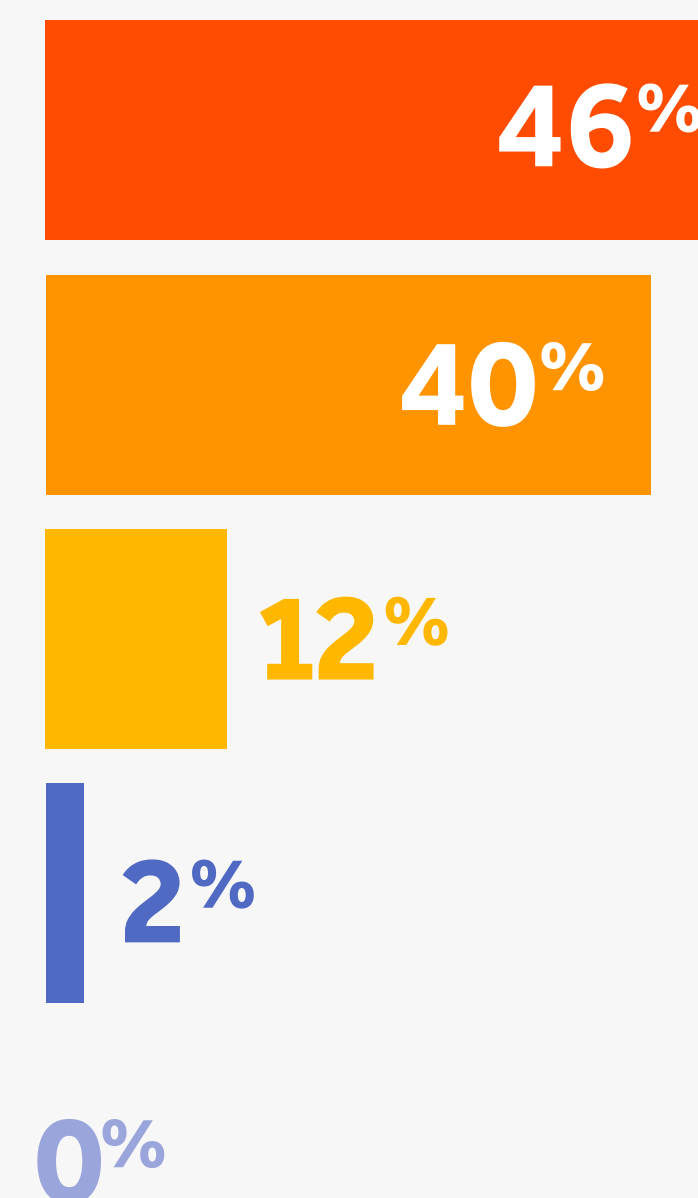




Prediction 5: Delivery and off-premise dining will remain crucial for restaurant revenue

According to [Toast consumer research](#), almost 70% of Irish consumers dine out or order delivery food at least once a week. So it's no surprise that 47% of Irish restaurant owners in our survey pinpointed [online ordering](#) and delivery platforms as the most influential technology trend for restaurant operations for 2026.

The food delivery phenomenon has shifted Irish dining habits, with consumers now spending [€2.2 billion](#) a year on food delivery. So, the news that a combined 86% of owners believe off-premise dining, including takeout and delivery, will be “extremely” or “somewhat important” to their revenue in 2026 tracks perfectly.



How important do you think off-premise dining (takeout/delivery) will be to your restaurant's revenue in 2026?

- Extremely important
- Somewhat important
- Neutral
- Not very important
- Not important at all



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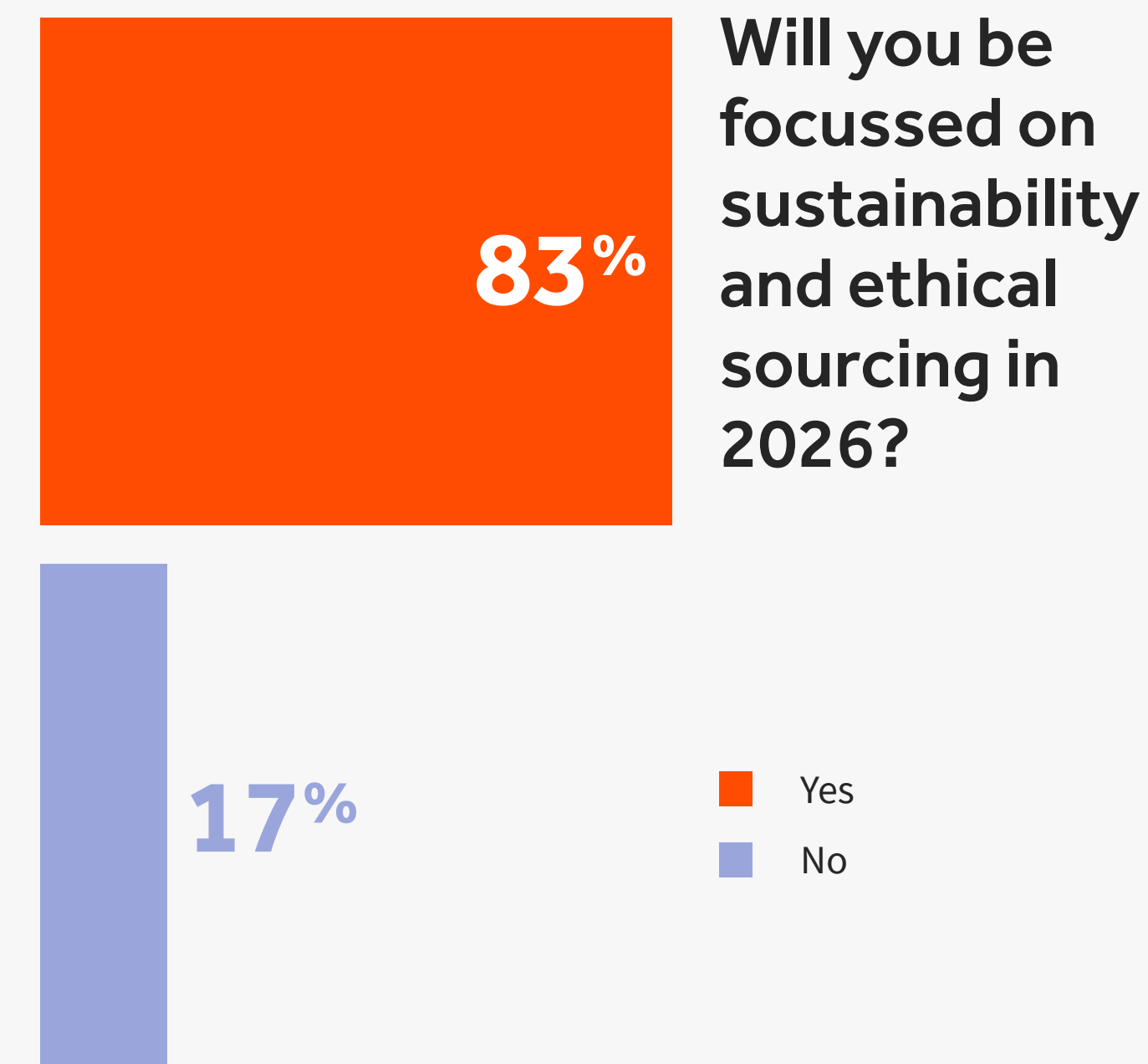
Prediction 6: 2026 will see an increased focus on restaurant sustainability



The reality is, consumers are becoming increasingly planet-conscious. So much so, they're willing to pay a **'sustainability premium' of around 10%**. So, in 2026, we can expect to see practices like reducing food waste, shortening supply chains, and creating seasonal menus continue to become industry standard.

83% of the Irish restaurant owners we asked said they would be focusing on sustainability and ethical sourcing in 2026.

When it comes to trends shaping Irish menus in 2026, a commitment to "local and sustainable sourcing" was cited by restaurant operators as the most influential consumer trend of the year. For inspiration on what a sustainable restaurant model looks like, look to restaurants like Sage in Westport, or Home in Belfast.



Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding



FINDINGS

The future of Irish restaurants relies on adaptability and change

As part of our restaurant industry predictions survey, Irish restaurant owners were asked to describe what they think will define a successful restaurant in 2026. One operator said that a successful restaurant ***“will be able to adapt to the changing technological landscape”***, which sums up the mood of 2026 so well.

The Irish hospitality industry is in a period of transformation. We’re in a time where the only consistent theme seems to be change. Restaurants are grappling with economic pressures, prompting them to turn to AI and automation for efficiency. Simultaneously, there is a clear and strong commitment to meeting consumer demands for improved

customer experience and a renewed focus on sustainability and ethical practices.

In all of the uncertainty, one thing’s for certain - the path forward is dynamic, requiring operational agility to navigate rising costs while strategically investing in technology, values, and practices that reflect the modern consumer.



Get a demo

“Bewley’s opened on Grafton Street in 1927. From electric lighting and global sourcing then, to data and AI now, technology has always been an instrument of hospitality. It only matters if it removes friction and allows us to deliver warmth, generosity and experience at scale. After nearly a century on Grafton Street, we’re clear: the tools will change, but hospitality has to remain human.”

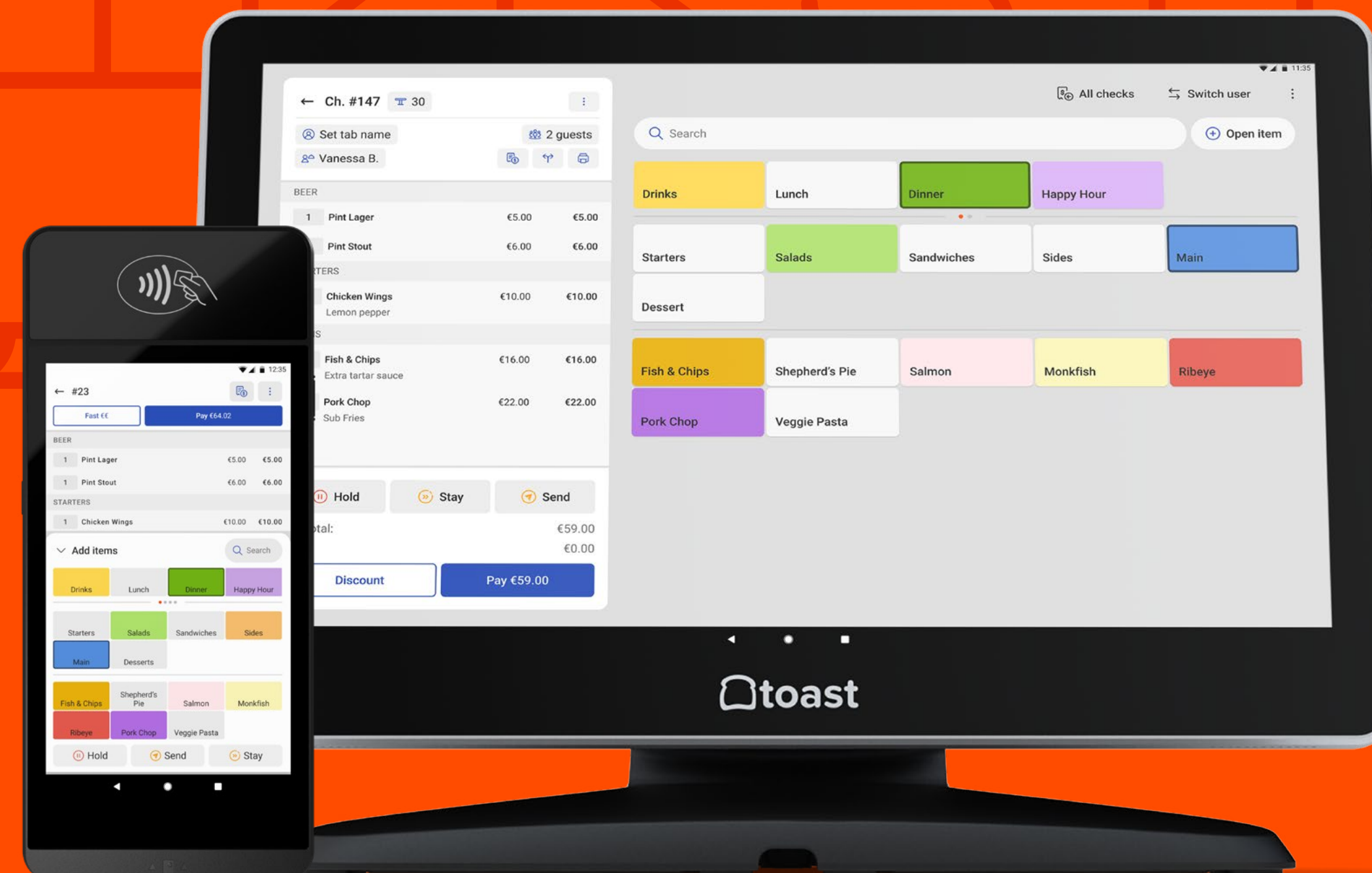


Cól Campbell
Bewleys
Managing Director



METHODOLOGY

To get insights and predictions on the changing restaurant industry, Toast conducted a blind survey of 258 Irish restaurant owners using the survey platform Pollfish. The survey took place from October 31st, 2025 to December 15th 2025.



*Respondents were not made aware that Toast was fielding the study.
Please note that percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.*