FOOD ON DEMAND

Over the last decade or so, digital services have made it easier than ever to get what you want. You could be in the back of a car heading home after deciding the night is over and yet just a few taps away is the latest blockbuster, novel or album for you to enjoy en route. Technology makes this possible but our relationship with it is symbiotic: on-demand services have changed our consumer habits in such a way that whereas before they were mere gimmicks, now we rely on the convenience they provide without thinking.

The food and drink industry has been anything but slow in catching on to the growing trend. Apps such as Seamless in the US and Deliveroo in the UK have saved dining establishments the hassle of employing delivery drivers to offer a growing clientele of food-savvy urbanites tasty meals with just a few taps.

Meanwhile in Tokyo, an app called Maishoku allows time-strapped office workers to opt in to a daily lunch order, saving them a trip out. Companies simply sign up to the service and employees put in their order at the start of the day from a rotating selection of restaurants, making sure their lunches stay cheap and vary from week to week. And in Italy, the food on demand trend is driven by providing more quality/artisanal food as much as convenience. For example, Italian brand Quomi allows users to choose recipes, delivers the ingredients and provides simple, clear cooking instructions, thereby removing most of the stress of weekly meal planning.

It isn't just delivery services that are using technology to overturn conventions and offer something new. Just as delivery apps have expanded our notion of a takeaway restaurant to include more than the perennial pizza joint, EatWith is changing the way we think about the restaurant itself. Launched in 2013, the app allows anyone with a kitchen and dining table to launch their own restaurant.

Once signed up, hosts advertise their menus with pictures and descriptions and then set a price for their evening. Diners come along, break bread with new people and then review the evening afterwards, which helps other users find the best nights in town. Although supper clubs were possible before, technology has made them so easy to set up, regulate and access that going to a stranger's house for dinner is an enticing prospect. And because users pay in advance, there are no awkward cash exchanges at the end of an EatWith night.

More traditional restaurants are also meeting the demands of the 21st century. They have caught on to the seamless convenience of ordering food on a smartphone, which makes making reservations and paying the bill look laborious in comparison. Velocity, a reservations and payment app, allows

users to make last-minute reservations at carefully selected restaurants without phoning up. Once there, guests can see how their bill is racking up with updates on their phone; when ready to leave, they can simply split the bill evenly and pay within the app. Already popular in London and major cities in the US, Velocity embodies the new trend of on-demand food services.

Bigger brands are also using technology to offer customers something more. Starbucks, the world's largest coffee chain, has long had a loyalty card system that rewards customers with free drinks, special offers and exclusive access to new products. Its own app makes payment much less taxing thanks to a payment system that works seamlessly with the loyalty card.

Domino's, meanwhile, has an app that allows users to browse the menu, order and track the progress of their food – features that are undoubtedly the reason why 48.6% of online sales are made using its app. Pizza Hut, Domino's' main competitor, has been quick to follow suit with an app that rewards customers with free sides and pizzas. Such loyalty schemes are not only increasing sales for some of the world's largest F&B brands but also offering consumers something extra on top of the convenience that ordering via an app gives.

Of course the services mentioned here are not an exhaustive list of on-demand food, but they indicate how this trend is taking form. Stripping away the cumbersome inconveniences of cash payments, bill splitting and phone calls while adding features such as collated menus, user reviews, GPS locations, seamless payments and intuitive user interfaces, digital services – whether aimed at delivery, supper clubs or restaurants – are making an increasingly varied selection of food more readily available than ever before.