

Spring 2026

State of Business Dining Report

Presented by



“In all of business, and in all of life, relationships are the only thing that matters. And there is no more powerful way to facilitate those relationships than over a meal.”

— Keith Ferrazzi, “Never Eat Alone: And Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time”



A Message from Dinova's President

The restaurant meal isn't a luxury for businesses; it's a strategic investment. It's where relationships are built and decisions get made.

That is what makes business dining such a resilient segment.

But resilient doesn't mean immune. In 2026, we've arrived at a new normal where economic uncertainty is the backdrop. That uncertainty doesn't hit all industries, companies, or markets the same way.

This moment is both complex and full of opportunity. Consumer sentiment remains fragmented by inflation and caution, while business dining has established itself as a \$250 billion engine.

Just as airlines and hotels have shifted their strategies to prioritize the professional traveler, restaurants that understand this market will be better equipped to secure their margins.

This report unpacks the latest trends so you can capture your share of this high-value segment.

Alison

Alison Quinn
President, Dinova



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This report covers 2023-2026, using 2023 as the baseline year. Dinova's proprietary business dining data includes 27 major metropolitan markets, 500+ companies across nine industry sectors, and is based on transactions from millions of corporate cardholders. Restaurant brand analysis aligns with Technomic's top 300 restaurant brands for comprehensive market coverage.

Dinova would like to acknowledge [Technomic](#) for their contributions to the consumer research and data informing this report.



The \$250B Opportunity in a Two-Track Economy

The U.S. dining market reached a record \$1.07 trillion in 2025, but that growth isn't evenly distributed. We are seeing a two-track reality: while many households are tightening their belts and skipping the extras, the business segment remains resilient.

Updated 2026 methodology reveals a market larger and more resilient than previously understood: a staggering \$250 billion per year, **or nearly 23% of U.S. food-away-from-home spend.**

Split evenly across the estimated 1 million restaurant units in the U.S.¹, **that's over \$250,000 in potential annual sales per rooftop.**

[!\[\]\(e2376d476d06eb31946dc01a69a4403a_img.jpg\) Learn more about our methodology here.](#)

¹<https://restaurant.org/research-and-media/research/industry-statistics/state-statistics>



2025 Performance in Review



The economic story of 2025 was defined by unpredictability. While the headlines pointed to record-breaking top-line restaurant sales, a deeper look reveals a widening gap between general consumer fatigue and the steadfast reliability of the business occasion.

- Business dining spend remained stable throughout last year, keeping pace with inflation.
- While the broader consumer market saw a contraction in visits, business dining traffic held.
- In 2026, both markets are mostly stable.

Unpredictable disruptions mean operators need to look beyond broad trends and understand what's driving demand locally.

2024 vs. 2025 Performance by Segment

Business Dining

Total Spend: 🟢 3.8%

Traffic: 🟡 0.3%

All Consumer Dining

Total Spend: 🟢 2.8%

Traffic: 🟡 -0.8%

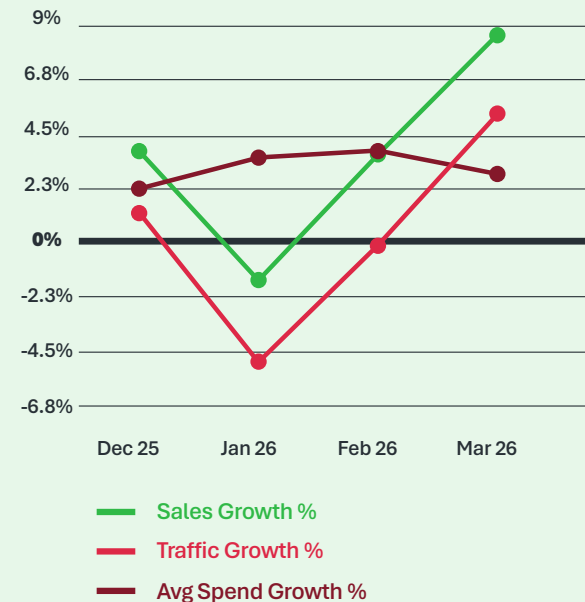
2026 Trajectory

In January 2026, sales temporarily flatlined amid widespread travel disruptions and post-holiday budget resets. However, this was a delay in demand rather than a loss; even as traffic dipped, the quality signal remained high, with average spend per visit continuing to climb.

February saw a robust 3.7% year-over-year sales bounce-back as traffic stabilized at 2025 levels. March told an even stronger story: sales grew 8.5% and traffic surged 5.3% year-over-year, reflecting genuine demand growth (not just rising prices). Meanwhile, Technomic's consumer projections show sales growth holding in the 4-5% range through May, with traffic expected to remain essentially flat.

Bottom line? The business segment has proven its ability to recover quickly from shocks, remaining a reliable growth engine in 2026.

Business Dining YoY Growth



What's Boosting Business Dining?

Return to Office

Attendance reached a post-2020 high.

In-Person Events

Over half of 2026 gatherings are expected to be face-to-face.

Travel Momentum

Business travel spend is forecast to hit a record high this year.

Your Restaurant is the New Cafeteria

As office attendance hit a post-2020 high¹, a shift occurred: companies began trading high-overhead cafeterias for group restaurant orders. With the “Commuter Tax”—the rising cost of gas and inflation—weighing on employees, restaurants have become an essential tool for corporate culture. Companies are increasingly sweetening the pot with free meals and subsidized lunch programs.

This transition means volume that once never left the building is now looking for a home in local dining rooms.

“Micro-markets are booming right now because a lot of places are pulling labor out of their cafeterias... this [shift] over the last two or three years has been one of the fastest-growing segments within our broader food service industry.”

— David Henkes, Senior Principal at Technomic

What Restaurants Should Know About RTO

76% of employees prefer packaged restaurant meals over cafeterias.²

Tuesday–Thursday are the busiest in-office days, driving the most consistent volume.¹

5 Miles is the critical radius; workers within this distance are the most frequent repeat guests.





The Corporate Campus as a Launch Pad: How Microsoft Brings Local Restaurants Inside

Microsoft, a Dinova corporate partner, reimagined the workplace cafeteria when it opened a state-of-the-art food hall on its Redmond, Washington campus. Among the premium food stations at One Esterra is Eat Local, a rotating showcase where local restaurants take up residence inside the facility.

The Eat Local partnership is a strategic match between a corporation looking to deliver diverse culinary experiences and restaurants looking for volume, visibility, and a loyal customer base. As more companies trade legacy cafeteria models for flexible, restaurant-forward dining programs, innovative opportunities like this will multiply.

Source: FoodService Director



IN-PERSON EVENTS

Catering to the Conference Renaissance

50%+
of 2026 business
gatherings are expected
to be in-person.¹

84%
of business travelers
say face-to-face meetings
are more effective.²

\$1.69 trillion
Forecast global
business travel spend
in 2026.³

Large conferences are back. Experience is the new ROI. After years of Zoom fatigue, event planners are bringing people back together—with higher expectations and a renewed conviction that nothing replaces the energy of a room full of people. The Global Business Travel Association forecasts global business travel spend to reach a record high. More positive news for restaurants: 86% of travelers plan to travel more as a group this year², and team dinners and client events follow.

Food and Drink as Social Glue

Event planners are focused on architecting great experiences, meaning food has moved from a line item to a centerpiece. As 40% of attendees say they want more dedicated networking and socialization time¹, marathon sessions and packed agendas are giving way to shorter programming with longer breaks. When food becomes central to the experience, not just conference fuel, planners need trusted restaurant partners.

¹<https://www.amexglobalbusinesstravel.com/meetings-events/me-forecast/>

²<https://skift.com/insights/the-state-of-corporate-travel-and-expense-2026/>

³<https://www.businesstravelnewseurope.com/Management/The-2026-Outlook>



An Opening for Secondary Markets

Facing cost pressure, meeting planners are rethinking where they host events. That shift is creating a windfall for cities outside the traditional conference circuit. **Some 90% of planners have considered moving meetings to secondary markets to reduce costs**¹. In fact, secondary-market growth in meetings and events has exceeded that of the top 25 markets, with cities like Nashville, Louisville, Kansas City, and Birmingham emerging as popular destinations.

Dinova's proprietary business dining data saw business dining spend in Nashville grow 6.6% year-over-year in 2025, reflecting the influx of corporate visitors the city is attracting. The Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex, meanwhile, generated a record \$463.5 million² in total economic impact in 2025. Corporate events dominate the meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions market, driving 63% of growth.³

¹<https://www.hoteldive.com/news/2025-meetings-industry-trends-report/739657/>

²<https://www.cbs42.com/news/local/bjcc-reports-record-463-5m-economic-impact-in-birmingham-for-2025/>

³<https://www.cendyn.com/blog/mice-market-snapshot-trends-from-may-2025/>



For restaurants in these markets, there's an opening to attract conference attendees looking to explore a new city.

Top U.S. Secondary Event Markets in May 2025

Source: Knowland by Cendyn

- #1: Nevada (excluding Las Vegas)
- #2: Southern Wisconsin
- #3: Birmingham, AL
- #4: Chattanooga, TN-GA

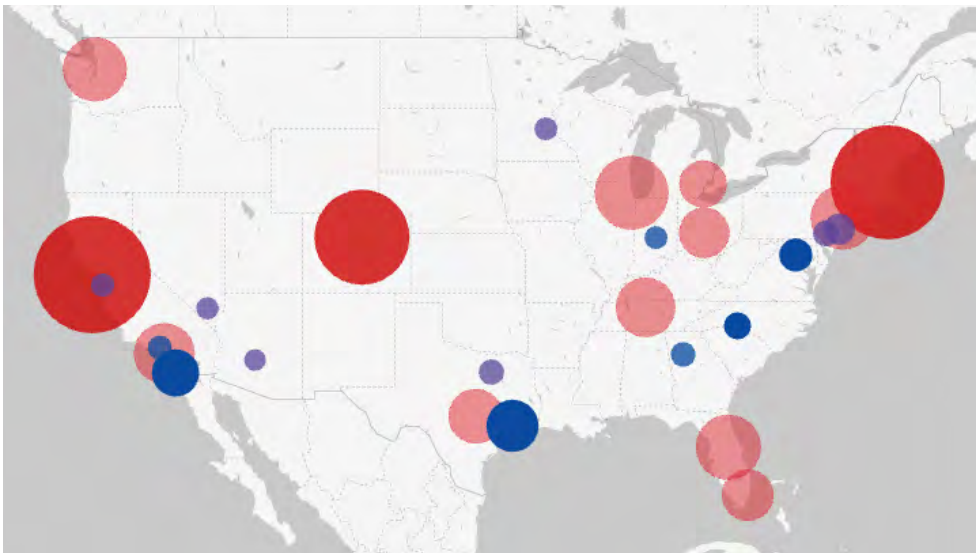
Market & Industry Intel:

Where Corporate Dining Dollars Are Flowing

Most restaurants already track consumer trends. Business dining deserves the same attention. Corporate diners outspend consumers and behave more predictably, but they're driven by forces most restaurants ignore: where business dining is happening, and which industries fuel the spend.

Here's what Dinoa's business dining data shows.

Cities powered by finance, tech, and healthcare drove spend in 2025.



← YoY Growth Contraction

Strongest YoY Growth→

Top Markets

San Francisco: **+16%**

Boston: **+15.5%**

Denver: **+12.4%**

Columbus OH: **+8.7%**

Orlando: **+7.5%**

New York City: **+7.3%**

Seattle: **+7.3%**

Underperforming Markets

Houston: **-5.4%**

San Diego: **-4.6%**

Washington DC: **-2.3%**

Charlotte, NC: **-1.3%**

Atlanta: **-0.9%**

Los Angeles: **-0.8%**

Indianapolis: **-0.6%**

Top Industries

Year-over-year spend growth diverged sharply by sector.

Growth Industries

Financials: **+10.7%**

Information Technology: **+7.1%**

Health Care: **+5.6%**

Industrials: **+4.1%**

Facing Headwinds

Consumer Staples: **-9.8%**

Materials: **-4.3%**

Consumer Discretionary: **-3.1%**

Energy: **-1.7%**

The divergence in dining spend mirrors broader trends. According to the GBTA's 2025 Business Travel Index, trade-sensitive sectors such as manufacturing face heightened risks while service sectors have shown resilience.

Finance, technology, and healthcare face less direct pressure. Consumer discretionary and materials companies, by contrast, are absorbing the cost of an uncertain climate.

🔗 **72% of spend now flows through smaller or independent restaurant brands.** While over 60% of operators reported traffic declines in 2025¹, the story looks different when you zoom out beyond the Technomic Top 300 chains. Spend among business diners grew and traffic held positive, carried largely by smaller, regional, and independent operators. The softness at the top reflects factors like:

- Restaurant closures
- A shift toward local and independent concepts
- The continued rise of third party platforms that redirect spend

For independent operators, the opportunity is real. Capturing it requires being visible to corporate travelers when business dining decisions are made.

¹<https://restaurant.org/research-and-media/media/press-releases/persistent-cost-increases-and-enduring-demand-will-shape-the-restaurant-industry-in-2026/>

Key Opportunities

- ▶ **Secondary markets are having a moment.** Cities like Nashville, Birmingham, and Chattanooga can capture record convention volume and the dining spend that comes with it.
- ▶ **Return-to-office is redistributing corporate dining dollars.** Restaurants near corporate hubs are positioned to absorb displaced cafeteria spend.
- ▶ **Independent restaurants are winning business dining.** 72% of spend flows through smaller and independent brands. The managed dining ecosystem favors local operators.
- ▶ **When foot traffic plateaus, business dining becomes a growth lever.** With traffic flattening, growth from new walk-in customers is hard to come by. Business diners and travelers can fill that gap.
- ▶ **At nearly 23% of total U.S. dining spend, business dining is too big to ignore.** The time to build a business dining strategy is now.



How Restaurants Win

➤ **Own Tuesday through Thursday.**

Peak office days drive peak business dining demand—staffing, specials, and reservations should reflect it.

➤ **Location is leverage.** Restaurants near walkable, office-dense corridors have an advantage. Know your corporate neighbors!

➤ **Quality over volume.** One business diner with a managed expense account outperforms two casual visits.

➤ **Follow the growth sectors.** Financials (+11%) and IT (+7%) employees spend more.

➤ **Capture the cafeteria shift.** Corporate meal programs are replacing on-site cafeterias. Make sure your restaurant gets those orders.

➤ **Protect your margins.** Managed dining programs send corporate spend directly to participating restaurants, keeping dollars in your pocket.





Dinova operates a business dining program that includes a network of over 24,000 restaurants in the U.S. and Canada and nearly 600 corporations, government agencies, and small to medium-sized businesses.

In 2025, Dinova joined the Buyers Edge Platform (BEP) family, the leading digital procurement network for the foodservice industry. Our partners now benefit from deeper data intelligence, expanded technology resources, and a more robust network designed to win the business dining occasion.

[!\[\]\(1ac7c971e7df5bf204fbb84fd617a50a_img.jpg\) Learn More Here.](#)