

Are Robots Slowly Replacing Humans as Restaurant Waiters?

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To date, tens-of-thousands of robot “waiters” have been deployed in restaurants worldwide. Some are waist-high, some are taller. Some have faces, some do not. Whatever their appearance, these restaurant robots can greet guests, lead guests to their dining tables, deliver drinks, and even buss tables. Generally, restaurant patrons have been accepting of robots working in restaurants because of the robots’ ability to provide a more hygienic and “contactless” service than humans can. But even with these capabilities, uncertainty and disagreement exists within the restaurant industry as to whether these “robot waiters” will be the new normal in coming years.

Proponents say that the use of robot waiters has a positive impact on the restaurant industry by making service more efficient and alleviating labor-shortage issues. Further, because the robot waiters are the ones taking trips back and forth from the kitchen, human waiters will have more time to “mingle” with patrons—which, theoretically at least, should increase tips. However, this is a point of contention with those opposed to robot waiters.

Opponents to the use of robot waiters say that the drawbacks outweigh the benefits. First, many restaurants have steps, outdoor areas, and other physical challenges that robots have trouble maneuvering. Second, and more alarming, some restaurants have experienced their robots breaking down, malfunctioning, and even running into patrons. In these instances, legal liability becomes a primary concern.

In the event of an injury caused by a robot waiter, how will restaurants deal with the resulting liability? Are the restaurants that deploy robot waiters vicariously liable for the robots’ actions, as is the case with most employees? What about the companies that manufacture the robot waiters? Or the programmers and engineers that designed the robots’ technology? These unanswered questions raise potential for products liability or manufacturing defects suits.

There is no question that robot waiters—and technology in general—can have positive effects on the restaurant and food service industries. However, one should also consider the potential risks, legal and otherwise, of becoming an “early adopter” of new technology in order to mitigate future business and reputational damage. If thoughtfully planned and implemented, the use of robot waiters can surely provide countless benefits to restaurants across the world.

For a more in-depth discussion of the general benefits and drawbacks of robot waiters, click [here](#).