SoundHound
for Restaurants

6 Questions to Ask
When Choosing a Drive-Thru Voice Automation Vendor

Buyer's Guide

Over the last few years, dine-in closures forced customers to switch to takeout, delivery, and drive-thru ordering. Despite widespread reopening, this trend is expected to continue, and drive-thrus remain the most popular option.

But increased customer demand and staffing shortages are challenging chain restaurants — who need to serve higher numbers of people, more quickly, more efficiently, and more accurately with less staff.

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Voice AI, or conversational AI, is a popular automation solution, handling customer ordering by letting customers simply use what's natural — *their voice.*

But not all voice AI platforms are the same. If you are looking to ramp up your ability to serve your customers faster and more accurately through drive-thrus, here are *6 questions you should ask when considering a voice AI provider:*

1. Is the quality of voice interaction natural and conversational?

2. Does it work well in challenging physical conditions?

**3.** How quickly can you get your menu data up and running?

4. Can the technology easily recognize a range of accents and common expressions?

5. Does the vendor have the experience to help you build an intuitive voice UI/UX?

6. Is the drive-thru part of an end-to-end platform that includes phone, kiosk and tableside ordering?

1. *Is the quality of voice interaction natural and conversational?*

Restaurant operators are rightly concerned that digital tools like voice assistants will detract from the customer experience. They worry that voice assistants will not understand their customers, will ask them to repeat, and will miss order changes. Be sure your vendor's software can do this:
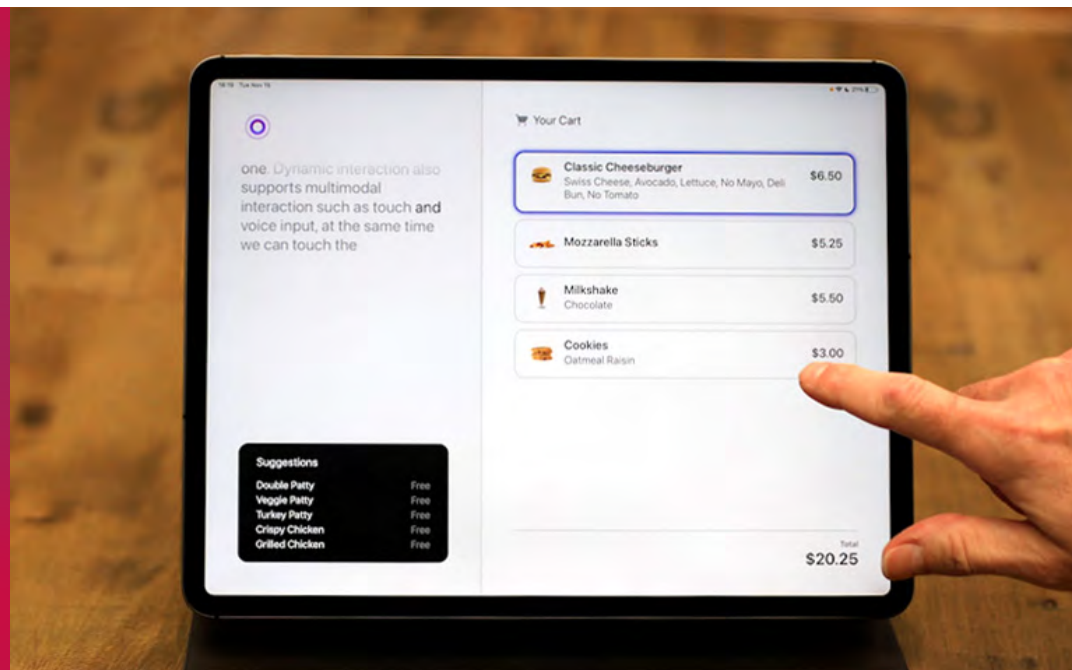
Look for voice AI software that interacts with people in a more natural way that imitates "normal" speech patterns: no "wake word" or turn-taking needed. As people talk to the AI — whether in a drive-thru lane or in-restaurant tabletop kiosk — they can see a text reproduction of the dialogue happening live in front of them, and how the AI is able to understand questions, changes to orders, and slang words. And in situations where touch would enhance the interface, voice AI with multimodal interaction such as SoundHound's Dynamic Interaction ™ provides multiple ways for customers to interact.

2. *Does it work well in challenging physical conditions?*

Drive-thrus are notorious for where they are located and the conditions they operate under: noisy urban areas or near highways, in rain, wind or snow, and the quality of the microphones and speakers may differ greatly. Can the voice AI software operate under challenging conditions?

Be sure your provider uses advanced voice technology such as acoustic modeling. Experienced voice AI providers train acoustic models to perform well in noisy environments by using training data that includes a full range of noise types such as wind, rain, engine sounds and more at levels that will be encountered at drive-thrus.

3. How quickly can you get your menu data up and running?

When selecting your conversational AI platform, make sure it can easily integrate with the most important item to your customers: the restaurant menu.

Many voice AI systems require that menu data from the POS system be manually input into the voice AI platform. This is ok for restaurants with only a small number of menu items, but is very time-consuming for longer menus, and can take weeks or months to complete.


Look for an advanced voice AI platform with prebuilt integrations that ingest menu data directly from POS systems, reducing onboarding time from months to days.
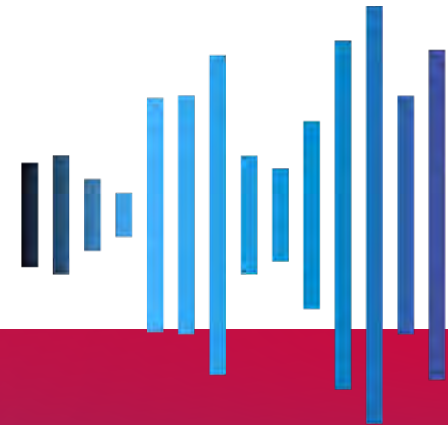
4. Can the technology easily recognize a range of accents and common expressions?

Locals tend to have their own dialects or common ways they identify items such as food. In some parts of the midwest, for example, a hoagie is known as a "huber," or residents may refer to soda as "pop." Make sure the voice AI software you buy is easy to customize and has the ability to continuously improve as the assistant is used.
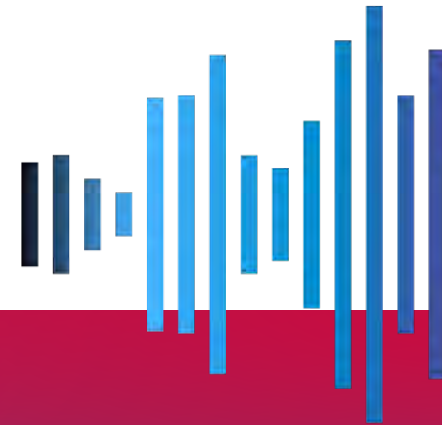
SoundHound lets you make updates to menu items or expressions with a fast hand edit. For example, a seafood restaurant may have on their menu, Save the Bay filet sandwich. But customers express it in various ways, calling it crispy or fish filet or fish burger. With the modifications noted above, the restaurant could quickly make these changes with a simple update.

5. Does the vendor have the experience to help you build an intuitive voice UI/UX?

Just as the success of an app or software program is highly dependent on an effective user interface/user experience, so, too, with conversational AI or voice AI. But voice UI/UX is different from apps and software. To create great user experiences with voice interactions, you need an understanding of how people naturally communicate with their voices, and you need to understand the fundamentals of voice interaction:
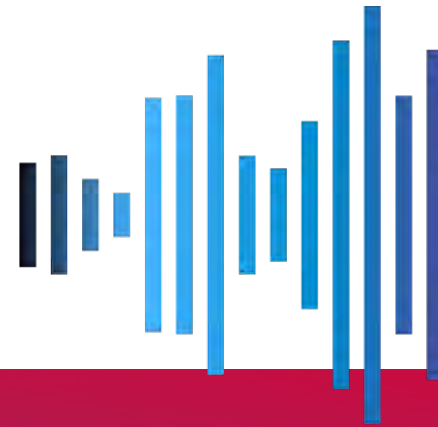
The interface will have a voice and it will be a welcoming voice and friendly—just as if you're talking to one of our team members. Part of the partnership is with a group called SoundHound, and they've done really great work in terms of voice and listening technology.

James Richardson, Vice President Marketing and PR, White Castle

SoundHound has spent over a decade building an independent voice AI platform that's revolutionary in its ability to understand speech and yet beautifully simple in how it responds. We've worked with the top worldwide brands to help them build amazing user interfaces, including White Castle, Mercedes Benz, Hyundai, Vizio, Netflix and more. Our platform now processes over 100 million queries per month, doubling usage within six months, and we now exceed 2 billion per year.

6. Are drive-thrus part of an end-to-end platform that includes phone, kiosk and tableside ordering?

Many early voice systems were implemented piecemeal without concern for integration. A restaurant may have begun with phone ordering and then later added kiosk or table side ordering, which made it difficult to integrate different channels with the POS system.

Look for technology that is expandable and uses common APIs. *SoundHound for Restaurants* is omnichannel and integrates ordering from phones, drive-thrus, kiosks, and tableside tablets. Once the order has been placed and modifications accepted and acknowledged, the voice AI platform seamlessly processes the order and payment through the POS, with no required interaction between staff and the front- of-house customer.

Now that you've read our Buyer's Guide, find out if our drive-thru solution — which is also part of our fully integrated end-to-end restaurant offering — *is right for you.*

At SoundHound, we have all the tools and expertise needed to help you deploy voice assistants across all of your restaurant ordering channels and to integrate with your POS systems and back-of-house operations.

Explore our SoundHound for Restaurants solution. Want to learn more?

Talk to us about how we can help you bring your voice strategy to life.

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