

Diners still trust word-of-mouth over social media

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Word-of-mouth recommendations have the greatest influence on customers' perceptions of places to eat out, new data suggests.

A survey by HospitalityGEM reported that personal recommendations were twice as influential on where consumers chose to eat as previous dining experiences, special offers, vouchers or TripAdvisor reviews.

Steven Pike, managing director of HospitalityGEM, said: "Despite all the fuss surrounding social media, four times as many respondents felt they were influenced by face-to-face discussions, which demonstrates how vital it is for operators to manage the guest experience to ensure consistent delivery of their offering.

"Operators also cannot ignore the impact first impressions have on consumers and especially amongst those looking to experience something new."

59% of respondents to the survey said that when eating in a pub they would be the least tolerant of food not being up to expectations, even if service and organisation was on point.

30% said they would be least tolerant of poor organisation and timings. 12% said they would be the least tolerant of poor service.

In comparison, restaurants faced considerably higher scrutiny over the quality of their food, with 80% of respondents saying they would be the least tolerant of a bad quality meal.

However, only 6% said they would be the least tolerant of poor service.

Pike added: "Maximising the guest experience is not solely about the quality of the product offering – it is also about the organisation, timing and how a team engage with the customer, which must all work seamlessly in harmony with an operator's brand values.

"Three quarters of those surveyed said they would stay longer and spend more if the service was good – so who says service is not about sales?"