

THE GUEST EXPERIENCE GAP

A FIELD STUDY OF FOOD & ENTERTAINMENT

FRONTLINE INSIGHTS IN CX, UX, AND TECHNOLOGY

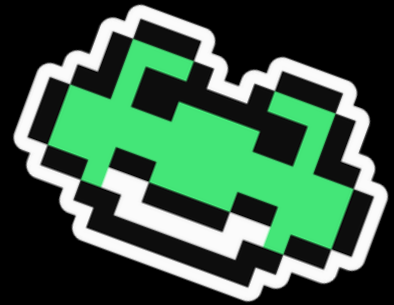




YOUR GO-TO
TECH

PARTNER
FOR FOOD &
FUN.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

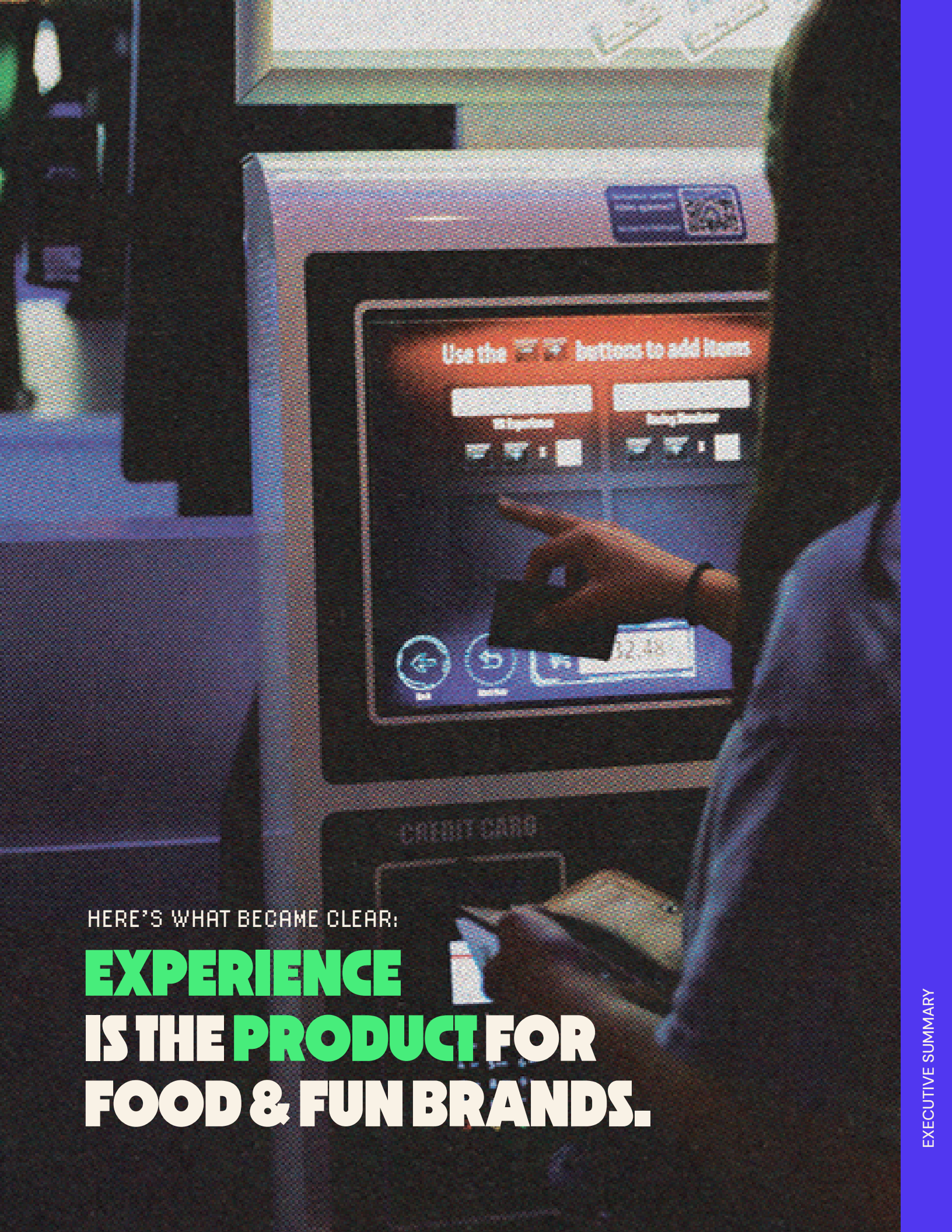


GUEST EXPECTATIONS KEEP RISING, AND THE SYSTEMS SUPPORTING THEM ARE STRUGGLING TO KEEP UP. THAT'S THE CORE PROBLEM FACING FOOD AND ENTERTAINMENT BRANDS TODAY.

The entertainment experience is breaking down—not randomly, but in predictable patterns. Across venues, guests hit the same walls: unclear pricing, confusing digital pathways, unreliable ordering systems, and check-in flows that turn excitement into frustration. Small problems compound into big ones that cost real money.

To see what's actually happening, Frogslayer deployed trained field researchers to 50+ entertainment venues. We deliberately evaluated brands as real guests, not consultants—mirroring how your customers actually experience your venues. We booked online, waited in lines, ordered food, played games, and documented every friction point through our 6-Stage Guest Journey Framework. Our designers tore apart websites and apps. Our engineers diagnosed the tech problems underneath.

We partnered with Dr. Bradley Wesner at Texas A&M to validate what we found. He applied academic rigor to our field data and connected our observations to broader industry research. The patterns were undeniable.



HERE'S WHAT BECAME CLEAR:

EXPERIENCE
IS THE PRODUCT FOR
FOOD & FUN BRANDS.

Guests don't just judge the rides or the food. They judge how easy it was to book, how smooth check-in felt, whether ordering made sense, and if staff could actually help when things went wrong. Right now, most venues are failing this test. Booking systems don't talk to check-in. Kiosks operate in their own universe. Mobile apps can't see what's happening in real time. It's not isolated glitches—it's systematic disconnection.

Our goal is simple: give you an honest, evidence-based picture of what guests actually experience today—and a clear path to fix it.

THIS REPORT DELIVERS 3 THINGS:

1 THE TOP 10 PROBLEMS KILLING GUEST EXPERIENCE ACROSS THE INDUSTRY AND WHY THEY MATTER TO YOUR BOTTOM LINE.

2 A JOURNEY-STAGE BREAKDOWN SHOWING EXACTLY WHERE FRICTION STARTS, HOW IT COMPOUNDS, AND WHAT IT'S COSTING YOU.

3 HOW THESE SAME PROBLEMS PLAY OUT DIFFERENTLY ACROSS DIFFERENT INDUSTRY VERTICALS AND WHAT THAT MEANS FOR YOUR OPERATION.





HERE'S WHAT LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

This research evaluated 50+ entertainment venues across Texas through three lenses: guest experience, digital usability, and underlying technology. The patterns were consistent and consequential.

The path forward starts with seeing clearly. This report is step one: understanding where your guest journey breaks and why. Step two is activating change—prioritizing the fixes that move the needle fastest. The venues that confront fragmentation now will define the next decade of food and entertainment. The question isn't whether to act, but how quickly you can start.

THE GUEST JOURNEY IS FRAGMENTING AT PREDICTABLE POINTS.

Check-in, ordering, and exit are the highest friction stages across every vertical we studied. These aren't random glitches – they're systemic failures where digital systems don't connect to physical operations.

FRICION IS COSTING YOU MONEY YOU CAN MEASURE.

Abandoned mobile bookings, suppressed F&B spend, extended check-in times, and staff pulled into troubleshooting mode all hit the P&L directly. When ordering systems fail, guests buy less. When check-in stalls, throughput tanks. When loyalty programs confuse, repeat visits drop.

STAFF ARE ABSORBING WHAT TECHNOLOGY SHOULD HANDLE.

The most consistent pattern in our research: frontline employees working around their own tools. Every manual override is labor cost, training burden, and guest experience risk.



WHY I JOINED THIS PROJECT:

A NOTE FROM DR. BRADLEY S. WESNER, PH.D.

For most of my career, I have been fascinated by a single question: Why do some experiences feel effortless while others fall apart the moment people, technology, and decision-making collide? That question has shaped nearly everything I've done — from my doctoral research on resilience and immediate-action decision-making in high-reliability teams, to my work teaching thousands of students, to the consulting engagements where I've helped leaders navigate complexity, misalignment, and rapid change.

When Frogslayer approached me about evaluating modern entertainment venues, I recognized the same patterns I've studied for years in very different environments: **systems designed for another era now straining under the weight of expectations they were never built to meet.** Venues weren't failing because of a lack of effort. They were failing because the guest journey had become more complex, and the underlying architecture hadn't kept pace.

I joined this project because I wanted to understand that complexity at a deeper level. I wanted to know how friction accumulates, how confidence erodes, and how emotional experiences are shaped not just by attractions, but by the invisible systems behind them. Entertainment venues have become hybrid digital-physical environments, and the smallest breakdown can ripple outward into service failures, staff frustration, and lost revenue. That interplay between human behavior, technology, communication, and process is exactly where I do my best work.

What I found in this industry felt both familiar and urgent. I saw staff forced into heroics to compensate for fragmented workflows. I watched families lose momentum before the fun even started. I saw operators who desperately wanted to deliver great experiences but were fighting misaligned systems every step of the way. It became clear that improving this industry wasn't about fixing isolated problems—it was about restoring the connection between people, technology, and operational clarity.

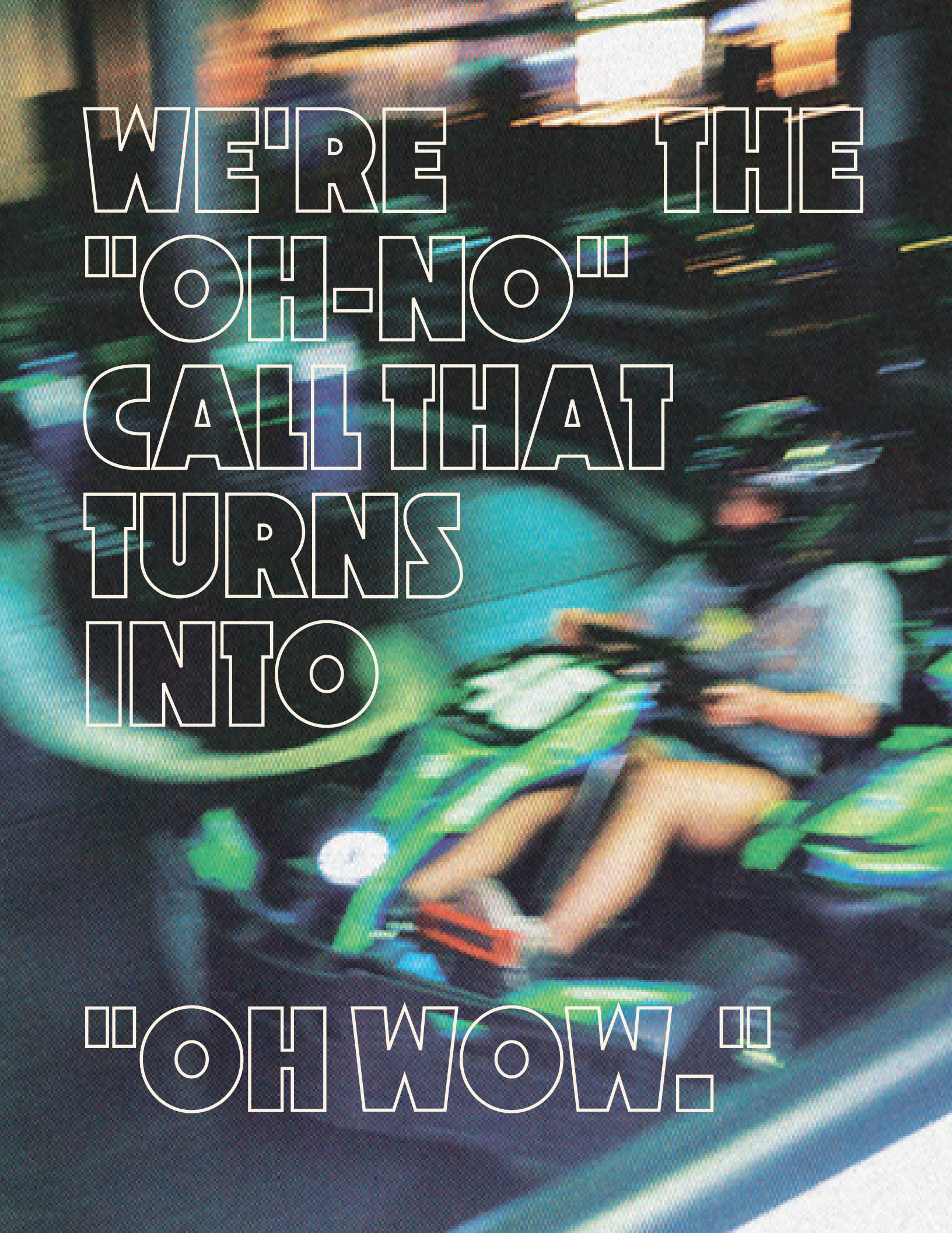
This project matters to me because experiences matter. They shape memories, relationships, loyalty, and trust. When they work, they create joy. When they fail, they create frustration that lingers long after the visit ends.

I believe modernization is not just a technical challenge—it is a human one. It requires understanding how people think under pressure, how teams adapt when systems break, how trust forms and dissolves, and how clarity can transform chaos into confidence. That is the work I care about. It is the work I have taught, researched, and practiced across my career.

And it is why I am proud to be part of this report.

My goal is simple: help operators build experiences worthy of the memories guests hope to create. If this project moves the industry even one step closer to that, then the work has been well worth doing.

Bradley S. Wesner, Ph.D.



WE'RE THE
"OH-NO"
CALL THAT
TURNS
INTO

"OH WOW."

THE STATE OF FOOD & ENTERTAINMENT



THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY IS BOOMING.

According to MarketsandMarkets, Location-Based Entertainment will nearly triple from \$5.47 billion in 2024 to \$15.33 billion by 2029—a 22.9% annual growth rate. Deloitte's 2024 research shows experience spending grew at 4.3% CAGR from 2019–2024, outpacing retail goods at 3.0%. Holiday shoppers in 2024 planned to spend 16% more on experiences while retail spending stayed flat.



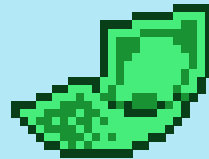
LBE EXPECTING A 22.9% YOY GROWTH RATE

Gen Z is driving this shift—37% plan to increase restaurant and entertainment spend in 2025, according to Qualtrics. New concepts launch constantly to capture this demand: pickleball eatertainment, VR arcades, bowling-plus-bar formats. Each adds operational complexity that legacy systems can't support.

LABOR ECONOMICS FORCE TECHNOLOGY BETS

Bureau of Labor Statistics data shows median hourly wages for food and beverage workers jumped from approximately \$12 in 2019 to \$14.92 in May 2024—roughly 20% wage inflation in five years. The BLS projects 1.16 million annual job openings through 2034, driven not by growth but by chronic turnover. FRED (Federal Reserve Economic Data) indices confirm labor cost as percentage of revenue continues rising for full-service restaurants while pricing power lags.

Technology adoption responds to this pressure. Korona POS industry analysis shows 350,000 restaurant self-service kiosks installed worldwide by mid-2023, up 43% versus 2021. Restworks reports 47% of QSRs now use self-order kiosks, with operators reporting 8–15% higher average checks and 40% faster order times.



20% WAGE INFLATION IN 5 YEARS

But the reality is that operators bolt new tech onto old systems, creating new problems. InTouch Insight's customer experience testing shows kiosks deliver 12–22% sales gains but drop perceived friendliness scores from 78% to 66%. Poor integration with POS, loyalty, and kitchen systems reintroduces friction—wrong orders, slow fulfillment, confused staff—diluting the promised ROI.

THE MARKET IS GROWING FAST – BUT THE INFRASTRUCTURE UNDERNEATH MOST VENUES WASN'T BUILT FOR COMPLEXITY. HERE'S WHY THE PRESSURE IS MOUNTING NOW.



CAPITAL MARKETS DEMAND INTEGRATION – BUT CAN'T GET IT

Private equity is betting billions on consolidation. According to Jacobin's analysis of the bowling industry, Bowlero grew from a few hundred million to over \$1 billion revenue between 2021-2023 rolling up U.S. bowling centers. Restaurant Business Online reported that in 2023, DCA Partners invested in Smash Park to fuel national expansion of the pickleball-and-eatertainment concept. The thesis: multi-revenue platforms (food, beverage, activities, events, memberships) can scale if operators deploy unified technology stacks.

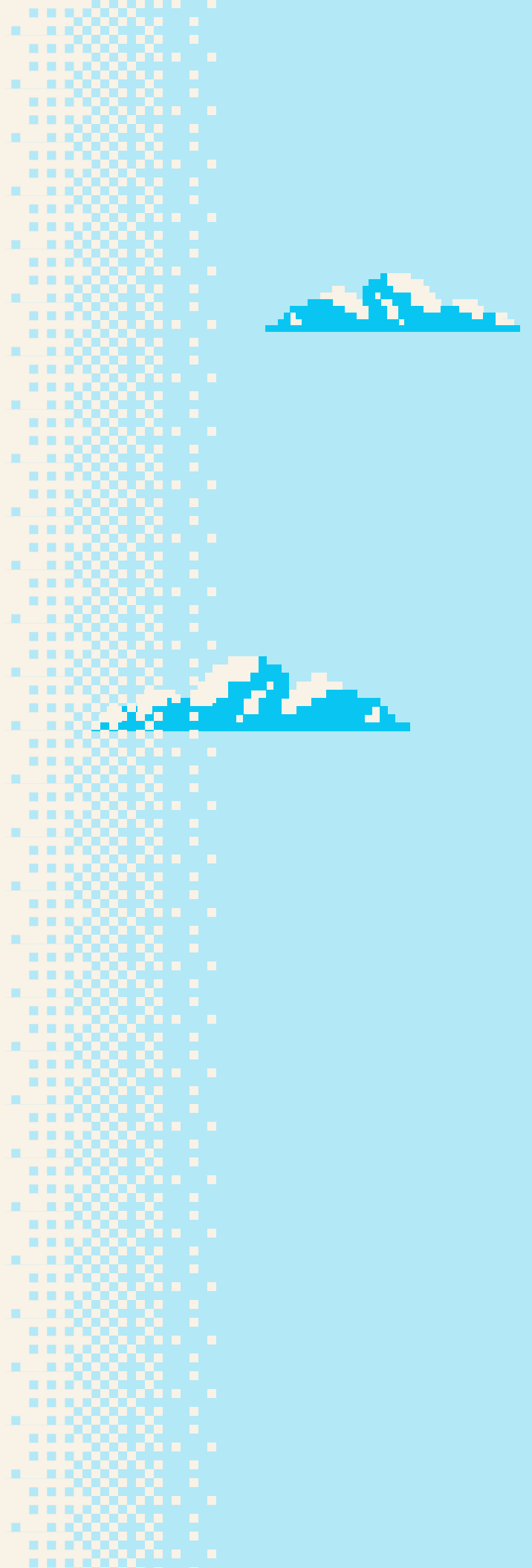
But L.E.K. Consulting's analysis shows technology integration repeatedly derails these roll-ups. When acquired venues run different POS, CRM, and booking platforms, consolidation creates more fragmentation, not less.

Grand View Research projects U.S. entertainment revenue will grow at 6.9% CAGR through 2030—but gains concentrate among digitally integrated operators. Firms under-investing in unified digital systems show slower recovery and weaker performance.

THE BREAKING POINT

Systems don't talk to each other, data sits locked in silos, and legacy tech runs on prayers. When consumers demand mobile experiences, venues add apps. When labor costs spike 20%, operators deploy kiosks. When PE firms consolidate brands, they need unified platforms.

None of these solutions work if the underlying systems can't integrate. Growth, labor pressure, and capital investment are accelerating—while infrastructure breaks under the load. That gap is where experiences tend to fall apart.



INDUSTRY CHALLENGES

Four core challenges repeatedly emerge across food and entertainment brands, forming the foundation for the insights in this report. They're not isolated issues; they are interconnected weaknesses that compound over time, limiting guest satisfaction, operational effectiveness, and a brand's ability to innovate at scale.



BEFORE EXAMING INDIVIDUAL FRICTION POINTS, IT HELPS TO UNDERSTAND THE FOUR SYSTEMIC WEAKNESSES THAT SHOW UP ACROSS NEARLY EVERY BRAND WE VISITED. THIS REPORT SPECIFICALLY FOCUSES ON THE FIRST CHALLENGE: DISCONNECTED GUEST JOURNEYS.

1 DISCONNECTED GUEST EXPERIENCES

Guests interact digitally with brands across apps, kiosks, websites, payment flows, and in-venue systems—but those touchpoints often operate like strangers. You've seen it, and likely experienced it; information is reentered, reservations disappear, and loyalty doesn't sync. These small breakdowns add up to friction that damages trust and reduces spend.

2 OPERATIONAL SYSTEM SILOS

Behind the scenes, core systems struggle to talk to each other. POS, kitchen displays, marketing engines, staff scheduling tools, and inventory systems run independently, forcing teams to bridge the gaps manually.

3 UNDERUTILIZED DATA ASSETS

Most brands collect a tremendous amount of guest and operational data, but can't activate it because the systems that store it are scattered and incompatible. The result is generic marketing, poor personalization, slow decision-making, and missed revenue opportunities.

4 TECHNICAL DEBT ACCUMULATION

A surprising amount of the industry still runs on outdated platforms, vendor-locked loyalty tools, decade-old POS setups, and patchwork integrations. These foundations make innovation slow, expensive, and brittle—especially at scale.



THE INSIGHTS IN THIS REPORT COME FROM REAL VISITS TO REAL VENUES. NOT SURVEYS OR EXECUTIVE INTERVIEWS. HERE'S HOW WE GATHERED THE DATA.

METHODOLOGY

To understand the true state of disconnected guest experiences in the entertainment industry, Tim Scott, Head of Product Strategy & Design at Frogslayer, designed a comprehensive assessment program using his 6-Stage Guest Journey Framework.

This framework organized how the team examined the problem from three critical perspectives: how guests feel during their journey (CX), how they interact with digital systems (UX), and the underlying technology that powers those interactions (Tech).

This multi-lens approach within the framework structure was essential because guest experience breakdowns rarely stem from a single cause or single journey stage. A frustrated guest might struggle with a mobile app that looks confusing (UX problem), runs slowly (Tech problem), and doesn't integrate with in-venue systems (CX problem)—impacting their experience from Pre-Arrival planning through Exit follow-up. Only by evaluating all three dimensions across all six journey stages could the team identify the root causes behind disconnected experiences.

The most meaningful insights emerged from connecting observations across methods. We'd evaluate a confusing mobile booking flow alongside the physical signage guests encountered on arrival, the POS systems staff used to correct errors, and the actual frustration we observed. This revealed how digital failures cascade into physical operations, creating compound friction that single-point analysis would miss.

Applying this framework across multiple entertainment verticals—cinemas, golf entertainment, theme parks, and bowling & arcade centers—we identified which failures were industry-wide versus venue-specific. This revealed systemic patterns like fragile digital-to-physical transitions that plague everyone, while highlighting where different venues diverge based on scale, operational complexity, or guest expectations.

CX AUDIT: HOW GUESTS ACTUALLY FEEL



METHOD	Frontline guest experience assessments combining 6-Stage journey mapping, operational assessment, and hardware/system observation
TEAM	Trained brand analysts operating as regular guests
GOAL	Document complete guest experience through physical and digital touchpoints, emphasizing operational service flow, service quality, and revenue impact

Research teams experienced every journey stage firsthand, capturing guest flow and bottlenecks, technology-mediated touchpoints (POS, kiosks, mobile ordering), staff interaction quality and training gaps, operational inefficiencies and revenue leakage, and in-venue technology performance failures.

UX AUDIT: WHAT CUSTOMERS SEE



METHOD	Systematic usability reviews using Nielsen's 10 Usability Heuristics and a comprehensive digital interface evaluation
TEAM	Product designers and UX specialists
GOAL	Evaluate digital interface usability, design patterns, and user interaction effectiveness across external guest-facing systems

Pre-visit digital touchpoints were assessed against established usability principles across nine core areas: first impressions and brand perception, navigation and information architecture, booking flows, mobile experience, conversion optimization, accessibility, links to in-venue digital experience, customer support, and loyalty mechanisms.

TECH AUDIT: WHAT'S UNDER THE HOOD



METHOD	Technical analysis of publicly accessible systems from "couch-to-store"
TEAM	Senior developers and systems architects
GOAL	Analyze technical infrastructure, performance metrics, security vulnerabilities, and system architecture supporting guest experience

Technical evaluation covered system performance benchmarking (Lighthouse scores, load speeds), technology stack analysis, integration readiness (API validation, system connectivity), security assessment (vulnerability scanning, protocol evaluation), and modernization opportunities.

FROGSLAYER'S 6-STAGE GUEST JOURNEY FRAMEWORK

Entertainment venues aren't just destinations—they're end-to-end experiences that begin the moment someone thinks about visiting and continue long after they leave. When preparing for the assessment initiative, we found that traditional customer journey models weren't designed for the unique complexity of entertainment venues.

Marketing lifecycle frameworks operate at too high a level, focusing on long-term relationships rather than moment-by-moment visit experiences. Service blueprinting excels at internal process optimization, but views experiences through an operational lens rather than the guest's perspective. Hospitality models assume linear progression through spaces that don't account for the simultaneous operation of activities, food service, and technology systems.

We needed something different, a standardized framework that could flex across different venue types while maintaining a consistent structure.

So Frogslayer's 6-Stage Guest Journey Framework was born. It provides that foundation—a systematic approach to understanding customer experiences in entertainment and hospitality environments where digital technology, food service, staff interactions, and core activities all intersect.



FOR THIS RESEARCH, WE EVALUATED EVERY VENUE, DIGITAL PLATFORM, AND TECHNICAL SYSTEM ACROSS ALL SIX STAGES OF OUR FRAMEWORK USING THE DISTINCT THREE-LENS AUDIT APPROACH.

THE 6-STAGES

PRE-ARRIVAL

Research, planning, and reservation before arrival

CHECK-IN

From parking lot to ready-to-play

ORDERING

F&B and activity purchase processes

SERVICE

Staff engagement & service delivery

EXPERIENCE

Engagement with core activities

EXIT

Departure & post-visit engagement

This framework represents every touchpoint where guests interact with brands—from the couch to the final receipt. It's how we understand the complete guest relationship and identify where disconnected systems create friction, missed opportunities, and revenue loss.

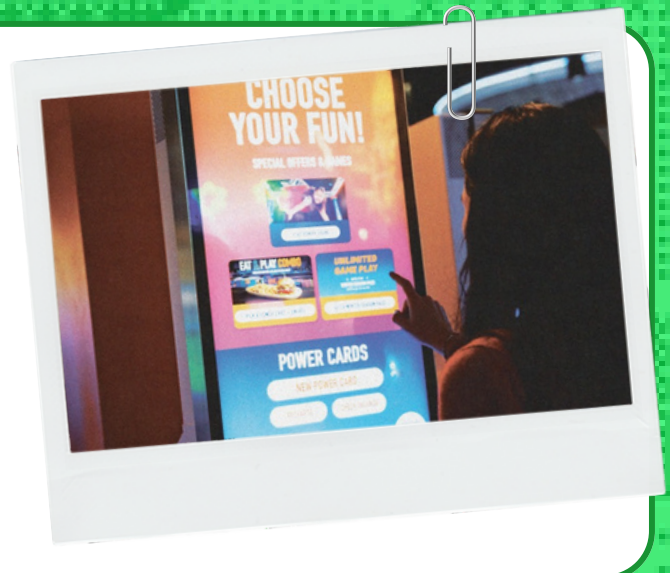
PRE-ARRIVAL

Everything before guests reach the parking lot. Website navigation, app downloads, online reservations, menu browsing, pricing research, waiver completion, and pre-visit communications. This predominantly digital stage sets expectations and represents the first opportunity to build excitement—or introduce friction that compounds throughout the visit.



CHECK-IN

From the moment guests park through readiness to engage with core activities. Includes exterior wayfinding, entry processes, staff greetings, payment setup, wristband or card distribution, safety briefings, and initial orientation. This hybrid stage reveals how well digital promises translate to physical reality.



ORDERING

The complete transaction flow for food, beverages, and additional services or activities. How guests place orders (QR codes, mobile apps, servers, kiosks, or counter service), menu accessibility, payment processing, order confirmation and tracking, and the integration between ordering systems and venue operations. Often the most digitally fragmented and friction-heavy stage.



SERVICE

All human interactions focused on hospitality and service execution. Staff attentiveness, responsiveness, and engagement quality. Food and beverage delivery. Problem resolution and flexibility. Staff knowledge of offerings and systems. The tone, speed, and professionalism of service. While often mediated by digital tools, this stage is primarily about the human element of hospitality.



EXPERIENCE

The primary entertainment activities that define the venue. Bowling lanes, golf courses, arcade games, movie screenings, trampoline parks, batting cages, go-karts—whatever the venue's core offering is. Activity quality and functionality, equipment condition, gameplay systems and technology integration, instructional clarity, activity variety, and the physical environment's contribution to enjoyment.



EXIT

The conclusion of the visit and everything that follows. Checkout process, staff farewell and acknowledgment, equipment return, digital receipt delivery, post-visit surveys, follow-up communication, loyalty program enrollment, and rebooking incentives. The most consistently neglected stage across the industry despite its disproportionate impact on overall satisfaction and return intent.

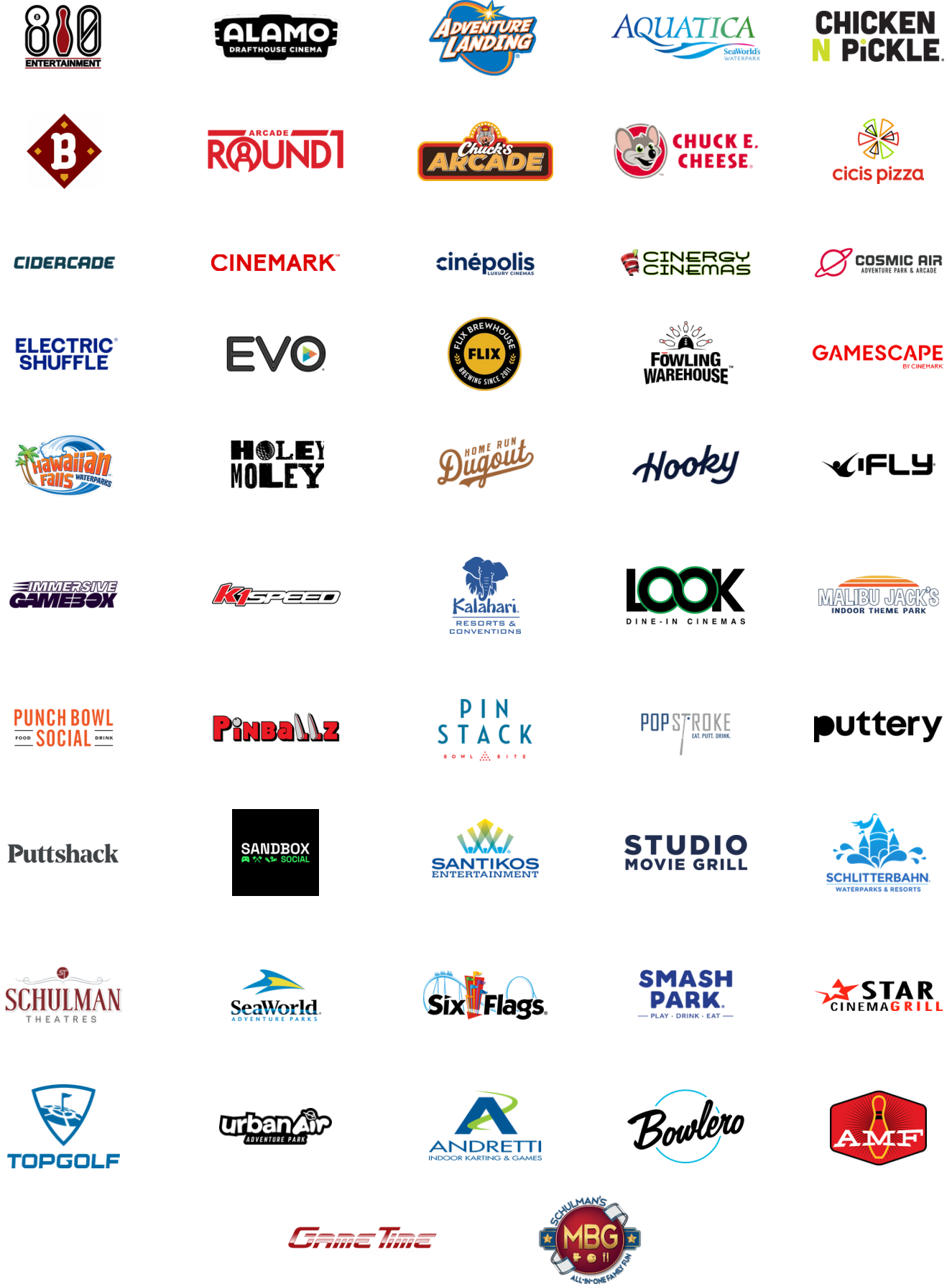




THE BRANDS

From July to November of 2025, Frogslayer's team of CX analysts, product designers, and senior engineers conducted these systematic assessments at the following food & entertainment brands.

The qualitative data from these assessments are reflected in this report.



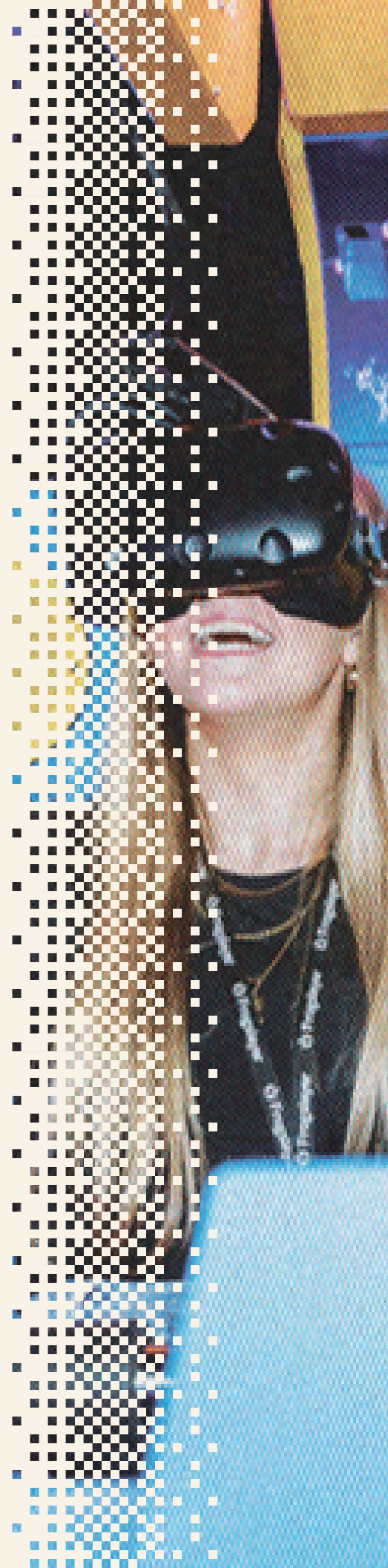
DATA COMPILATION & ANALYSIS

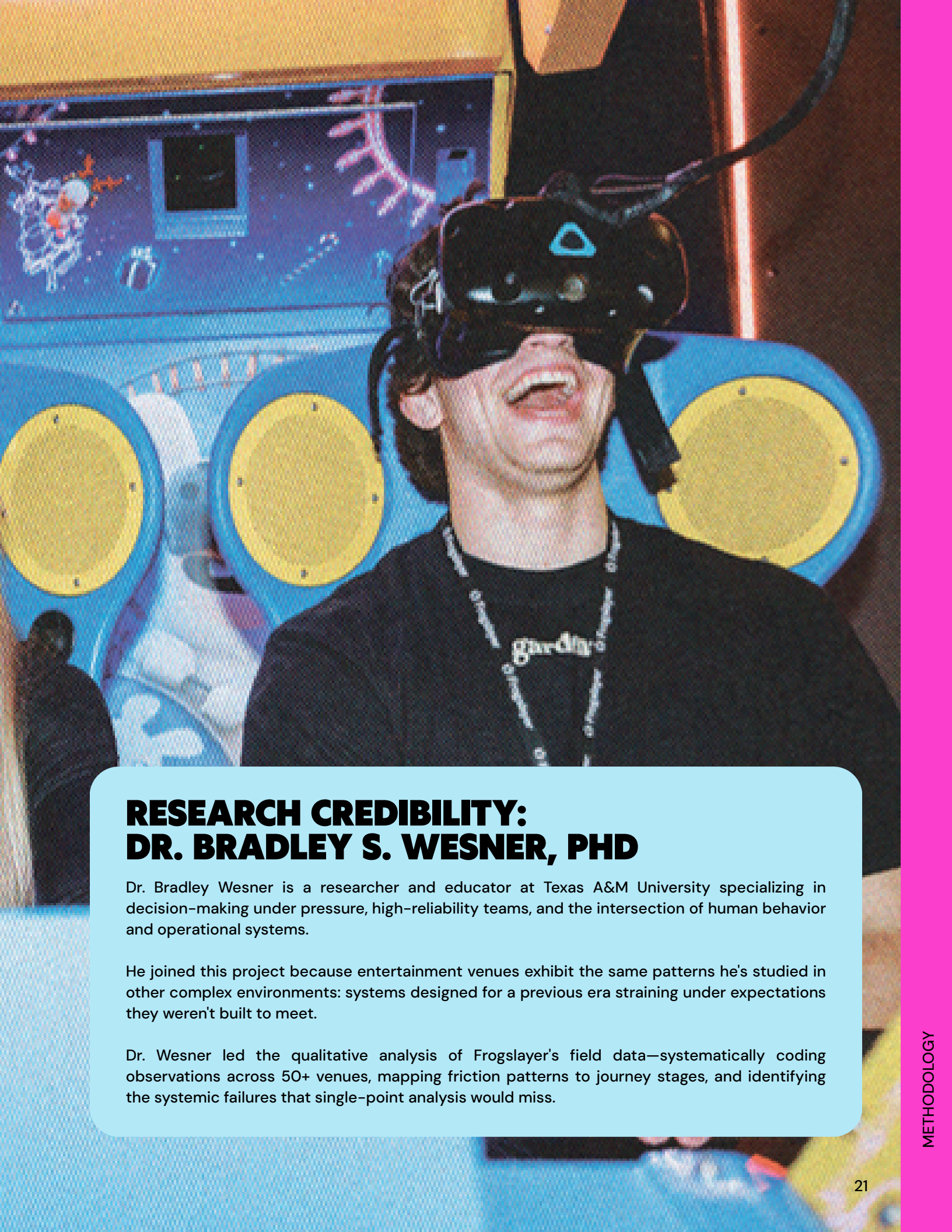
After assessing 50+ entertainment venues through three different lenses—CX, UX, and Tech—we had mountains of raw observations. We consolidated every venue finding into a single dataset structured around our 6-Stage Guest Journey Framework. This let us line up apples to apples: one venue's check-in disaster against another's, mobile booking failures across different brands, ordering chaos compared market by market.

We brought in Dr. Wesner to lead the analysis of this compiled dataset. He systematically coded each observation and mapped it to its journey stage, cross-referencing CX problems with UX failures and tech breakdowns to see the full picture—where issues actually start, how they snowball, and which problems show up everywhere versus just at certain venues.

Through his qualitative analysis, Dr. Wesner synthesized guest behaviors, usability failures, and tech constraints into clear themes. His systematic approach and stage-by-stage comparison revealed the same breakdowns surfacing repeatedly: pre-arrival confusion, check-in chaos, ordering system failures, staff workaround Olympics, and that fragile moment where digital promises meet physical reality.

This rigorous analysis transformed thousands of observations into the insights you'll find in this report. We weren't just cataloging problems—Dr. Wesner's work uncovered why disconnected systems create the same guest frustrations across every type of entertainment venue. More importantly, his analysis identified where fixing these disconnections would create the biggest impact.





RESEARCH CREDIBILITY: DR. BRADLEY S. WESNER, PHD

Dr. Bradley Wesner is a researcher and educator at Texas A&M University specializing in decision-making under pressure, high-reliability teams, and the intersection of human behavior and operational systems.

He joined this project because entertainment venues exhibit the same patterns he's studied in other complex environments: systems designed for a previous era straining under expectations they weren't built to meet.

Dr. Wesner led the qualitative analysis of Frogslayer's field data—systematically coding observations across 50+ venues, mapping friction patterns to journey stages, and identifying the systemic failures that single-point analysis would miss.

THIS IS THE CORE OF THE REPORT:

WHAT WE FOUND, WHERE WE FOUND IT, AND WHY IT MATTERS TO YOUR P&L

1 TOP 10 MOST CONSEQUENTIAL FINDINGS

2 FINDINGS ACROSS THE 6-STAGE GUEST JOURNEY

3 FINDINGS ACROSS INDUSTRY VERTICALS

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

This section shares what was observed most consistently and critically across more than 50 entertainment and experience venues. While every operator faces a unique mix of challenges, clear patterns emerged—recurring breakdowns in digital flows, operational systems, and guest-facing touchpoints that carry outsized impact on satisfaction, staff workload, and revenue performance.

We've organized our findings into three cuts of the same data.

First, the Top Ten most consequential findings: the breakdowns that make guests abandon bookings, create hour-long food waits, and force staff into constant workarounds.

Next, we map out these issues across our 6-Stage Guest Journey Framework to show exactly where problems cluster. Some stages consistently create more friction than others, and understanding this concentration helps prioritize solutions that actually move the needle.

Finally, we examine how these same issues manifest differently across key industry verticals: Theaters & Cinema Entertainment, Golf Entertainment, Theme Parks & Water Parks, and Bowling & Arcade Entertainment.

Together, these layers provide a comprehensive, evidence-backed picture of where friction occurs—and where the greatest opportunities for transformation lie.

TOP 10 MOST CRITICAL FINDINGS

1. FRAGMENTED, HIGH-FRICTION CHECK-IN & WAIVER FLOWS

CX, UX, TECH

Guests bounce between multiple check-in points (desks, kiosks, mobile links, and waiver stations) with little guidance on which path applies to their ticket type or group. Kiosks reject valid IDs, age selections confuse, and confirmation delays create immediate doubt about whether the visit has started correctly. These failures hit first-time guests and families hardest.

Where it shows up:

PRE-ARRIVAL

CHECK-IN

How common: Seen in most venues using digital waivers or multi-step check-in.

Why it's critical: First impressions stick. When entry takes 15 minutes instead of 5, throughput tanks, staff get overwhelmed, and guests start their experience frustrated. Every downstream problem gets magnified.

2. POS FRAGMENTATION ACROSS F&B, ACTIVITIES, AND ARCADE/ATTRACTIONS

CX, TECH

Venues run multiple, incompatible payment systems simultaneously—RFID wristbands for some purchases, arcade cards for others, QR-only locker payments, token-to-ticket converters, and kiosks operating independently from the main POS. This fragmentation forces mental translation at every purchase point and eliminates opportunities for unified data capture, personalized offers, and impulse buys.

Where it shows up:

SERVICE

EXPERIENCE

EXIT

How common: Widespread in multi-attraction and legacy-system venues.

Why it's critical: Fragmented POS reduces speed, increases errors, and prevents operators from understanding true guest value. It limits personalization and weakens both operational efficiency and revenue strategy.



3. CONFUSING WEBSITE AND MOBILE NAVIGATION FOR CORE TASKS

UX

Key digital tasks—pricing, booking, attractions discovery, hours, age rules, and location selection—remain unnecessarily difficult across venues. Our audits highlight inconsistent labels (“Things to Do” vs. “Attractions”), price ranges instead of clear pricing, and confirmation paths that leave guests wondering whether transactions were completed. Even polished sites struggle with basic clarity, hierarchy, and pathing, undermining early trust and reducing conversion.

Where it shows up:

PRE-ARRIVAL

How common: A majority of sites show navigation depth, labeling inconsistencies, or poor content hierarchy.

Why it’s critical: If guests cannot quickly determine offerings, pricing, or availability, they abandon the process or call staff directly—both of which reduce conversion and trust.

4. INSUFFICIENT MOBILE OPTIMIZATION OF DISCOVERY, BOOKING, AND WAIVERS

UX, TECH

Booking confirmations take 10–20 seconds to load, essential actions hide behind non-responsive menus, and heavy scripts slow everything on cellular networks. Performance audits show severe degradation—17+ second load times, delayed interactivity—making critical tasks feel unreliable. Mobile users, often already on-the-go or on-site, absorb the worst friction.

Where it shows up:

PRE-ARRIVAL

CHECK-IN

How common: Very common across venues relying heavily on third-party booking/waiver tools.

Why it’s critical: Mobile is now the default medium for planning and completing tasks. Slow, unstable, or poorly optimized mobile flows reduce conversions and disrupt the start of the physical visit.

5. QR-BASED ORDERING THAT ADDS FRICTION INSTEAD OF REDUCING IT

CX, UX, TECH

QR codes—meant to simplify ordering and access—frequently backfire. Scans lead to broken links, SSL handshake failures, wrong pricing pages, or dead-end flows. QR locker systems and “report a problem” codes fail at the moment help is most needed, destroying trust in what should be simple technology.

Where it shows up:

ORDERING

SERVICE

How common: Frequent among operators using QR menus, QR ordering, or QR-based access.

Why it’s critical: QR systems are meant to simplify ordering and reduce labor. When they fail, they create highly visible trust breaks at moments when guests expect speed and convenience.

6. KIOSKS & SELF-SERVICE STATIONS THAT ARE CONFUSING OR UNRELIABLE

UX, TECH

Kiosk interfaces display buttons for missing hardware, flows loop or stall without recovery options, and default screens appear broken. Age validation, payment steps, and cart-building vary across kiosks within the same venue. These failures drive guests to avoid kiosks entirely while increasing staff workload.

Where it shows up:

CHECK-IN

ORDERING

EXPERIENCE

How common: A recurring issue in bowling/arcade, family entertainment, and multi-attraction venues.

Why it's critical: If kiosks cannot be trusted, guests avoid them entirely, shifting the workload back to staff and negating the operational benefits self-service is supposed to provide.

7. LACK OF CONSISTENT QUEUE AND CAPACITY MANAGEMENT

CX, TECH

Large venues struggle to communicate real-time availability, wait times, and wayfinding across sprawling properties. Guests enter multi-attraction facilities with no clarity about where to go first, correct queue locations, or expected wait times. Digital signage and maps rarely align with ground reality.

Where it shows up:

CHECK-IN

EXPERIENCE

How common: Common in high-volume, multi-attraction, and open-layout venues.

Why it's critical: Queue ambiguity creates stress and perceived unfairness. Without real-time information or clear signage, guests make poor decisions, abandon experiences, and view operations as disorganized.

8. WEAK OR UNDERUTILIZED LOYALTY AND MEMBERSHIP PROGRAMS

CX, TECH

Loyalty systems are either invisible, misleading, or so fragmented guests can't understand the benefits. Sign-up paths route to unrelated flows, benefits lack clarity and personalization, and programs rarely tie to actual guest behavior. Even venues with large databases fail to create automated campaigns that drive returns.

Where it shows up:

EXPERIENCE

EXIT

How common: Observed in most venues with nominal or outdated loyalty offerings.

Why it's critical: Effective loyalty programs increase repeat visitation and spend. When benefits are unclear or systems are fragmented, operators lose an essential retention and revenue lever.



9. LITTLE TO NO STRUCTURED POST-VISIT ENGAGEMENT

CX

Most venues send no follow-up beyond a receipt or generic confirmation. Others lose guests entirely through inaccessible emails or absent digital records. Meanwhile, negative exit experiences—staff smoking at entrances, disorganized departure paths—actively damage the final impression and emotional afterglow.

Where it shows up:

EXIT

How common: Widespread; most venues do not continue the relationship beyond the transaction.

Why it's critical: Post-visit communication reinforces memory, drives repeat business and enables recovery from minor issues. Without it, the relationship resets to zero after every visit.

10. ACCESSIBILITY GAPS IN DIGITAL EXPERIENCES

UX

Digital experiences show persistent gaps: small fonts, cluttered layouts, poor contrast, missing labels, and text-heavy screens. Some venues display UI labels for hardware that doesn't exist (prompting for unavailable barcode scanners). Even minor issues like mislabeled cookie notices signal systematic neglect.

Where it shows up:

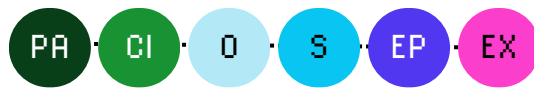
PRE-ARRIVAL

ORDERING

How common: Frequently observed across mobile web, online menus, and kiosk interfaces.

Why it's critical: Accessibility failures exclude guests, create friction for families and older visitors, and introduce compliance risks. They also signal a lack of digital rigor.





FINDINGS ALONG THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Across more than 50 entertainment venues, one pattern became unmistakable: the guest experience is not a sequence of isolated moments — it is a tightly interconnected system. Friction at any stage cascades forward, amplifying breakdowns and shaping the emotional arc of the entire visit.

Using Frogslayer’s 6-Stage Guest Journey Framework, the following section examines where experiences break, why they break, and how these failures compound across discovery, arrival, ordering, service, the core experience, and exit. This journey-driven lens allows operators to see not just what went wrong, but how early signals evolve into systemic problems that impact revenue, trust, staff workload, and long-term loyalty.

PRE-ARRIVAL

THE PRE-ARRIVAL STAGE SHOULD BUILD CONFIDENCE, REDUCE UNCERTAINTY, AND SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS ABOUT PRICING, OFFERINGS, AND REQUIRED STEPS. THIS IS WHERE ANTICIPATION IS CREATED—AND WHERE TRUST IS EITHER EARNED OR ERODED.

1. PRICING & OFFERING CLARITY BREAK DOWN EARLY

Guests often encounter broad price ranges instead of concrete numbers, inconsistent age or height rules, and confusing attraction descriptions. This forces them into guesswork at the very moment they should be gaining clarity.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE P&L

Unclear pricing forces guests to call or abandon. Every phone call is labor cost; every abandonment is lost revenue. Clarity converts.

FIELD STORY:

THE 20 SECOND WAIT

Start a 20-second timer on your phone. It sounds quick, but when you're trying to complete a purchase, it feels endless. At a luxury cinema chain, that 20-second wait defined their booking experience. The venue's mobile website scored just 35 on PageSpeed Insights, with pages taking up to 20 seconds to become interactive on cellular networks.

For a brand positioning itself as premium entertainment, slow-loading pages directly contradicted the luxury promise. Performance issues compounded during booking flows—users selecting seats or adding concessions experienced lag that made the process nearly impossible on mobile devices. This technical failure forced guests to either abandon mobile bookings entirely or arrive frustrated before their experience even began, fundamentally undermining operational efficiency and brand positioning.



2. NAVIGATION HIDES BASIC INFORMATION OR FRACTURES CORE DECISION PATHS

Key tasks—checking hours, comparing attractions, verifying requirements, or locating venue-specific policies—are buried under vague labels (“Things to Do,” “Play,” “Experiences”) or scattered across multiple pages without hierarchy.

3. MOBILE PERFORMANCE SLOWS THE PLANNING PROCESS

Long load times, heavy scripts, and poorly optimized mobile layouts stall the booking or waiver flow. Several venues had pages that took 10–20 seconds to become responsive when accessed on cellular networks.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE P&L

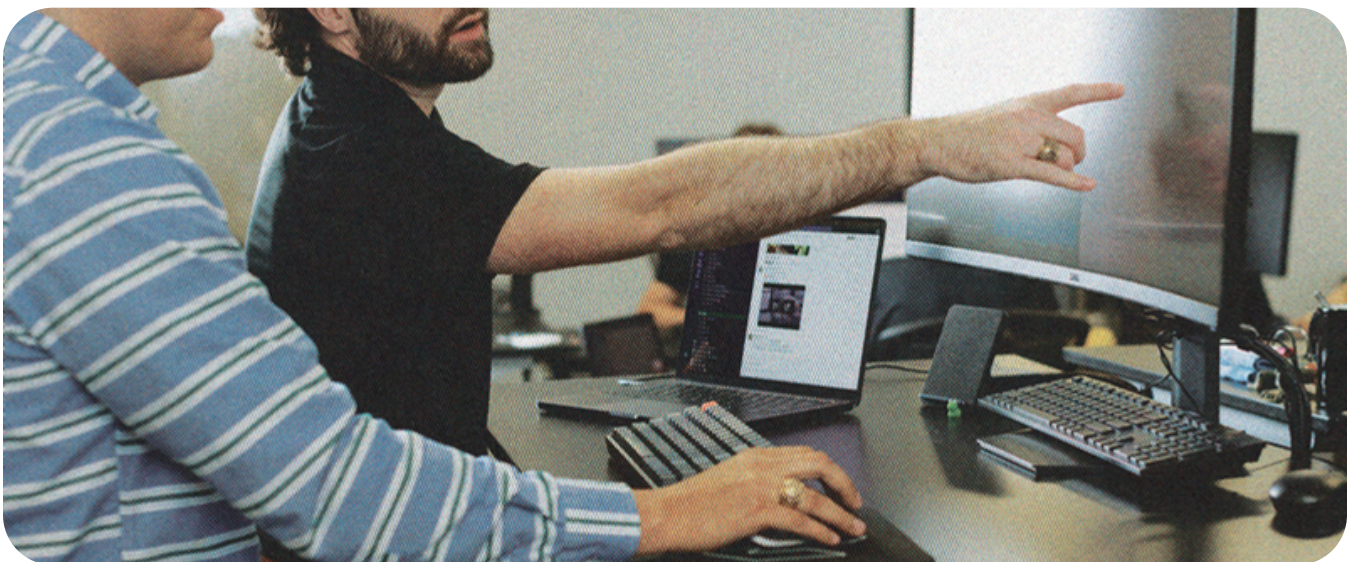
A 20-second load time isn't just frustration—it's a guest booking with your competitor instead. Mobile speed is conversion speed.

4. BOOKING AND WAIVER WORKFLOWS INTRODUCE EARLY UNCERTAINTY

Confirmation delays, mismatched instructions, and inconsistent form logic lead to repeated attempts, double-submissions, or guests abandoning the process entirely. Many guests begin the visit worried about whether the transaction “went through.”

5. LOCATION CONFUSION IS COMMON IN MULTI-SITE BRANDS

Brands with multiple locations often fail to differentiate offerings, pricing, or hours across sites. Guests routinely misinterpret which location they are booking, which increases anxiety and reduces trust.





PRE-ARRIVAL IS THE GUEST'S FIRST TRUST TEST. WHEN DIGITAL CLARITY FAILS HERE, THE REST OF THE VISIT BEGINS UNDER A CLOUD OF UNCERTAINTY THAT INFLUENCES EVERY STAGE THAT FOLLOWS.



IMPACT

Pre-arrival friction has an outsized impact because guests are making decisions with limited information and high emotional stakes.

Uncertainty suppresses conversion

When guests cannot verify price, availability, or requirements, they hesitate and often abandon.

Ambiguous information increases future workload

Staff must spend valuable time clarifying policies that should have been communicated upstream.

Trust is lost before arrival

Slow confirmations or inconsistent navigation make guests question whether the venue is organized or technologically modern.

WHERE THIS SHOWED UP

CX Unclear expectations, frustration, uncertainty

UX Hidden or mislabeled navigation paths, unclear requirements, poor hierarchy

TECH Slow mobile performance, inconsistent confirmation logic, heavy scripts



CHECK-IN

ARRIVAL AND CHECK-IN SHOULD FEEL INTUITIVE, ORGANIZED, AND FAST. GUESTS EXPECT CLEAR DIRECTION, A SINGLE COHERENT PROCESS, AND VISIBLE CUES THAT THE VENUE IS PREPARED FOR THEM. THIS IS THE MOMENT WHERE ANTICIPATION CONVERTS INTO ENGAGEMENT—OR DISSOLVES INTO FRUSTRATION.

1. MULTIPLE UNCOORDINATED ENTRY PATHS FORCED GUESTS INTO GUESSWORK

Guests routinely encountered several potential “starting points”—kiosks, waiver stations, front desks, QR signs, tablet stands, and staff members—without clear guidance on which path applied to their situation. Many chose incorrectly and had to backtrack.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE P&L

Confusion at entry backs up lines, delays throughput, and burns staff time on wayfinding instead of service. Every minute of check-in chaos ripples through the day.

2. KIOSKS FREQUENTLY PRODUCED ERRORS, STALLS, OR INCOMPLETE FLOWS

Common failures included vertical ID rejections, looping screens, unresponsive UI elements, mismatched prompts (“scan ID” when no scanner existed), and no recovery paths. Guests lost confidence quickly and turned to staff for assistance.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE P&L

Unreliable kiosks don't reduce labor—they redistribute it. Every kiosk failure becomes a staff transaction, erasing your self-service investment.

FIELD STORY:

WHEN TECH BECOMES THE BOTTLENECK

What should have taken two minutes became a ten-minute line. At a family entertainment center in Texas, our team witnessed a complete waiver system meltdown. The venue's Microsoft Surface Pro tablets—their primary check-in technology—failed across all three units. Touchscreens wouldn't register email addresses, blocking progress beyond the required fields. Both researchers had to abandon the kiosks and complete waivers on personal devices, turning staff into manual workaround facilitators.

The impact cascaded through operations. Non-functional kiosks created bottlenecks, forcing staff to guide each guest through alternative processes. Technology failure transformed efficiency goals into operational headaches, creating uneven experiences and inflated wait times across the board.

3. WAIVER AND TICKET SYSTEMS DID NOT COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER

Families often completed waivers only to discover they were in the wrong system, or they had to repeat information at a different station. Groups regularly needed staff intervention to link members or verify completion.



4. STAFF BECAME THE FALLBACK FOR BROKEN OR UNCLEAR DIGITAL FLOWS

When technology failed or was ambiguous, staff had to manually check waivers, override kiosk issues, or explain the process step-by-step. This increased line length and introduced uneven experiences depending on the staff member. This pattern—staff absorbing what systems should handle—repeats throughout the journey. We examine it fully in Stage 4: Service.

CHECK-IN IS THE MOST FRAGILE STAGE IN THE JOURNEY. WHEN DIGITAL AND PHYSICAL SYSTEMS FAIL TO WORK TOGETHER, GUESTS IMMEDIATELY PERCEIVE THE VENUE AS DISORGANIZED—AND THAT PERCEPTION CARRIES INTO EVERY SUBSEQUENT MOMENT OF THE VISIT.

IMPACT

Check-in is the guest's first operational impression, and it establishes the emotional baseline for the entire visit.

Trust is either confirmed or broken in the first minute

When technology works and staff workflows flow smoothly, guests feel confident. When processes stall or loop, guests question the venue's capability.




Operational inefficiency escalates rapidly

A single unclear step at check-in can cause lines to expand exponentially, pushing stress downstream into ordering, service, and experience stages.

Staff morale is directly impacted

When technology underperforms, staff bear the burden—manually resolving issues, managing stressed guests, and improvising around system limitations.

WHERE THIS SHOWED UP

-  **CX** Confusion, long lines, repeated steps, dependency on staff
-  **UX** Unclear pathways, ambiguous prompts, inconsistent interfaces
-  **TECH** Kiosk stalls, waiver system mismatches, unreliable QR flows

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ORDERING

ORDERING SHOULD BE FAST, CLEAR, AND FRICTIONLESS. GUESTS EXPECT TO BROWSE OPTIONS EASILY, TRUST THE PRICING THEY SEE, AND COMPLETE PURCHASES WITHOUT CONFUSION—WHETHER THROUGH KIOSKS, QR CODES, MOBILE DEVICES, OR STAFF. THIS IS THE MOMENT WHEN DIGITAL CONVENIENCE SHOULD ELEVATE OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY.

1. QR-BASED ORDERING OFTEN ADDED FRICTION INSTEAD OF REMOVING IT

Broken links, expired endpoints, slow-loading menus, and confusing redirects were common. In several cases, QR codes led to the wrong menu or an error page, forcing guests to flag down staff or abandon the digital option entirely.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE P&L

Broken QR ordering shifts guests back to servers, inflates wait times, and suppresses impulse purchases. The efficiency promise becomes a cost center.



FIELD STORY:

THE TAPED-OVER SOLUTION

At a multi-concept entertainment venue, we found bowling lane QR codes covered with black tape. When we asked why, the server explained that "digital ordering sends orders that never reach the kitchen." The venue had completely reverted to manual waitstaff ordering, eliminating any efficiency gains.

What should have been seamless in-lane ordering became dependent on server availability, increasing wait times and frustrating guests expecting (and teased) modern conveniences, such as QR code ordering. Meanwhile, movie theater guests in that same venue faced different fragmentation—pre-order customers received seat delivery while kiosk purchasers had no food ordering option, forcing them to leave mid-movie for bar pickups. This created two-tier service levels within the same venue.

2. KIOSKS PROVIDED INCONSISTENT OR INCOMPLETE PURCHASING FLOWS

The kiosk reliability issues documented at check-in (see Stage 2) resurfaced here—but with direct revenue impact. Ordering kiosks buried essential items behind unclear category labels, displayed images that didn't match available inventory, or failed mid-transaction without explanation. Where check-in kiosk failures cost time, ordering kiosk failures cost spend.

3. PRICING AND PRODUCT VISIBILITY WERE UNEVEN OR MISLEADING

F&B pricing sometimes appeared only after building a cart, and activity pricing was inconsistently shown across digital and physical environments. Guests frequently expressed confusion about package differences, add-ons, or upgrade options.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE P&L

When guests can't trust what they see, they buy less. Price confusion kills upsells and add-ons—the highest-margin revenue.



4. POS FRAGMENTATION UNDERMINED CROSS-VENUE CONSISTENCY

Separate systems for arcade credits, F&B, retail, activities, and lockers forced guests into multiple transactions and mental conversions (tokens → points → cards → minutes). Staff had to translate between systems, increasing the chance of errors.

5. STAFF INTERVENTIONS WERE REQUIRED MORE OFTEN THAN INTENDED

When digital ordering failed, staff became the backup system—locating missed items, resolving payment stalls, re-inputting orders, and clarifying confusing menu structures. This is the same "staff as fallback" pattern from check-in, now compounding. See Stage 4: Service for the full impact on frontline teams.



ORDERING IS A REVENUE ENGINE—BUT ONLY WHEN SYSTEMS WORK SEAMLESSLY. WHEN QR FLOWS BREAK, KIOSKS STALL, OR PRICING FEELS UNCLEAR, GUESTS SHIFT FROM ENJOYMENT TO IRRITATION AND SPEND DROPS INSTANTLY.



IMPACT

Ordering is one of the highest-impact moments for both guest satisfaction and revenue performance.

Friction here directly lowers spend

When ordering is slow or unclear, guests buy less, purchase fewer add-ons, or abandon upgrades entirely.




Digital failure becomes emotional frustration

Guests expect ease—especially when hungry or managing children. When ordering breaks, patience declines sharply.

Operational efficiency depends on clean ordering flows

Staff capacity collapses when digital systems offload problems instead of resolving them upstream.

WHERE THIS SHOWED UP

-  **CX** Long lines, incorrect orders, incomplete purchases, frustrated guests
-  **UX** Confusing menus, mislabeled categories, non-intuitive kiosk paths
-  **TECH** Broken QR flows, inconsistent POS systems, unreliable hardware integration

SERVICE

GUESTS EXPECT STAFF TO BE KNOWLEDGEABLE, PRESENT, AND EMPOWERED. THEY ASSUME EMPLOYEES CAN RESOLVE ISSUES QUICKLY, PROVIDE GUIDANCE, AND REINFORCE A SENSE OF ORDER. STRONG STAFF INTERACTIONS ELEVATE THE EXPERIENCE; WEAK OR INCONSISTENT ONES AMPLIFY EVERY PRIOR FRICTION POINT.

1. STAFF FREQUENTLY COMPENSATED FOR SYSTEM FAILURES

When kiosks stalled, QR flows broke, or POS systems disagreed, staff had to manually override processes, explain inconsistencies, or re-enter guest information. This shifted focus from hospitality to troubleshooting.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE P&L

Every workaround is labor cost. When staff troubleshoot instead of serve, you're paying hospitality wages for IT support—and burning out your best people.

FIELD STORY:

STAFF AS HUMAN BAND-AIDS

At a family entertainment center in Texas, we watched a complete digital waiver system failure turn employees into human workarounds. When the QR-based waiver system crashed, staff manually completed processes on tablets they clearly didn't understand. The 15-minute check-in process stretched as employees juggled manual waiver entry, confused payment processing, and system navigation.

Rather than greeting guests and creating excitement, staff spent their time troubleshooting—manually entering data that should have flowed automatically. This shifted their role from hospitality providers to technical support, fundamentally altering the guest experience. Digital failure transformed seamless self-service into labor-intensive manual processes, undermining both operational efficiency and service quality.





2. VISIBILITY AND PRESENCE WERE INCONSISTENT

In some venues, staff were inaccessible during high-friction moments (check-in, ordering, locker issues, queue transitions). Guests lacked clear points of contact and often had to search for help.

3. STAFF WORKFLOWS WERE NOT ALIGNED WITH DIGITAL SYSTEMS

Procedures designed for legacy operations often clashed with newer digital flows. Staff followed workarounds rather than standardized processes, creating confusion for both guests and employees.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE P&L

Misaligned workflows extend training time, increase errors, and accelerate turnover. System-staff friction is a hidden line item in your labor budget.



SERVICE EXPERIENCE REVEALS THE TRUE COST OF SYSTEM FRAGMENTATION. WHEN TECHNOLOGY AND OPERATIONS DO NOT SUPPORT STAFF, EMPLOYEES BECOME PROBLEM-SOLVERS INSTEAD OF HOSTS—SHAPING GUEST MEMORIES IN UNINTENDED WAYS.

IMPACT

Service is the human buffer between the guest and the system—and when the system underperforms, the staff absorbs the friction.




Morale & retention are affected by tech quality

When tools fail repeatedly, frustration increases and staff lose confidence in the systems meant to support them.

Operational inefficiency increases through the day

A few minutes lost at check-in, ordering, or troubleshooting add up to hours of lost throughput and revenue.

WHERE THIS SHOWED UP

-  **CX** Inconsistent staff experiences, unclear responsibilities, perceived lack of professionalism
-  **UX** Confusing processes that staff must manually interpret or override
-  **TECH** System failures that force staff into workaround mode rather than service mode

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a pink t-shirt and shorts, is captured in a mini-golfing stance on a green artificial turf field. She is holding a golf club and looking down at the ball. The background shows a fenced-in area with trees and a clear sky. The overall scene is bright and outdoors.

EXPERIENCE

THIS IS THE MOMENT GUESTS CAME FOR—THE ACTIVITY, ENTERTAINMENT, OR ENVIRONMENT THAT JUSTIFIES THE VISIT. THEY EXPECT SEAMLESS TRANSITIONS INTO THE EXPERIENCE, CONSISTENT FUNCTIONALITY, INTUITIVE INTERFACES, AND AN ATMOSPHERE THAT REINFORCES EXCITEMENT. AT THIS STAGE, FRICTION FEELS PERSONAL, BECAUSE IT INTERFERES DIRECTLY WITH THE REASON GUESTS CHOSE THE VENUE.

1. DIGITAL INTERFACES AT ATTRACTIONS WERE FREQUENTLY UNRELIABLE OR OUTDATED

The kiosk and tablet reliability issues documented at check-in and ordering (see Stages 2 and 3) followed guests into the core experience. Scorekeeping tablets froze, game screens lagged, and attraction kiosks presented unclear prompts. But here, the stakes felt higher—these failures interrupted the reason guests came in the first place.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE P&L

When the core experience stutters, guests don't blame the tablet—they blame the brand. Unreliable gameplay systems directly damage rebooking intent.

2. ATTRACTION CURRENCIES CREATED COGNITIVE LOAD

Tokens, points, cards, minutes, credits, and tiered access levels—often unaligned across activities—forced guests to navigate complex exchange systems. Parents and new guests were especially confused by conversions and expiration rules.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE P&L

Confused guests spend less. When the mental math is too hard, they stop buying—or leave value on unused cards and credits you'll never recover.

FIELD STORY:

THE CURRENCY MAZE

Who wants to do math when you're supposed to be having fun? At an entertainment venue, we documented complete guest confusion over multiple attraction currencies. The venue displayed both "play points" and "e-tickets" on kiosks with zero explanation, while arcade readers showed mysterious "VIP pricing" that appeared everywhere but was never defined.

Guests faced seemingly impossible calculations—determining whether 220 points for \$20 or the undefined "VIP" rate represented better value, without understanding what either currency actually bought. Parents and first-time visitors navigated between point systems without conversion rates or value propositions. This digital interface failure transformed simple transactions into anxiety-inducing puzzles, directly diminishing the entertainment experience guests came for. Cognitive overload replaced fun at the most basic transactional level.

3. RELIABILITY OF THE CORE ATTRACTION VARIED BY TIME OF DAY OR LOAD

High-capacity times often exposed weaknesses in technical performance: slow scoring systems, intermittent Wi-Fi, unstable local networks, and equipment stress. Guests interpreted these failures as a lack of investment in the experience they paid for.








THE CORE EXPERIENCE IS THE EMOTIONAL CENTER OF THE VISIT. WHEN DIGITAL OR OPERATIONAL FRICTION INTERFERES WITH GAMEPLAY, ATTRACTIONS, OR ENVIRONMENTAL IMMERSION, GUESTS INTERPRET THE FAILURE AS A BREACH OF VALUE—SHAPING THEIR FINAL IMPRESSION AND LIKELIHOOD OF RETURN.

IMPACT

Friction at this stage has a disproportionate emotional impact because it interrupts the reason guests are there.

<p>Opportunities for delight are lost</p> <p>Smooth, intuitive, high-functioning experiences create moments guests rave about. When impaired, these moments disappear.</p>	<p>System reliability becomes a proxy for brand competence</p> <p>When screens freeze or scoring resets, guests assume the venue is behind the times or poorly maintained.</p>	<p>Staff workload spikes when core systems fail</p> <p>Staff get pulled away from hospitality to resolve gameplay issues, redistribute equipment, or troubleshoot malfunctioning devices.</p>
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WHERE THIS SHOWED UP

-  **CX** Interrupted experiences, confusion, diminished excitement
-  **UX** Unclear interfaces, inconsistent attraction currencies, poor flow
-  **TECH** Lagging hardware, unreliable Wi-Fi, stressed local networks, outdated equipment

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EXIT

THE EXIT PHASE SHOULD FEEL SMOOTH, INTENTIONAL, AND COMPLETE. GUESTS EXPECT AN EASY PATH TO PAYMENT, CLEAR WRAP-UP STEPS, AND SUBTLE CUES THAT THE VENUE VALUES THEIR TIME. AFTER LEAVING, THEY EXPECT CONFIRMATION MESSAGES, FOLLOW-UP COMMUNICATION, AND OPPORTUNITIES TO STAY CONNECTED. THIS STAGE SHAPES THE FINAL EMOTIONAL IMPRESSION—THE MEMORY THAT DETERMINES WHETHER THE VISIT BECOMES A ONE-OFF EVENT OR THE BEGINNING OF A RELATIONSHIP.

1. PAYMENT AND WRAP-UP PROCESSES WERE FRAGMENTED OR UNCLEAR

Guests often had to navigate separate systems for activities, food, lockers, and retail—sometimes requiring multiple transactions. Payment kiosks and POS lanes varied in their logic and flow, creating uncertainty around whether the visit was truly “done.”

2. NO CONSISTENT PROMPT FOR LOYALTY, RE-ENGAGEMENT, OR FEEDBACK

Most venues ended the relationship at the door—no program enrollment, no feedback request, no reason to return. The loyalty program weaknesses documented in Finding #8 of the Top 10 were most visible here: guests left with emails collected but never activated, emotional afterglow unsustainable, and no path back.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE P&L

Repeat visits cost a fraction of new guest acquisition. No exit engagement means you're paying full acquisition cost every time—even for guests who loved you.





3. POST-VISIT COMMUNICATION WAS RARE OR NONEXISTENT

Where emails existed, they were typically generic receipts rather than personalized follow-ups. Many guests reported receiving no record of their booking or visit—a missed opportunity to re-activate and build relationships.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE P&L

The 48 hours after a visit are your highest-intent window. Silence during that window forfeits rebooking revenue and lets recoverable complaints become public reviews.

FIELD STORY:

THE SILENT TREATMENT

Nothing is worse than getting ghosted by a venue you actually enjoyed. At an entertainment venue in Texas, we found total absence of post-visit digital engagement despite collecting customer data. After providing emails during waiver sign-up, guests received zero follow-up communication—no acknowledgment, thank-you, or reminder of their experience.

Without follow-up, the venue missed critical opportunities: immediate feedback collection when experiences were fresh, personalized promotions based on activities enjoyed, loyalty program enrollment, and social sharing prompts for organic marketing. One researcher called it "a forgettable ending to an otherwise fun day." The digital silence transformed potentially loyal customers into one-time visitors, with no mechanism to re-activate relationships or sustain the emotional afterglow that drives repeat visits.



EXIT AND POST-VISIT ENGAGEMENT CLOSE THE EMOTIONAL LOOP OF THE EXPERIENCE. WHEN GUESTS DEPART WITHOUT CLARITY, CONNECTION, OR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, THE RELATIONSHIP ENDS INSTANTLY—REGARDLESS OF HOW STRONG THE VISIT WAS.



IMPACT

The exit and post-visit phase determines whether the experience ends with momentum—or dissolves the emotional investment guests made throughout the visit.

Revenue opportunities are lost at the point of departure

Without structured prompts for loyalty or re-engagement, guests leave without a clear path to return.

Operational inefficiencies linger into closing workflows

Unclear wrap-up procedures lead to guest bottlenecks, unpaid balances, or staff effort spent reconciling fragmented systems.

Lack of follow-up communication breaks the relationship

Without post-visit emails or incentives, venues lose visibility into guest behavior and forfeit high-value retention opportunities.

WHERE THIS SHOWED UP

CX Unclear exit, missing wrap-up cues, lack of emotional closure

UX No structured prompts for feedback or loyalty enrollment

TECH Disconnected payment systems, absent automated follow-up communication



FINDINGS BY INDUSTRY VERTICAL

The same core problems hit different venues in different ways. A broken kiosk at a cinema creates a 5-minute delay; at a theme park, it backs up hundreds of guests. Legacy POS systems frustrate bowling alley staff; at golf entertainment venues, they kill the premium experience guests paid for.

By breaking down our findings across Theaters & Cinema, Golf Entertainment, Theme Parks, and Bowling/Arcade venues, we show how identical technology failures create wildly different operational impacts—and where each segment has the biggest opportunities to fix what matters most.



THEATERS & CINEMA ENTERTAINMENT

Movie theaters and cinema concepts offering film screenings with varying levels of food and beverage service—from traditional concessions to full-service dining. Includes luxury cinema chains, dine-in theaters, and traditional multiplexes.



GOLF ENTERTAINMENT VENUES

Experiential golf concepts combining technology-enhanced gameplay with food, beverage, and social atmosphere. Includes indoor simulators, tech-enabled mini golf, and driving range entertainment venues designed for groups and social gatherings.



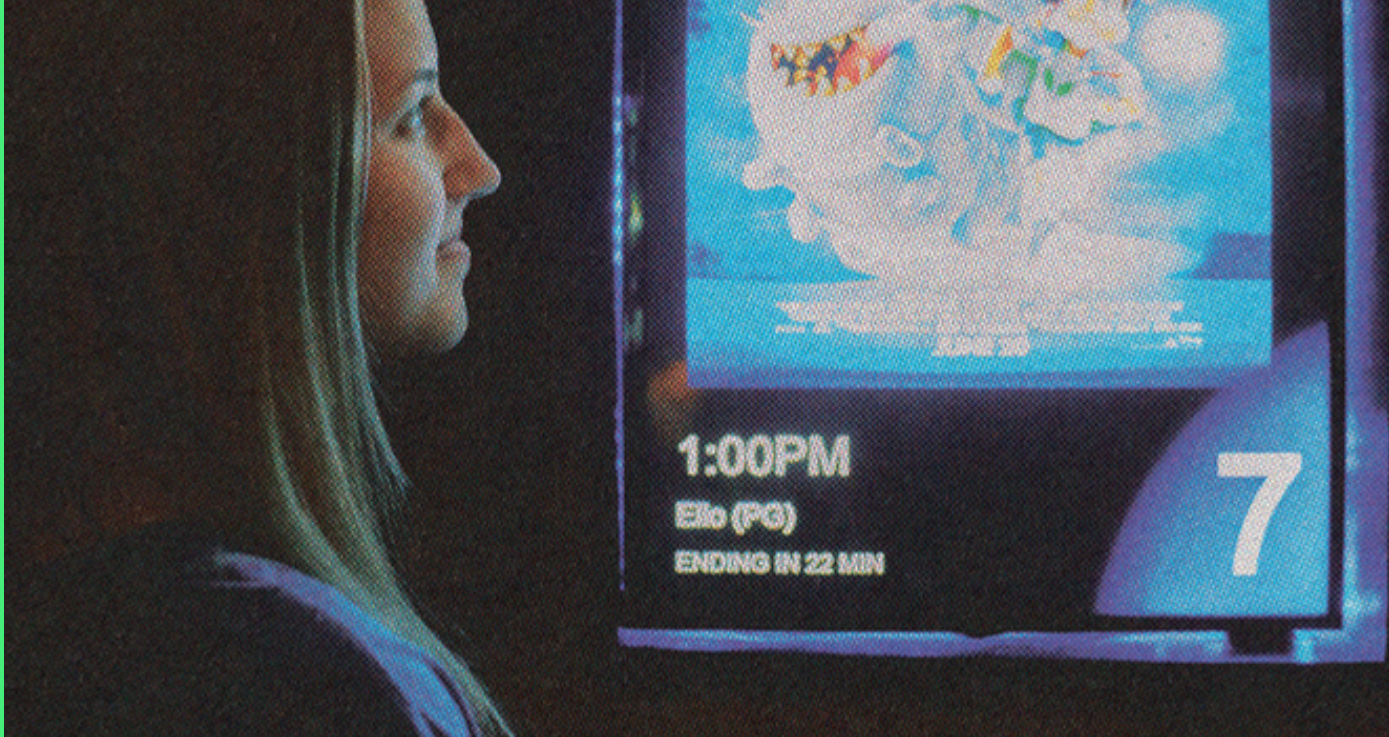
THEME & WATER PARKS

Large-scale outdoor entertainment destinations featuring rides, attractions, and seasonal operations. Characterized by high daily attendance volume, physical attractions requiring real-time capacity management, and significant food/beverage/retail operations.



BOWLING & ARCADE ENTERTAINMENT

Multi-activity entertainment centers anchored by bowling and arcade games, often including additional offerings like laser tag, billiards, and food service. Typically features card-based or token-based redemption systems and hosts group events and parties.



THEATER & CINEMA ENTERTAINMENT

A VERTICAL WITH STRONG FOUNDATIONS IN TICKETING BUT ONGOING FRAGMENTATION IN CONCESSIONS, LOYALTY, AND MOBILE UX.

FINDINGS

Ticketing systems are refined but cluttered.

Essential tasks are obscured by upsells, promos, and loyalty layers that slow decision-making.

Concessions remain the weakest link.

Long lines persist and mobile ordering underperforms because POS and menu logic are inconsistent.

Mobile UX lags behind desktop quality.

Heavy pages, slow load times, and complex checkout flows frustrate guests.

Systems don't speak to each other.

Guests encounter disjointed flows between ticketing, concessions, pickups, and third-party integrations.

IMPACT

1. Strong ticketing sets expectations: weak concessions break them.
2. Slow ordering directly suppresses the most profitable revenue line.
3. Disjointed mobile flows reduce loyalty enrollment and repeat engagement.

BRAND	APP	MOVIE KIOSK	IN-APP BOOKING	IN-APP ORDERING	IN-SEAT ORDERING	LOYALTY PROGRAM
CINEMARK	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
ALAMO DRAFTHOUSE	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
FLIX BREWHOUSE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
STAR CINEMA GRILL	✓		✓		✓	
STUDIO MOVIE GRILL	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
CINÉPOLIS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
LOOK CINEMAS		✓			✓	✓
SCHULMAN THEATERS	✓	✓	✓		✓	
EVO ENTERTAINMENT	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
SANTIKOS ENTERTAINMENT	✓	✓	✓			✓
SCHULMAN'S MBG	✓		✓		✓	✓
GAMESCAPE	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
CINERGY ENTERTAINMENT	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
HOOKY ENTERTAINMENT		✓			✓	

SEVEN RECEIPTS TOO MANY

FIELD STORY

A Texas entertainment venue deployed modern self-service kiosks with integrated payment terminals to streamline ticketing and concessions. The system featured touchscreen interfaces, integrated payment processing, and digital receipt generation—all contemporary self-service hallmarks.

But sophisticated doesn't mean functional. At checkout, the kiosk displayed only a loading screen with no indication that card insertion was required. One researcher noted: "All I saw was a loading screen, so I didn't realize it wanted me to insert my card—which made the whole process take way longer than it needed to."

When payment finally processed, the system generated seven separate receipts for a single transaction. Excessive paper output created confusion about which receipt verified tickets, enabled concession pickup, or served record-keeping. Advanced technology actually slowed transactions and left customers uncertain about essential next steps—the opposite of promised efficiency.

VERTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Cinema has solved the hardest part—ticketing at scale—but legacy concession tech and overloaded digital flows undermine revenue per guest. Operators often mistake "functional" for "optimized."

CINEMA IS CLOSEST TO DIGITAL MATURITY, BUT FRAGMENTATION BETWEEN TICKETING AND CONCESSIONS PREVENTS THE VERTICAL FROM UNLOCKING ITS FULL REVENUE POTENTIAL.

EXPERT INSIGHTS

“GUEST EXPERIENCE HAS BECOME THE PRIMARY DRIVER OF REPEAT VISITS IN FOOD AND ENTERTAINMENT. A CINEMA IS COMPETING WITH TRAVEL, GAMING, AND LIVE EVENTS FOR ATTENTION. THE BRANDS SEEING GROWTH ARE THE ONES TREATING CX AS A REVENUE STRATEGY, NOT JUST A SERVICE INITIATIVE. OPERATORS MUST CONTINUOUSLY EVOLVE THE EXPERIENCE, USING TECHNOLOGY AND INSIGHT TO MEET RISING EXPECTATIONS WITHOUT LOSING THE HUMAN ELEMENT.”

-ALLISON JERNIGAN






ALLISON JERNIGAN

CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER, BINGE NETWORKS

Allison Jernigan is the Founder of Ruby Rock, a consulting firm advising entertainment and hospitality brands on partnerships, business development, and revenue growth. With more than 20 years of experience, she helps operators strengthen ancillary revenue categories and align guest experience with measurable business outcomes. She also serves as Chief Content Officer at BINGE Networks, overseeing global streaming distribution and content strategy. Her work focuses on driving sustainable growth in competitive, experience-driven markets.

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GOLF ENTERTAINMENT

HIGH-CEILING EXPERIENCES WEAKENED BY QUEUE AMBIGUITY, FRAGILE PROPRIETARY SYSTEMS, AND UNEVEN F&B PERFORMANCE.

FINDINGS

Beautiful design, complex booking.

Group pricing, bay selection, and reservation flows overwhelm guests.

Queue logic is unreliable.

Walk-ups, reservations, and groups compete without transparent prioritization.

Ordering quality varies widely.

Some venues offer seamless in-bay ordering; others rely on stalled QR or slow POS flows.

Gameplay systems drop under load.

Network lag, scoring resets, and device calibration issues break immersion.

IMPACT

1. Momentum defines guest enjoyment in this vertical; friction breaks the spell.
2. Queue confusion causes perceived unfairness and early attrition.
3. Gameplay failures damage brand perception more than any other friction point.



THE OVERWHELMING GATEWAY

FIELD STORY

A leading golf entertainment venue's website promised seamless reservations but delivered the opposite. The online booking system was cluttered and overstimulating—loud visuals, dense content, intense colors, and zero centralized navigation created immediate friction.

Our CX assessment group faced confusion about additional fees, poorly organized seasonal offers, and promotional tabs leading nowhere. Complex booking flows with hidden pricing structures represented millions in lost revenue when guests abandoned reservations or chose simpler competitors instead.

The disconnect between high-energy entertainment promises and frustrating digital gateways demonstrates how poor user experience undermines even compelling physical experiences before guests even arrive.

VERTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Golf venues have the highest emotional stakes and the lowest tolerance for technical instability. Every disruption feels like a downgrade from “premium” to “chaotic.”

BRAND	APP	KIOSK	IN-APP BOOKING	WEBSITE BOOKING	IN-APP ORDERING	MOBILE SCORING	DIGITAL SCORING	LOYALTY PROGRAM
TOPGOLF	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
POPSTROKE	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
PUTTSHACK		✓		✓			✓	✓
PUTTERY				✓			✓	
HOLEY MOLEY				✓				

Note: This does not include all brands with mini-golf, only brands that have golf as the core entertainment.



GOLF ENTERTAINMENT THRIVES ON SOPHISTICATION; EVEN MINOR DIGITAL OR OPERATIONAL FAILURES MAKE THE EXPERIENCE FEEL LESS PREMIUM AND REDUCE GUEST SPEND.



THEME & WATER PARKS

HIGH-SCALE OPERATIONS STRAINED BY DIGITAL INCONSISTENCY AND WEAK REAL-TIME COMMUNICATION.

FINDINGS

Performance varies massively.

Some parks show modern apps; others rely on slow, outdated sites with unclear ticket bundles.

Queue management is the core pain point.

Guests cannot rely on wait times, closure updates, or line logic.

Mobile reliability collapses under real-world conditions.

Heavy pages and poor cellular performance stall core tasks.

Operational systems lag behind guest-facing promises.

Gates, lockers, POS devices, and internal networks often run on legacy technology.

IMPACT

1. Emotional stakes are high; unclear data creates frustration and distrust.
2. Mobile performance determines park navigation and spend behavior.
3. Queue dissatisfaction is the #1 driver of negative reviews.

BRAND	APP	KIOSK	IN-APP BOOKING	IN-APP ORDERING	VIRTUAL QUEUE	DIGITAL MAPS	PHOTO PICKUP	WAIT TIMES	LOYALTY PROGRAM
AQUATICA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
HAWAIIAN FALLS		✓							✓
KALAHARI		✓							✓
SCHLITTERBAHN		✓						✓	✓
SEAWORLD	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
SIX FLAGS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓



WHEN APPS FAIL AT PEAK DEMAND

FIELD STORY

A major theme park promoted their mobile app as the gateway to faster access through premium passes and real-time wait times. But field research revealed critical performance failures during peak usage.

The app's most valuable features—queue management and premium pass access—became unreliable precisely when cellular networks were strained by high attendance. One researcher noted constant crashes: "It constantly kicked me out... the fact it was hosted on an external website felt very off."

Guests who paid for digital convenience found themselves carrying printed backup tickets "just in case," defeating the technology's primary value proposition. This disconnect between digital promises and real-world reliability directly impacts guest satisfaction and undermines premium service revenue.

VERTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Theme parks frequently modernize the app experience without modernizing the operational backbone—widening the expectation gap.

THEME AND WATER PARKS EXCEL AT SPECTACLE BUT UNDERPERFORM AT REAL-TIME CLARITY; WITHOUT INTEGRATED SYSTEMS, GUESTS EXPERIENCE FRUSTRATION INSTEAD OF IMMERSION.

BOWLING & ARCADE ENTERTAINMENT

THE VERTICAL WITH THE LARGEST MODERNIZATION GAP AND THE MOST PRONOUNCED SYSTEM FRAGMENTATION.

FINDINGS

Digital layers are outdated.

Websites, mobile interfaces, and booking flows fall significantly behind other verticals.

Check-in is heavily manual.

Guests bounce between desk, kiosk, and arcade card stations just to begin the visit.

Arcade systems operate as a silo.

Different cards, points, readers, and currencies create confusion and increase staff burden.

Hardware reliability is inconsistent.

Broken readers, frozen scoring tablets, and unstable networks strain operations.

IMPACT

1. Families expect “effortless fun”; when the experience feels hard, sentiment drops immediately.
2. Staff become troubleshooters instead of hosts.
3. Digital friction suppresses upgrades, add-ons, and party bookings.

THE SYSTEM SHUFFLE

FIELD STORY

A leading bowling and arcade venue promised streamlined digital experiences but delivered a maze of disconnected systems. During peak hours, the arcade card kiosk failed to dispense new cards, printing vouchers that forced guests to walk to the bowling desk for manual redemption. Meanwhile, broken QR ordering codes at bowling lanes were covered with black tape, requiring guests to flag down servers while digital menus remained purely informational.

“The most frustrating part was the tablet. It felt like there were so many ways to get to the same outcome which just made things harder to navigate,” one researcher noted.

What should have been a 30-second card purchase became a multi-step journey across departments, creating exactly the manual friction modern entertainment venues struggle to eliminate.

BOWLING & ARCADE VENUES ARE MOST HURT BY FRAGMENTATION AND MOST PRIMED FOR TRANSFORMATION; MODERNIZATION DELIVERS IMMEDIATE OPERATIONAL AND FINANCIAL ROI.



BRAND	APP	IN-APP BOOKING	ONLINE BOOKING	ONLINE GAME CARD	BOWLING KIOSK	ARCADE KIOSK	DIGITAL SCORING	IN-APP GAME CARDS	LOYALTY PROGRAM
810 ENTERTAINMENT		✓	✓				✓		✓
AMF			✓			✓	✓		✓
ANDRETTI INDOOR KARTING & GAMES			✓			✓	✓		✓
BOWLERO			✓			✓	✓		✓
EVO ENTERTAINMENT	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓
GAMESCAPE	✓		✓			✓	✓		✓
HOOKEY ENTERTAINMENT						✓	✓		
IT'Z USA						✓	✓		✓
KALAHARI			✓			✓	✓		✓
LUCKY STRIKE ENTERTAINMENT						✓	✓		✓
MALIBU JACK	✓			✓		✓	✓		✓
PINSTACK	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
PINBALLZ	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
PUNCH BOWL SOCIAL						✓	✓		
ROUND1	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓
SANTIKOS ENTERTAINMENT	✓					✓	✓		✓
SCHULMAN THEATERS	✓				✓	✓	✓		
SCHULMAN'S MBG	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓
SMASHPARK	✓						✓		✓

VERTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Bowling/arcade venues feel the greatest pain from legacy systems—and therefore stand to gain the most from modernization.

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a dark long-sleeved top and dark pants, is standing in a dimly lit, modern interior space. She is looking down at a kiosk or counter in front of her. The background features a large, dark, curved structure, possibly a ceiling or wall, and several illuminated signs, including one with a star shape and others with text like "EINWEG" and "ODD TR". The overall atmosphere is dark and futuristic.

EXPERT INSIGHTS

“WE OFTEN TALK ABOUT THE GUEST EXPERIENCE, BUT WE OVERLOOK THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE OF THE TECH WE BUY. IF OUR DIGITAL SYSTEMS ARE FRAGMENTED, OUR FRONTLINE STAFF BECOMES ‘HUMAN PATCHES’ FOR DIGITAL FAILURES. AS AN OPERATOR, I KNOW THAT SUCCESS COMES FROM CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE EMPLOYEES WANT TO STAY – BUT THEY WON’T IF THEY ARE CONSTANTLY FIGHTING BROKEN KIOSKS OR CLUNKY INTEGRATIONS. FROGSLAYER’S FIELD STUDY PROVES THAT TRUE HOSPITALITY CAN’T HAPPEN IF STAFF IS STUCK IN SUPPORT MODE.”

-STEVE JACKSON



STEVE JACKSON

VP OPERATIONS, SMASH PARK ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

Steve is a 30+ year operations veteran in the LBE and restaurant industry. He's been an integral leader of innovation implementation for brands such as CEC, Main Event Entertainment, and Dave & Busters, among others. In addition to owning his own concept he currently consults for restaurant and entertainment brands, with a focus on delivering hospitality and operational excellence.

 [CONNECT WITH STEVE](#)






OPPORTUNITIES

DIAGNOSIS WITHOUT DIRECTION ISN'T USEFUL. THIS SECTION TRANSLATES THE FINDINGS INTO ACTION—STARTING WITH THE HIGHEST-LEVERAGE FIXES.

The patterns in this report are clear: entertainment venues are not suffering from a lack of ideas, effort, or demand. They are held back by fragmented systems that were never designed for the complexity of the modern guest journey. The good news is that the same issues that create friction also reveal where the highest-yield opportunities lie. This section outlines the most actionable paths forward for operators ready to modernize their experience foundations—without turning the next decade into a never-ending IT project.




What these opportunities share is that none of them belong cleanly to a single function. They sit at the intersection of technology, operations, marketing, and frontline execution — an intersection most organizations are not formally designed to own.



FROM FRAGMENTED JOURNEYS TO CONNECTED EXPERIENCE SYSTEMS





BUILD SYSTEMS THAT ACTUALLY CONNECT

Stop treating every tool as its own project. Right now, most venues manage websites, apps, kiosks, POS, and loyalty like separate kingdoms. But guests experience all of this as one journey. They don't care about your org chart.

-  Start with the journey, not the system diagram. Map what should happen at each stage in plain English. Then figure out which systems need to talk.
-  Kill the overlaps. When three tools do the same job badly, pick one that actually integrates with everything else.
-  Make integration non-negotiable. "Does this connect?" becomes as important as "What can it do?"





FIX ORDERING AND PAYMENT ONCE AND FOR ALL

Ordering is where experience meets revenue, and too often, both lose. Multiple currencies, broken QR codes, confusing kiosks—all creating friction exactly when guests are trying to spend money.

-  One payment method, one mental model. Stop asking guests to think in points, credits, tickets, and dollars simultaneously.
-  Design menus for speed, not beauty. Group things logically. Surface high-margin items. Remove unnecessary steps.
-  Match digital and physical pricing. When they differ, guests assume you're either disorganized or dishonest.
-  Track the money metrics. Where do carts get abandoned? How often do staff override? These aren't UX issues—they're revenue leaks.

TURN DATA FROM EXHAUST INTO FUEL





Most venues collect mountains of data that nobody uses. Booking records here, POS transactions there, loyalty sign-ups somewhere else—all disconnected, all wasted.

-  Create one ID that follows guests from browsing to booking to departure. Even this basic connection unlocks value.
-  Pick five metrics that matter. Time to check-in, web-to-booking conversion, F&B per guest, repeat rates, post-visit response. Stop drowning in dashboards.
-  Segment the obvious. Families aren't adult groups. Weekday regulars aren't weekend warriors. Basic targeting beats spray-and-pray every time.
-  Fix what data tells you. High abandonment? Simplify that step. Strong conversion? Double down there.



MAKE STAFF HEROES, NOT HACKERS

The most striking pattern in our research was watching staff constantly work around their own tools. When systems fail, frontline employees absorb the friction. They become human patches for digital problems.

-  Map what staff actually do, not what the manual says. Find where they fight systems to help guests.
-  Choose boring stability over exciting features. Simple tools that work beat complex systems that don't.
-  Give staff eyes on the operation. Queue lengths, order backlogs, system status—visibility enables proactive service.
-  Build for your turnover reality. Complex tools in high-churn environments guarantee chaos. New staff should be competent in days, not weeks.

STOP ABANDONING GUESTS AT EXIT

At most venues, the relationship ends when payment clears. No follow-up. No feedback. No attempt to turn visits into habits. It's like spending thousands on a first date then ghosting.



Make exits intentional. Clear paths, simple farewells, maybe ask "How was everything?" like you mean it.



Follow up fast. Within 48 hours—thank them, ask for feedback, offer something relevant to their actual visit.



Mine feedback for fixes. Post-visit responses reveal friction you can't see from inside.



Reward real behaviors. Frequent visits, group bookings, off-peak arrivals—not just email sign-ups.

THE BIG PICTURE

THESE OPPORTUNITIES WORK BECAUSE THEY'RE BASED ON WHAT'S ALREADY SUCCEEDING AT THE BEST VENUES WE STUDIED. THEY'RE NOT THEORETICAL—THEY'RE PROVEN. THE TOOLS EXIST. THE PATTERNS ARE CLEAR. THE ONLY QUESTION IS WHERE YOU'LL START AND HOW FAST YOU'LL MOVE.

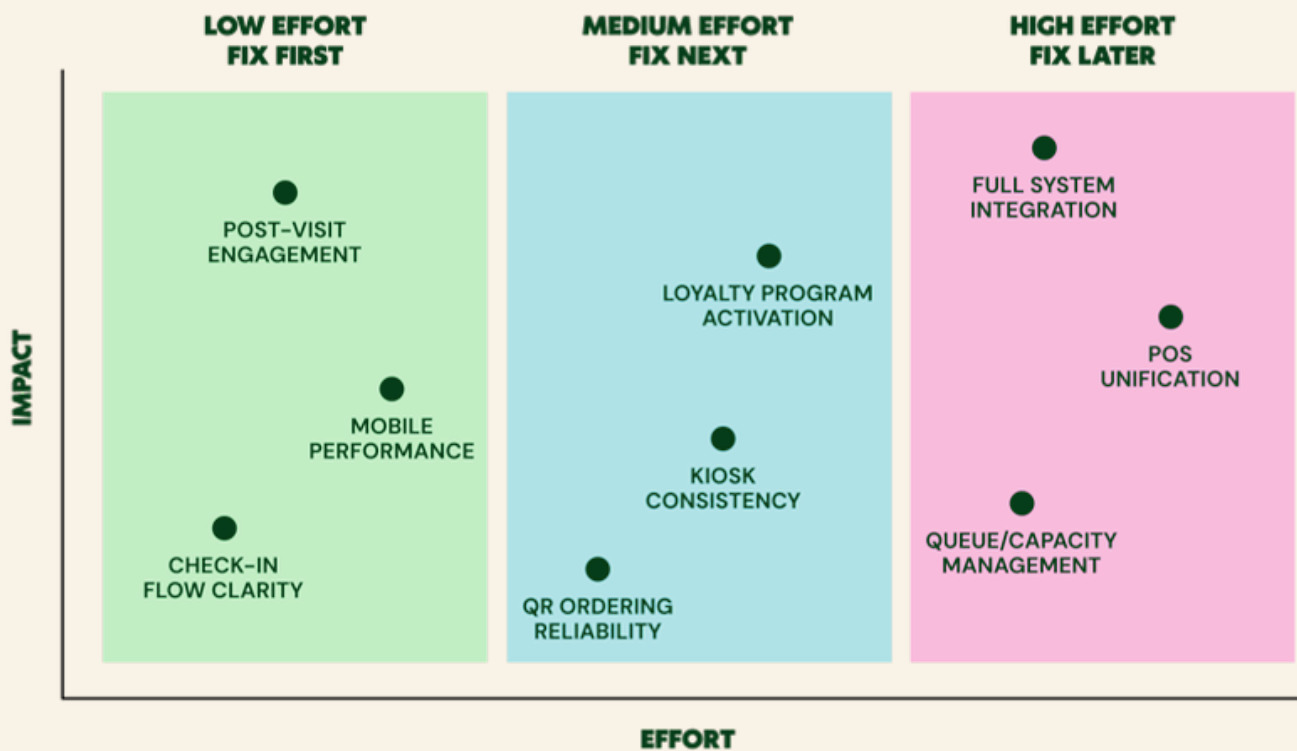




WHERE TO START

A PRIORITIZATION FRAMEWORK

Not every problem needs to be solved at once. Based on our research and 20+ years of experience, here's how we'd sequence the work—balancing impact against effort.



FIX FIRST (HIGH IMPACT, OFTEN LOWER EFFORT)

These create immediate guest friction and have relatively clear solutions.

ISSUE	WHY FIRST
MOBILE PERFORMANCE	Directly suppresses conversion; often fixable with optimization, not rebuilds
CHECK-IN FLOW CLARITY	Highest-friction stage; signage and process changes can help before tech fixes
POST-VISIT ENGAGEMENT	Low-effort automation unlocks repeat revenue with minimal integration work

FIX NEXT (MODERATE IMPACT, MODERATE EFFORT)

These require more coordination but deliver significant returns.

ISSUE	WHY NEXT
QR ORDERING RELIABILITY	Requires vendor coordination or replacement, but directly impacts F&B revenue
KIOSK CONSISTENCY	Needs UX and technical attention, but reduces staff burden when fixed
LOYALTY PROGRAM ACTIVATION	Requires cross-functional alignment, but compounds over time

FIX LATER (IMPORTANT, BUT COMPLEX)

These require more coordination but deliver significant returns.

ISSUE	WHY LATER
POS UNIFICATION	High-value but high-effort; often requires phased migration
QUEUE/CAPACITY MANAGEMENT	Needs real-time infrastructure most venues don't yet have
FULL SYSTEM INTEGRATION	The ultimate goal—but dependent on fixing upstream issues first

CONCLUSION

Across more than fifty venues and three distinct audit lenses, one truth comes to focus: the guest experience is only as strong as the systems beneath it. Venues are not failing because of a lack of effort or ambition, but because their operational and digital foundations have not kept up. Disconnected touchpoints, brittle integrations, and improvised workflows now sit directly between guests and the memories they hope to create.

Fragmented check-in flows, unreliable kiosks, confusing digital navigation, and broken mobile experiences appear repeatedly across venues and verticals. These are not isolated "IT problems"—they are systemic failures in how technology, operations, and design are assembled around the guest journey. When booking doesn't align with check-in, ordering systems don't align with staff workflows, and exit flows lack any structured follow-up, friction compounds. What begins as confusion evolves into longer lines, lower spend, staff burnout, and guests who quietly decide not to return.

While it feels grim, this clarifies the path forward: **Operators who treat the guest journey as an integrated system will win the market.**

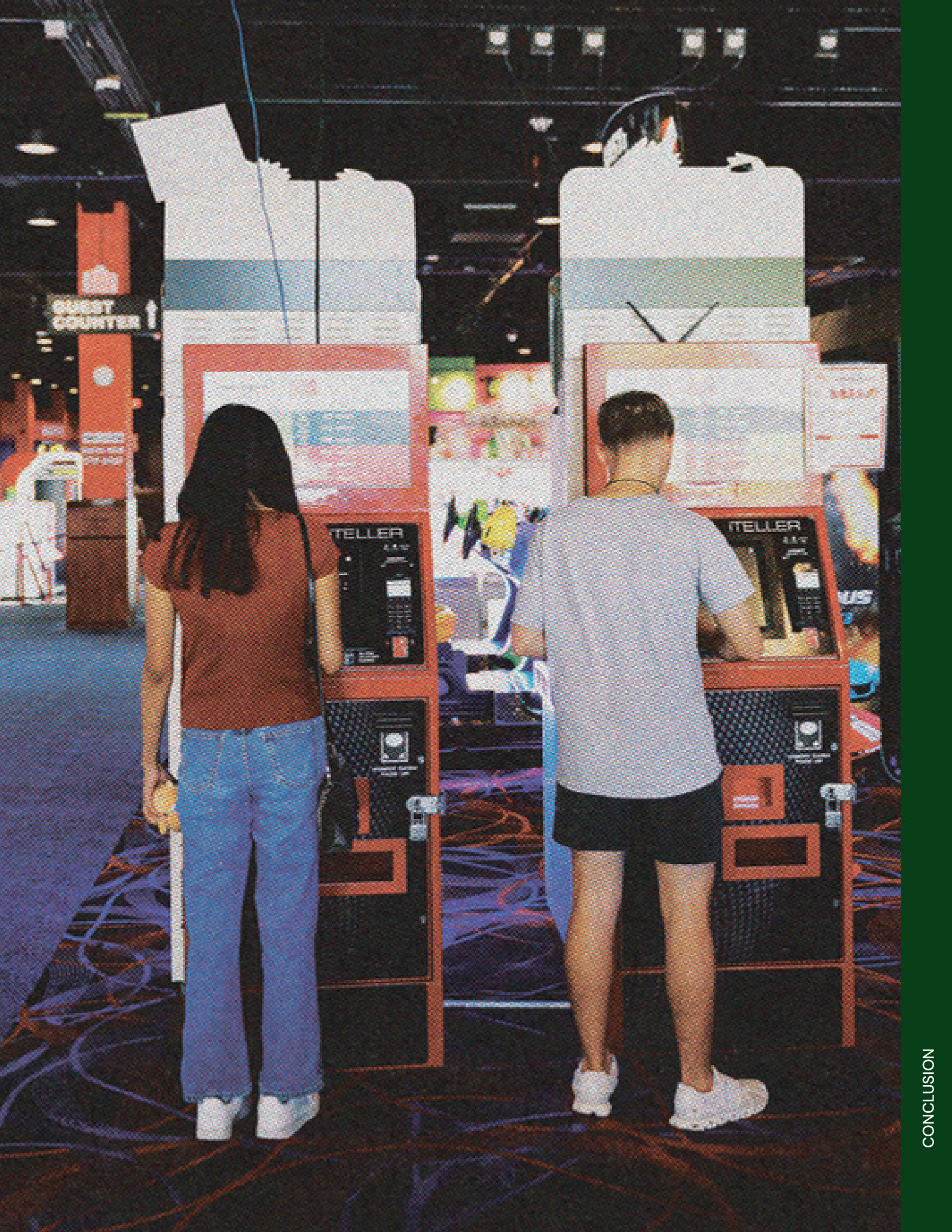
The strongest venues streamline their systems: a single check-in path, unified pricing across channels, staff empowered by reliable tools, and intentional exit flows that set up the next visit. In these environments, technology fades and guests describe visits as "easy," "fun," "worth it."

The opportunity extends beyond solving today's pain points. The same foundations that reduce friction enable next-generation experiences—dynamic pricing that feels fair, personal loyalty programs, real-time capacity tools that turn waiting into anticipation.

As the industry continues to grow and saturate, there will be winners and losers. As it is, the status quo is costing brands guest satisfaction, re-engagement, and revenue. Brands that wish to lead the industry need to act now. Whether operators pursue the work ahead with internal teams, existing vendors, or new partners, the mandate is the same: treat the guest journey as the center of gravity and bring every system into alignment with it.

Experience is the product, and experience is built on systems. The venues that confront fragmentation, modernize foundations, and design with the full journey in mind will not just remove friction—they will create the confident, memorable visits that guests talk about, return to, and recommend.

Those experiences will define the next decade of food, fun, and entertainment.





FINAL THOUGHTS

A NOTE FROM ROSS MOREL, CEO AT FROGSLAYER

In early 2025, I made a decision that would change everything: Frogslayer would focus entirely on food & entertainment.

For two decades, we worked across various industries—oil & gas, manufacturing, transportation & logistics, financial services, healthcare, legal, and many more. But when we worked with guest-driven brands, we kept seeing the same patterns: fragmented guest journeys, siloed data, friction between digital promises and physical reality, and lots of pilots that never turned into real outcomes.

No one was focused solely on helping guest-driven brands fix these systemic problems.

So, I asked my team: Can we close that gap?

That's when our brand assessment initiative was born.

We formed our internal team of CX, UX, and technical experts to evaluate the guest journey from end-to-end. We deployed our teams into the top food & entertainment brands across Texas. Not from a boardroom—from the frontlines, as real guests, experiencing every broken kiosk and confusing mobile flow.

As the assessment data rolled in, we realized we had something unprecedented: 60+ page deep dives into real guest experiences, complete with field observations, photos and videos from the frontline, and in-depth analyses of brand websites and apps.

That's when we brought in Dr. Bradley Wesner from Texas A&M University's Mays Business School to synthesize these 50+ detailed assessments into actionable insights—not just for individual venues, but for the industry as a whole.

What makes this research different is its authenticity. This data is real, from the frontlines, evaluated through a guest-first lens.

Food & entertainment leaders don't need another consultant with a slide deck. They need a fast-moving partner who understands that "tech-enabled hospitality" starts by getting on the floor of their stores and can execute across layers of their business: **guest experience, in-store operations, data, and infrastructure.**


This is a competitive space where there will be winners and losers. The winning brands will be the ones that act on these insights and will define the next decade of food and entertainment.

The question isn't whether change is coming. The question is whether you'll be driving that change or reacting to it.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ross Morel".

ROSS MOREL
CEO AT FROGSLAYER

 [CONNECT WITH ROSS](#)

ABOUT FROGSLAYER

YOUR GO-TO TECH PARTNER FOR FOOD & FUN



For over twenty years, Frogslayer has turned complex technology challenges into remarkable growth stories. Today, we are the execution partner for food, fun, and experience-driven brands—helping guest-driven operators connect their systems, data, and experiences so guests stay engaged, operations run smarter, and every location performs better.

We don't just build software. We architect outcomes. And we do it where others don't: in the messy, high-stakes moments when there's no room for error and no time for excuses.

“IF IT’S YOUR JOB TO EAT A FROG, IT’S BEST TO DO IT IN THE MORNING.
AND IF IT’S YOUR JOB TO EAT TWO FROGS, IT’S BEST TO EAT THE BIGGEST ONE FIRST.”
MARK TWAIN



WE DO THE HARD THINGS FIRST

History has proven we're wired for the tough stuff. Like wrangling mountains of fragmented data into unified systems and rescuing stalled implementations when failure isn't an option. The problems no one wants to touch—we run toward them. That's literally how we got our name. Our clients don't see us as a vendor—they consider us an extension of their own team. They rely on us to move fast, deliver with precision, and anticipate what's next. They know we care just as much about their success as they do. It's why our projects succeed at 3x the industry average while nearly 70% of digital initiatives fail elsewhere.

OUR APPROACH: CONNECTED SYSTEMS, CONNECTED EXPERIENCES

The four modernization challenges identified in this research represent our core service lines:

Connected Guest Experiences

Design, develop, and integrate the digital touchpoints that bring your brand to life across web, mobile, kiosk, games, redemption, and in-store systems. We eliminate the friction points documented throughout this report.

Unified Operations & Systems

Streamline every layer of your business by connecting front-of-house and back-of-house systems, from POS and ordering to loyalty and marketing automation. No more system silos.

Data Intelligence & Personalization

Unify and activate your data to deliver personalized guest experiences, improve decision-making, and optimize performance across locations. Turn your data into a competitive advantage.

Modernization & Long-Term Enablement







Modernize core systems, eliminate technical debt, and create scalable infrastructure that enables faster innovation and sustained growth.



RELATIONSHIPS
MATTER.

RESULTS COUNT.



3X  HIGHER PROJECT SUCCESS RATE THAN INDUSTRY AVERAGE	\$24M  IN NEW REVENUE FOR MAJOR EATERENTAINMENT BRAND IN JUST 2 MONTHS	\$1B+  IN MEASURABLE ROI DELIVERED SINCE 2011
1B  PEOPLE WORLDWIDE INTERACT WITH OUR SOFTWARE	08  PATENTS SECURED FOR OUR CLIENTS	7X  "BEST PLACE TO WORK" IN TEXAS & U.S. HONOREE

WE KNOW OUR WAY AROUND FOOD & FUN

We don't just code from behind our desks. We embed deeply in your operations—walking your stores, shadowing your teams, understanding the pressure of Friday nights and the complexity of multi-location operations. We know you need to innovate without disrupting the guest experience, and we make sure the fun never stops.

From walking venues as mystery guests to debugging POS systems during peak hours, we go where the action is. That's how we identified the patterns in this research, and it's how we'll help you fix them.

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER. RESULTS COUNT.

When you work with Frogslayer, you're not hiring a vendor—you're gaining a team that owns the outcome. No excuses. No shortcuts. No handoffs. We do business the Texas way: straight talk, firm handshakes, no nonsense.

You won't only see us on Zoom, and our work isn't outsourced overseas. We still believe in meeting face-to-face and shaking your hand. When we give you our word, we mean it.

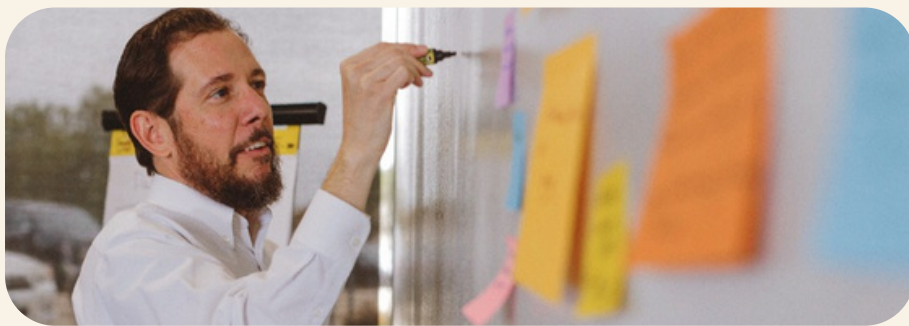
The venues that confront fragmentation now—that treat the guest journey as an integrated system and bring every touchpoint into alignment—will create the confident, memorable visits that guests talk about, return to, and recommend.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report came together because a lot of brilliant individuals leaned in and did the work. It represents hundreds of hours of research, site visits, analysis, debate, writing, and careful refinement.

From the earliest spark of an idea to create a report to the final layout, this was a true team effort. The goal was to create something thoughtful and original, grounded in firsthand observation and practical insight. There is great pride in what this team built together and sincere gratitude for the care each contributor brought to the work.

Thank you to every contributor who made this possible.



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UNDEFEATED
EXECUTION.
UNMATCHED
EXPERIENCE.



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