**Fast Casual**

Fast casual is a new and growing concept in restaurants, positioned between quick service restaurants (QSRs), like McDonalds, Burger King, or KFC, and casual restaurants,

such as Denny’s, Applebees, or Chili’s. The fast casual concept’s hallmarks include counter service, customized menus, freshly-prepared and higher quality foods, and upscale and inviting dining spaces.

**How It’s Developing**

The fast casual concept rose through the 1990s and 2000s, most notably through the growth of outlets including Chipotle and Panera.

The format usually includes the option for diners to order at a counter, providing some level of customization over their order, limited table service, more local and health-conscious ingredients, and upscale or distinctive décor.

Even as fast casual restaurants encourage all-natural, local and organic menu options, they also pay attention to technology’s role in customer’s lives, utilizing customer loyalty apps, online or mobile ordering, and mobile payments. [[1](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/fastcasual#Notes and Resources)]

The concept has attracted the interest of established restaurateurs and celebrity chefs, including Rick Bayless (Xoco), Bobby Flay (Burger Palace), and Tom Colicchio (‘wichcraft), providing higher-end experiences at more affordable and accessible prices. [[2](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/fastcasual#Notes and Resources)]

Fast casual’s appeal to millennials has also advanced its popularity. Millennials may be attracted to fast casual’s digital engagement, convenience, authenticity, and emphasis on quality rather than advertisement. [[3](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/fastcasual#Notes and Resources)]

In hotels, adoption of fast casual can be seen in changes to space as well as dining options. Adoption of living room-like, social, and flexible spaces (multiple and various seating spaces, easy-to-find power outlets) encourage clients to spend both social and business time in public spaces. [[4](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/fastcasual#Notes and Resources)] These spaces respond to customers that increasingly seek opportunities to be productive and connected, have upscale tastes and are technologically savvy, and seek balance and control in their experiences. [[5](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/fastcasual#Notes and Resources)]

The fast casual concept also demonstrates a certain degree of flexibility. Recent trends among fast casual restaurants include modified or limited table service – introducing servers to check in on guests, refill drinks, etc., in an effort to enhance service while still minimizing the cost over more formal restaurants with wait service. [[6](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/fastcasual#Notes and Resources)]

**Why It Matters**

While many credit the popularity of fast casual to its affordability, it is also seen as reflective of changing consumer values, including desires for more social and aspirational experiences. [[7](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/fastcasual#Notes and Resources)] Libraries that emphasize not only the affordability and value of libraries, but also the social and experiential value of library programs and services might be able to capitalize on the popularity of the fast casual concept.

Fast causal will have a profound influence on how users encounter spaces. Fast casual has oriented consumers to more active and social spaces, where they can see people hanging out and enjoying the space. [[8](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/fastcasual#Notes and Resources)] Empty lobbies, formal service counters, and other traditional features of library spaces may be at odds with fast causal experiences.

Distinctive décor and experience may be a particularly important elements from the fast casual movement. Even as fast casual clients embrace technology, they still seek local, physical connections that promote community belonging. [[9](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/fastcasual#Notes and Resources)]

**Notes and Resources**

[1] “Lunch wars: How Fast Casual Took Over D.C., and Why the Boom is Fading.” Lydia DePillis. *The Washington Post*. December 4, 2013. Available from [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2013/12/04/lunch-wars-ho...](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2013/12/04/lunch-wars-how-fast-casual-took-over-d-c-and-why-the-boom-is-fading/)

[2] “Meet the Chefs Who Are Bringing Quality Food to the Masses.” Jason Daley. *Entrepreneur*. December 12, 2013. Available from <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/229411>

[3] “How Millennials Will Dictate The Future Of Fast Food.” Maggie McGrath. *Forbes*. April 18, 2014. Available from[http://www.forbes.com/sites/maggiemcgrath/2014/04/18/how-millennials-wil...](http://www.forbes.com/sites/maggiemcgrath/2014/04/18/how-millennials-will-dictate-the-future-of-fast-food/)

[4] “Hotels Transform Dining Options for Time-Pressed Travelers.” Barbara DeLollis. *USA Toda*y. January 18, 2013. Available from [http://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/hotels/2013/01/04/trends-in-hotel-e...](http://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/hotels/2013/01/04/trends-in-hotel-eating-for-2013-fast-casual-caters-to-busy-lifestyles/1808475/)

[5] “How a Hotel Became a Hot Fast Casual Concept.” Brenda Rick Smith. *Fast Casual*. November 18, 2014. Available from[http://www.fastcasual.com/articles/how-a-hotel-became-a-hot-fast-casual-...](http://www.fastcasual.com/articles/how-a-hotel-became-a-hot-fast-casual-concept/)

[6] “The Latest Thing in Fast-Casual Dining is Here.” Peter Frost. *Crain’s*. November 21, 2014. Available from[http://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20141121/ISSUE01/141129967/the-la...](http://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20141121/ISSUE01/141129967/the-latest-thing-in-fast-casual-dining-is-here)

[7] “Meet the Chefs Who Are Bringing Quality Food to the Masses.” Jason Daley. *Entrepreneur*. December 12, 2013. Available from <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/229411>

[8] “How a Hotel Became a Hot Fast Casual Concept.” Brenda Rick Smith. *Fast Casual*. November 18, 2014. Available from[http://www.fastcasual.com/articles/how-a-hotel-became-a-hot-fast-casual-...](http://www.fastcasual.com/articles/how-a-hotel-became-a-hot-fast-casual-concept/)

[9] “A Salad Chain’s Surprise Ingredient: Tech Money.” Natasha Singer. *The New York Times*. November 29, 2014. Available from [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/30/technology/a-salad-chains-surprise-ing...](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/30/technology/a-salad-chains-surprise-ingredient-tech-money.html)