

#20 RESTAURANT AUTOMATION

The idea of an automated restaurant operation has been around for decades, but it's finally coming close to reality. No, robots aren't going to be flipping burgers any time soon, but there's no need for such gimmicks. Restaurateurs are just starting to adopt smart automation in the back of the house, and with a wave of new equipment, burgers don't need to be flipped, neither does chicken and nor do light switches. New automatic grills can form burger patties (no smashing required). Chipotle and Pizzeria Locale hired a team of engineers to create a two-minute pizza oven. Chick-fil-A spent \$50 million to create a grill that adjusts pressure during the cooking process to churn out 10 pieces of chicken in minutes. That grill and the pizza oven are still proprietary, but they signal a growing trend toward automated cooking that will shed labor costs by requiring fewer and less-skilled kitchen workers. Automation suites can turn lights on; sensors can monitor equipment efficiency for major power savings and keep tabs on temperatures. And everything from inventory to hours worked can be tracked via a tablet. This type of equipment has been either unavailable or cost-prohibitive until very recently, but the explosion of restaurant technology investments means high-tech devices are becoming available to and affordable for all operators.



No, robots are probably not going to start serving you pizza, but automation is becoming a reality at restaurants.