

2026 RESTAURANT TECH REPORT

FAST FOOD FAULT LINES

The Cost to Employees When
QSR Technology Breaks Down



Executive Summary

Quick-service restaurants (QSRs) are built on the promise of speedy service free from friction. Whether ordering at the counter, pulling up to a drive-thru, or tapping an order on a kiosk or phone screen, customers arrive with clear expectations of the QSR experience. It should be fast, easy, and consistent. It should be simple.

That feeling of effortlessness is an illusion. Behind it sits a complex network of systems that must function synchronously under constant pressure. When even one component falters, the disruption spreads quickly, and employees are left to manage the fallout. In an industry with a median employee tenure of just two years, these technical disruptions exacerbate existing turnover pressures and threaten customer loyalty.

In a national survey of frontline QSR employees, Canopy found that technology interruptions are a routine part of their shifts. System reliability issues outweigh training or confidence as the primary source of disruption, even though 80% of employees report feeling adequately trained. When systems freeze, go offline, or fail to sync, employees rely on manual fixes and inconvenient workarounds to keep service moving.

These technical disruptions are most common at locations where multiple ordering channels operate simultaneously, such as drive-thru, kiosk, and mobile. In these environments, employees spend more time reconciling systems and managing handoffs than those in locations with fewer ordering channels.

This report helps to quantify these issues, their frequency, and their implications for daily QSR operations.

Methodology

This report is based on a national survey conducted by Canopy in Q4 2025 to understand the experiences of QSR employees with technology. The survey collected responses from over 500 QSR employees across a range of age groups, experience levels, and QSR formats, including respondents working at major brands such as McDonald's, Burger King, Chick-fil-A, Domino's, Dunkin', and Panera Bread.

Key Findings

Tech interruptions are routine.

Nearly 1 in 5 employees face them every week.

Drive-thru systems fail most often.

Employees report higher rates of technology interruptions in the drive-thru than in any other channel.

Workarounds are standard practice.

Nearly half of employees have to resort to manual fixes.

More ordering options mean problems.

Multiple ordering channels increase coordination challenges across systems.

Failures lead to customer abandonment.

Forty-eight percent of employees have witnessed customers leaving due to technology issues.

WHEN TECHNOLOGY SLOWS THE LINE



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On the floor, technology issues rarely appear as single, isolated failures. Instead, they surface as pauses and added steps woven into an already fast-moving shift. Employees manage these disruptions as part of their daily work. Experience changes how those disruptions show up on the floor. Longer-tenured employees are often able to keep work moving even when systems falter.

NEARLY 1 IN 5 EMPLOYEES

have to stop what they are doing at least once a week to address a system issue, and more than half (57%) encounter problems several times a month.

These interruptions affect core systems used throughout the restaurant, particularly ordering and payment, and often occur while employees are already managing active orders and handoffs.

To keep service moving, employees adjust. Forty-seven percent use workarounds at least once a week, such as re-entering orders, writing information by hand, or verbally relaying details between stations. These adjustments keep orders moving, while quietly adding steps to workflows built for speed.

40%

of longer-tenured employees report rarely pausing work to address technology issues.

31%

of employees pause their regular job duties at least once a week to address technology issues.

48%

of QSR employees have seen customers abandon an order due to a technology issue.



Technology interruptions add small, repeated steps to daily workflows, slowing service in ways that are easy to overlook in the moment.

- Steps Added
- Workflows Extended
- Tasks Slowed
- Pace Reduced
- Delays Absorbed
- Friction Accumulates

SUBTOTAL: Workflow Friction



DRIVE-THRU SYSTEMS ARE A HIGH-VOLUME VULNERABILITY

**DRIVE
THRU**



DRIVE-THRU SYSTEMS ARE A HIGH-VOLUME VULNERABILITY

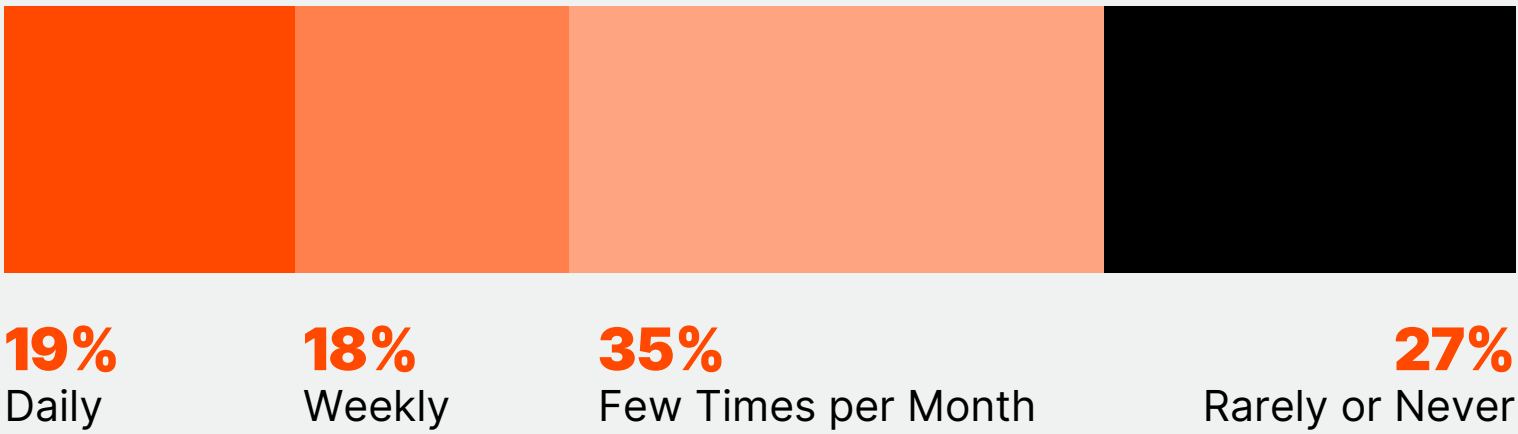
Inside the restaurant, employees can often address technology issues without immediately disrupting service. In the drive-thru, there is far less room to recover. Orders move in a fixed sequence, with limited ability to reroute work or contain disruptions once they occur.

Drive-thru employees report more frequent technology issues than those working in other areas of the restaurant. Nineteen percent experience drive-thru technology problems every day, and another 18% encounter issues on a weekly basis. These disruptions most often affect core tools needed to keep cars moving, including payment systems and point-of-sale terminals. To keep service moving, employees rely on manual fixes.

NEARLY HALF (49%) OF DRIVE-THRU EMPLOYEES use workarounds at least once a week, such as writing orders on paper or asking customers to pull forward early. Because the drive-thru operates in a strict sequence, these interventions are difficult to isolate.

When disruptions occur, their effects extend beyond a single order and are more likely to influence customer behavior. Fifty-four percent of drive-thru employees have seen customers abandon an order due to a technology issue, compared to 35% of employees working outside the drive-thru.

72%
OF EMPLOYEES REGULARLY SEE
DRIVE-THRU TECHNOLOGY PROBLEMS



MOST COMMON DRIVE-THRU
TECHNOLOGY ISSUES

"Card reader won't process payment"	38%
"POS offline"	31%
"Timer wrong or misses cars"	28%
"Tablet slow or disconnects"	23%
"Receipt printer fails"	21%



In the drive-thru, technology interruptions are harder to isolate and affect more customers at once.

- Issues Spread
- Delays Cascade
- Orders Stack Up
- Manual Fixes Multiply
- Wait Times Increase
- Customers Walk

SUBTOTAL:
Order Flow Disruption



SELF-SERVICE KIOSKS CREATE NEW POINTS OF FRICTION



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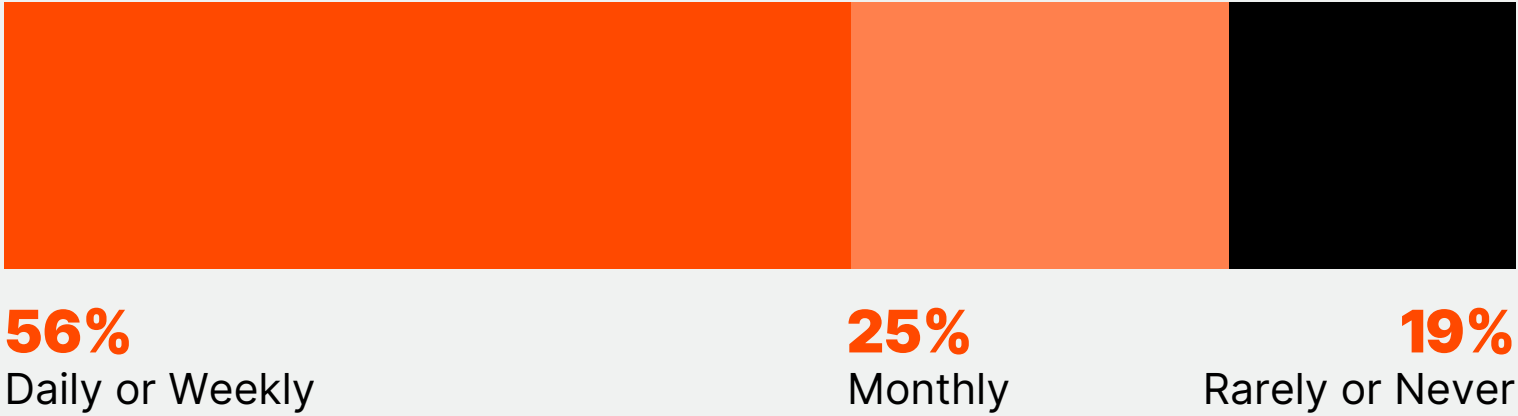
Self-service kiosks are intended to give customers a faster, more autonomous way to place orders with minimal employee involvement. When they malfunction, that dynamic reverses. Employees are pulled into the ordering process to assist customers with tasks the kiosk is designed to handle independently.

At QSRs with kiosks, employees are frequently diverted from other responsibilities to resolve issues at the front of the restaurant: 35% report being asked for help daily, with another 21% fielding issues on a weekly basis.

THE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS WITH SELF-SERVICE KIOSKS include unresponsive touchscreens, payment failures, and receipt printer issues.

These interruptions are not limited to the kiosk itself. Restaurants with kiosks report more frequent technology-related work stoppages overall. Eighteen percent experience daily interruptions, compared to 7% at restaurants without kiosks. Customer impact follows a similar pattern. Fifty-three percent of employees at kiosk locations have seen customers abandon an order due to a technology issue.

81%
OF EMPLOYEES ARE REGULARLY PULLED IN TO HELP WITH SELF-SERVICE KIOSKS



53%
OF EMPLOYEES AT KIOSK LOCATIONS HAVE SEEN CUSTOMERS ABANDON AN ORDER DUE TO A TECHNOLOGY ISSUE



Self-service kiosks are designed to reduce employee involvement in ordering. When they fail, employees are pulled back into the process to assist customers directly.

- Division of Labor Reversed
- Employees Pulled Into Ordering
- Other Work Interrupted
- Attention Redirected
- Workflows Re-Routed
- Complexity Added

SUBTOTAL: Service Disruption



MOBILE ORDERING: WHEN TIMING AND VISIBILITY BREAK DOWN



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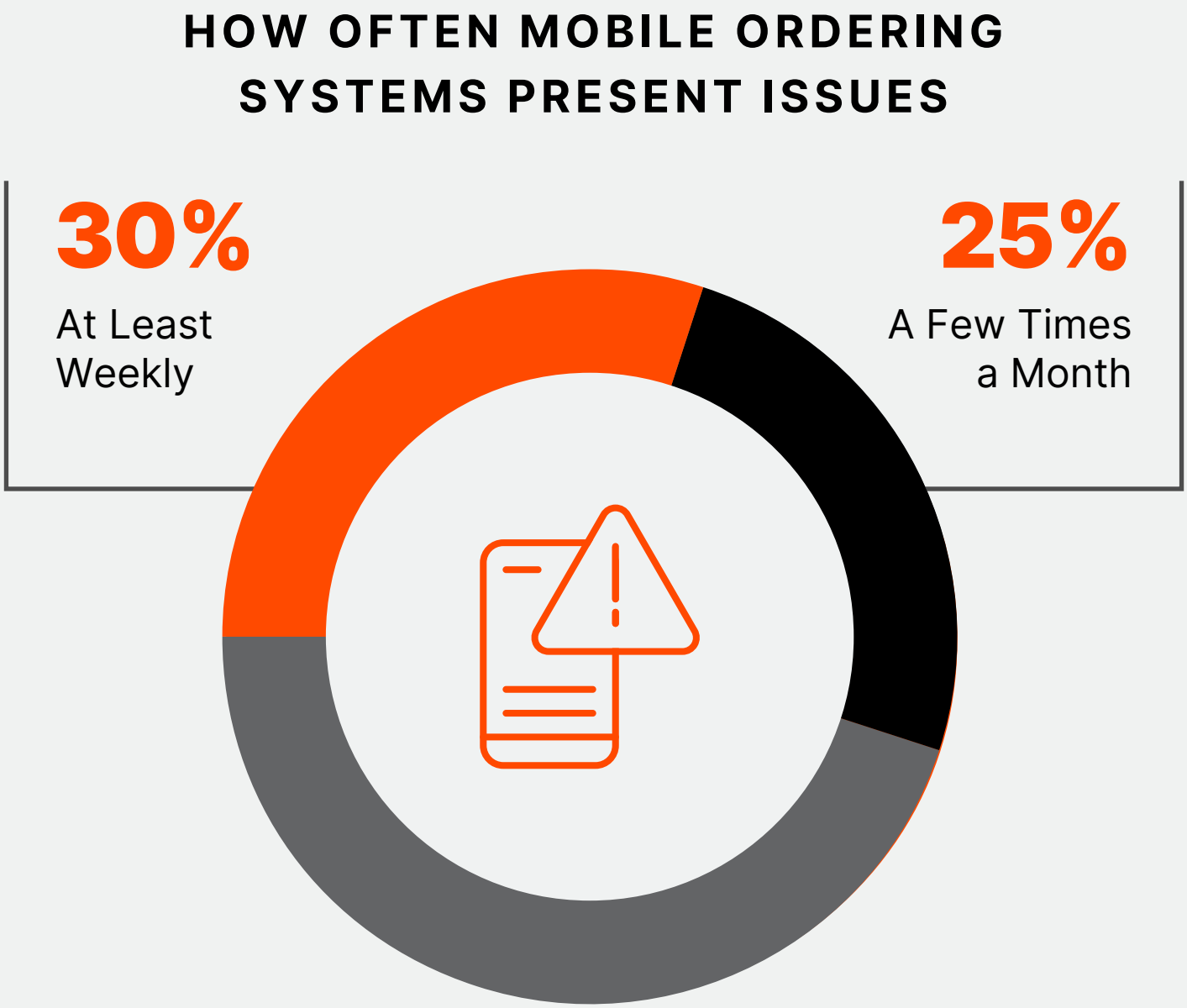
Mobile ordering offers customers convenience and flexibility, yet employees report that it is one of the most difficult order streams to manage. Orders placed through mobile apps do not always arrive predictably, making it harder for employees to see, pace, and sequence work alongside in-store and drive-thru demand.

Technology issues with mobile ordering are common. Thirty percent of employees encounter problems at least weekly, and many of the most frequent issues involve missing or mistimed orders rather than full system outages. Thirty-six percent say mobile orders do not appear on the POS or kitchen display system (KDS), while 28% report orders arriving late or all at once. Duplicate or missing tickets further complicate order handling.

39% OF EMPLOYEES rely on mobile order workarounds at least once a week, such as re-entering orders or adjusting timing to account for missing or delayed tickets.

These interventions often occur while employees are already managing other order streams, increasing complexity across the shift and reducing their ability to maintain a steady pace.

Customer impact increases as these issues persist. Fifty percent of employees at restaurants offering mobile ordering report that technology issues have caused customers to abandon mobile orders, compared to 29% at restaurants without mobile apps.



Mobile ordering is hardest to manage when employees lack a consistent view of order timing and status.

- Order Timing Unclear
- Sequence Disrupted
- Demand Collides
- Manual Adjustments Required
- Issues Resolved Late
- Delays Persist

SUBTOTAL: Order Breakdowns



THE PATH TO A MORE RELIABLE RESTAURANT



THE PATH TO A MORE RELIABLE RESTAURANT

Across QSR operations, employees routinely step in to manage technology breakdowns while orders continue moving. As ordering channels expand, reliability increasingly depends on how systems work together under pressure, rather than relying solely on individual tools.

The findings in this report indicate that breakdowns are most likely to occur when multiple order streams operate simultaneously. Orders fall out of sequence, issues surface during peak periods, and employees rely on manual fixes to keep work moving. These challenges surface at the system level, where tools and platforms must operate together.

The modern connected restaurant relies on a complex mix of technologies, from POS systems to kiosks, kitchen displays to drive-thru, as well as other front-of-house and back-of-house tech. QSR technology provides leverage to restaurant operators and, so long as it works as intended, supports a fast, reliable experience for customers.

Visibility into system performance combined with a centralized way to manage and automate connected restaurant technologies can help QSRs identify recurring issues, recognize where coordination breaks down, address problems earlier, and even support emerging AI use cases.

Canopy provides end-to-end visibility and management for the devices and networks that support restaurant operations, allowing teams to see how systems perform across locations and ordering channels.

When restaurant technology performs consistently across channels, service becomes easier for employees to manage and more predictable for customers. Over time, that consistency supports smoother daily operations and reduces the need for manual intervention during busy periods.



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