

What food court customers expect

FOOD quality, cleanliness, staff manners and the accuracy of taking orders are considered prime issues by customers at food courts.

They are perceived as more important than queue time, the availability of seats and the accuracy of change returned.

These were among the findings released yesterday from a customer satisfaction survey commissioned by the Singapore Management University's Institute of Service Excellence (ISES).

The ISES shares the findings with companies in the food and beverage (F&B) sector – as well as other sectors, depending on the industry in question – to help them improve productivity.

Questions asked of respondents include whether their experience at an eatery met their expectations and how satisfied they were with factors like cleanliness.

The study also found that customers at fast-food restaurants had similar wants to patrons at food courts.

On the other hand, restaurant-goers are concerned more with the responsiveness of service staff to additional requests and the time taken to receive the menu.

Food quality, however, is a top

priority across the board.

The study found that the top 10 of the 30 companies measured across the F&B and tourism sectors scored well simply by meeting their customers' expectations.

Dr Marcus Lee, academic director of ISES, said that companies should focus on understanding customers' needs and wants.

"It is always possible to try to outdo customers' expectations by offering 20 items on the menu instead of 10," said Dr Lee.

"But rather than throwing in the kitchen sink, it is more important to understand customers' priorities."

The study, he said, also showed that meeting customers' expectations is integral to customer satisfaction.

This in turn leads to higher consumption and more revenue for the business.

"There are many 'quick-wins' restaurants can adopt," he added.

Deborah Tan, 18, a student at ACS International, said: "Food quality and cleanliness are the most important. The small things like whether the waiter refills an empty glass also count.

"These tiny things make you return."

JESSICA LIM