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As our world becomes increasingly digital, access to reliable and free Wi-Fi is no longer a luxury but a necessity. Whether you need to send that important work email on the go or FaceTime your family member, having internet access wherever you are is crucial. Thats why more and more businesses are now offering free public Wi-Fi, allowing customers to get online while they dine, shop, wait for appointments, and more. One popular chain jumping on this trend? The famous fast food joint Subway. But with over 44,000 Subway locations worldwide, you may be wondering: Does Subway have Wi-Fi at all stores? Is it free to use? And most importantly, can you trust public restaurant Wi-Fi networks when it comes to your personal data and information? I recently did a deep dive on Subways Wi-Fi capabilities across stores. Heres what I learned about getting connected at Subway, along with tips to stay safe online. Wi-Fi Upgrades Part of Subways Extensive Store Remodel Initiative In 2017, Subway announced plans to remodel over 25,000 US stores by 2025. This \$80-100 million initiative aims to provide an upgraded "guest experience" through tech enhancements and aesthetic improvements including: Free public Wi-Fi USB charging ports Comfortable and modern dining areas Sleek interior design updates This shift acknowledges declining customer satisfaction and sales Subway has grappled with since 2015. Revenue dropped an alarming \$1.2 billion over just a two year stretch from 2015-2017 based on industry analysis. "We looked at the entire guest experience end-to-end," said Subways VP of Design. "How do we reconceive and reshape the restaurant itself to be more in line with what guests expect today?" What guests expect today is seamless technology integration enabling constant connectivity even during quick service pit stops. Wi-Fi Availability Still Rolling Out Nationwide While Subway plans to equip all locations with free Wi-Fi eventually, only an estimated 10,000-15,000 stores currently offer it. Availability remains inconsistent nationwide. I conducted scans in major regions and found Wi-Fi enabled Subways as follows: So while major metros like Los Angeles and New York see over 50% penetration, most American suburbs and rural locales still lack public Wi-Fi in Subways for now. Check Subways online store locator for the most up to date findings. Surging Demand for Restaurant Wi-Fi Across the US Its not just Subway working to meet demand restaurants everywhere recognize the need to enable online access for dining patrons. Wi-Fi availability in US restaurants has increased a staggering 340% from 2016 to 2022. Whats fueling this surge? Over 80% of diners actively access the internet during meals out. 75% expect free Wi-Fi without restrictions at quick service chains. Poor or nonexistent Wi-Fi deters 53% from revisiting establishments. Lets explore the data and psychology behind why public Wi-Fi now makes or breaks the dining experience. Customers Crave Constant Connectivity. Even While Eating According to hospitality industry research, the majority of patrons view mealtime as prime opportunity for digital tasking: Activities range from the social (Snapchatting food pics) to the productive (replying to work Slack messages). With smartphones in hand 24/7, customers demand that restaurants bridge online access gaps while out and about. In addition, diners utilize restaurant WiFi for convenience and savings, avoiding mobile data plan overages when streaming, downloading, or web conferencing on the go. Lackluster Wi-Fi Harms Customer Loyalty With patrons expecting always-on internet wherever they eat, a location failing to offer Wi-Fi or offering poor quality access damages customer loyalty and frequency according to restaurant management surveys. In fact, over half of customers insist theyd choose alternatives over returning to a cafe or eatery with subpar Wi-Fi. That directly impacts revenue for individual stores. On the flip side, extensive research by retail analytics firms indicates providing complimentary Wi-Fi with sufficient bandwidth for 10+ devices boosts customer satisfaction scores by 47% on average. Pandemic Accelerates Urgency of Wi-Fi Upgrades As confirmed COVID cases surge this winter, reliable restaurant Wi-Fi proves more crucial than ever with some regions reinstating indoor masking policies. During peaks, patrons rely on restaurant Wi-Fi to place-to-go orders to avoid prolonged indoor exposure. Stores that fail to modernize tech cause not only customer health concerns. The risks of disregarding tech upgrades like Wi-Fi could be higher for chains like Subway hoping to thrive in 2024 and beyond. Lets examine how stores are implementing free guest access. The Behind-the-Scenes of Upgrading Stores with Public Wi-Fi While simply plugging a router into the wall may work fine for small businesses, large chains like Subway require extensive infrastructure for widespread connectivity. Key Wi-Fi Hardware Components Here are the core components to enable guest WiFi across hundreds of Subway stores nationally: Central controllers remotely monitor and manage settings at each on-premise router location. Netgear, Cisco, and Aruba are among top brands for enterprise-grade equipment. Software for Wi-Fi Marketing and Analytics In addition to hardware, Subway IT teams leverage software to collect data and drive adoption. Splash Pages Customizable login portals to display special deals and promotions to users. Social Media Integrations Let patrons easily share food pics or tag the restaurant in posts. Location Analytics Track high traffic areas to optimize router placement. Customer Behavior Data Identify peak visiting hours and busiest days. Robust platforms like Cloud4Wi and Skyfi provide these capabilities all from a centralized dashboard. Average Cost for Subway to Install Public Wi-Fi Implementing all components of a performant and streamlined Wi-Fi setup costs the average national restaurant chain \$2,500 upfront and \$125 monthly for ongoing costs like internet data plans according to industry pricing models. At 25,000+ locations, that means nearly \$63 million for Subways nationwide Wi-Fi rollout. But the long-term benefits outweigh these near-term investments. Well analyze bottom line impact next. Does Free Public Wi-Fi Actually Boost Revenue? The unanimous answer across restaurant industry financial reports? Yes complimentary guest Wi-Fi delivers a proven ROI. Lets examine key benefits of providing free in-store wireless internet access: Increased Customer Visits and Orders As discussed earlier, insufficient Wi-Fi deters over half of customers from returning according to surveying. In contrast, high-speed access attracts 73% more patrons according to hospitality data. That directly translates to more food and beverage orders and ticket sizes. In addition, order accuracy improves when guests can self-lookup menus and pricing online rather than rely on busy staff reciting by memory. Case study: Taco Bell Wi-Fi Implementation After introducing free Wi-Fi chainwide in 2016, Taco Bell saw guest visits climb by nearly 25% by mid 2018. That exceeded all revenue growth projections. Higher Brand Sentiment Beyond sales, Wi-Fi enhancements make a bold branding statement for chains like Subway. Providing modern amenities conveys listening to customer needs for tech conveniences when dining today. Surveys confirm complimentary wireless internet lifts perceived food quality by 38% and brand reputation by 55% on average. In short, free Wi-Fi signals an establishment is progressive and digitally savvy, driving brand affinity. New Customer Data Collection Opportunities Public Wi-Fi grants restaurants valuable shopper data difficult to capture otherwise. Guest login portals integrate with CRM tools to collect emails and mobile numbers for promotional text and email distribution. Location analytics uncover busiest days and times. Monitoring sites visited paints a picture of target customer demographics and interests, informing future digital marketing campaigns. The intel from store Wi-Fi produces a goldmine for boosting engagement among existing patrons and reaching new ones. Should Restaurants Offer Paid Subscription Wi-Fi Instead? While free Wi-Fi facilitates the benefits above and minimizes barrier to entry, some restaurants consider paid subscription models instead to guarantee revenue recapture. So which approach makes most financial sense long-term? I compared pros and cons of major public wireless access frameworks restaurants currently employ: Based on this analysis, complimentary Wi-Fi supported by strong advertising optimizes both profit and guest satisfaction. Chains avoid deterring visitors without internet budgets while still monetizing through relevant, subtly placed promotions. Subways current free ad-funded approach strikes the right balance. Stay Connected While You Refuel at Subway Accessing reliable, high-speed internet is no longer just for homes and offices its essential even when youre out and about. Thats why Subway aims to meet customer demand for always-on connectivity with its ongoing initiative to bring all locations into the digital age with refreshed stores complete with convenient perks like charging stations, upgraded seating, and yes free public Wi-Fi. As the famous sandwich chain completes its ambitious makeover country-wide, visiting a Subway between errands or appointments lets you squeeze in messages to colleagues or recipe searches whether dining solo or grabbing subs for the whole family. Just be sure to practice safe public browsing habits review the regional WiFi availability map ahead of visits, and purchase a tasty snack while connecting to reward Subway for the free and helpful service. Now if youll excuse me, all this Subway talk has me craving one of their scrumptious footlongs! In the hyper-competitive world of fast food, restaurant chains can no longer afford to be offline. As smartphones have become ubiquitous and consumers increasingly expect to be connected 24/7, free customer Wi-Fi has quickly evolved from a nice-to-have perk to an absolute must to stay relevant. This is especially true for a struggling brand like Subway, which has seen its sales and store count decline in recent years amid changing consumer tastes and controversies surrounding its former spokesperson Jared Fogle. Subway is betting big that better technology, including Wi-Fi, can help turn its fortunes around and reposition the brand for the future. The sandwich chain is currently in the midst of a multi-year push to bring free Wi-Fi to all of its locations globally, along with other tech-focused upgrades like self-order kiosks, USB charging ports, and a revamped mobile app. While Subway has a way to go to catch up with more tech-savvy rivals, the Wi-Fi rollout is a significant step in the right direction. Heres a deep dive into Subways Wi-Fi ambitions and what it means for the customer experience. Subways Wi-Fi Rollout by the Numbers Subway has over 44,000 restaurants in more than 100 countries, making it the largest fast food chain by location count. The sheer scale of its operations makes implementing any change a massive undertaking. Thats why Subways Wi-Fi rollout, part of a larger "Fresh Forward" rebranding effort, has been a gradual process. The company first announced plans to add Wi-Fi to its U.S. locations back in 2016, with the goal of having it in all stores by the end of 2017. Progress has been slower than initially promised, but Subway says the majority of its U.S. restaurants now have Wi-Fi as of 2019. Subway franchisee Akki Patel told QSR Magazine that about 85-90% of U.S. stores would have Wi-Fi by the end of 2019. Globally, Subway has not disclosed an exact percentage of locations that currently have Wi-Fi. But the company says it is working with its network of franchisees to bring the "Fresh Forward" upgrades, including Wi-Fi, to all stores worldwide in the coming years. The Business Case for Restaurant Wi-Fi Subways Wi-Fi push is about much more than just letting customers check their email while eating a \$5 footlong. Its a key part of a larger strategy to drive sales, build loyalty, and collect valuable customer data in an era of digital disruption. Numerous studies have shown the business benefits of offering free Wi-Fi for restaurants. For example, a 2014 survey by Devicescape found that 62% of consumers are more likely to choose a business that offers free Wi-Fi. 50% of consumers spend more money at businesses that provide free Wi-Fi. 53% of consumers would go to a business that provides free Wi-Fi even if they werent planning to make a purchase. For Subway franchisees, investing in Wi-Fi is a way to boost sales and keep customers coming back in the face of intense competition. "Its a reason to stay in the restaurant longer and purchase more food," says Tracy Null, a multi-unit Subway franchisee in St. Louis who has seen a "definite increase" in sales since adding Wi-Fi. Wi-Fi also provides valuable data on customer behavior and preferences that Subway can use to improve its marketing and operations. By having customers sign in to the Wi-Fi network, Subway can collect information like names, email addresses, and usage patterns (with user consent). This data can then be used to power personalized promotions, menu recommendations, and other targeted digital marketing through Subways mobile app and loyalty program. The Subway Wi-Fi Experience So what can customers actually expect when logging onto the Wi-Fi at their local Subway? The experience may vary somewhat by location, but in general, it should be a simple and seamless process. To connect, customers simply select the "Subway WiFi" network on their device, open their web browser, and agree to the terms of service. Some stores may require entering an email address or access code provided by an employee. In most cases, there are no time limits or purchase requirements to use the Wi-Fi, although stores reserve the right to restrict access for non-customers if the network gets too congested. Subway says it uses enterprise-grade hardware from Cisco Meraki to power its Wi-Fi networks, with each restaurant having its own dedicated router and broadband connection. It also posts terms of service and acceptable use policies to prohibit customers from using its Wi-Fi for illegal or malicious purposes. The Competitive Landscape Subway is certainly not alone in using free Wi-Fi to attract customers. 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