

**eat**

**A Buyers Guide to  
Restaurant Reservation Software**

<https://restaurant.eatapp.co>

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## **Restaurant reservation providers are currently in a highly competitive race....**

to deliver the best product on the market, and each offer a variety of different features. The differences between providers can often seem confusing so we wanted to highlight the features and services sophisticated restaurant owners and F&B directors look for when assessing front-of-house restaurant software and help create a better understanding of what buyers should be looking for.

You could be reaching a point where you've found a solution that works. Or you could be wondering how the technology has developed over the past few years, and considering a switch.

You probably know generally about the benefits of reservation software, but less about the specific features available in different systems. You might have already concluded that you need a reservation system, but you might not know exactly what you want. With this guide, you'll be able to make a clear and informed decision on which system could be best for you.

We do this by breaking down everything you need to know about different platforms, and giving you questions and ideas to take with you when talking to restaurant software providers about working with them.

# WHAT IS RESERVATION SOFTWARE?

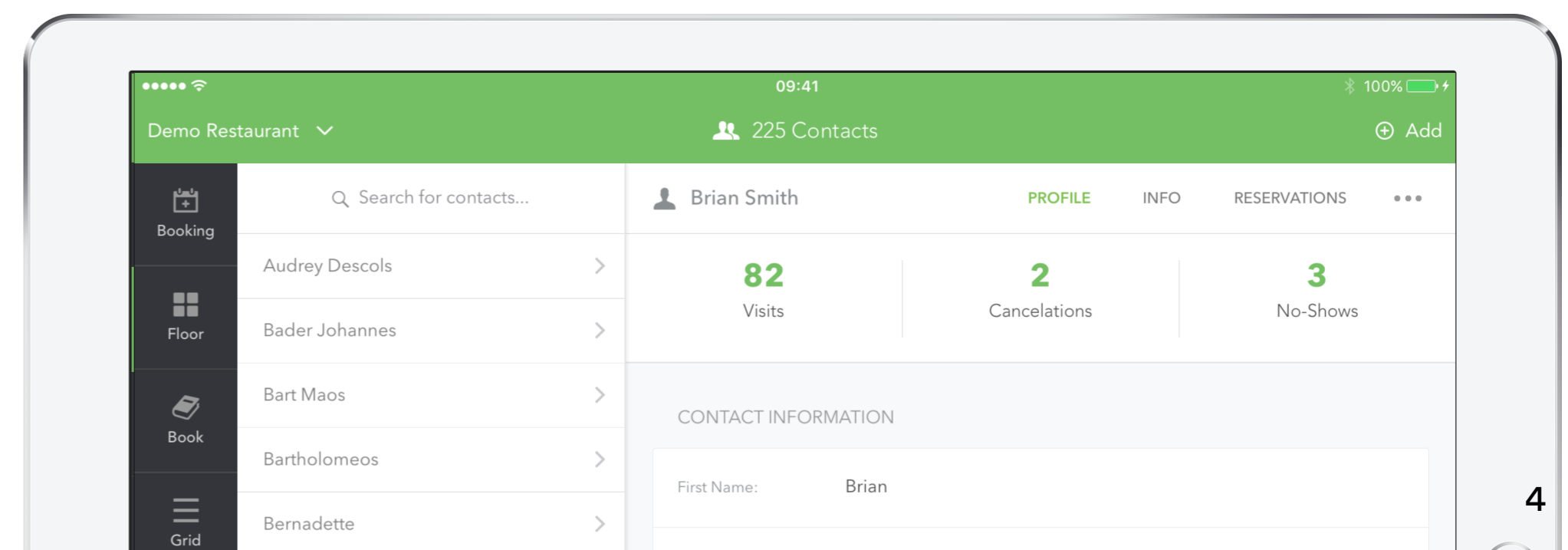
In the restaurant industry, reservation software refers to digital applications that, broadly speaking, replace the traditional pen and paper method of organizing reservations in a physical diary.

However, by digitizing front-of-house operations, reservation systems now have a greatly expanded feature set available to staff all the way up the management chain. As a result, reservation software now interfaces, and is sometimes fully responsible for, database and contact management, marketing, guest communication (CRM), capacity and stock planning and business intelligence.

The core features of reservation software are:

- ✓ **Reservation management - add incoming reservations**
- ✓ **Table management - managing a restaurant floorplan**
- ✓ **Database management - maintaining a guest database**

How these features work, additional features that extend the core functionality and price make up the difference between different providers.



# WHY IS RESERVATION SOFTWARE IMPORTANT?

In today's world, digital technology is embedded in most of the dining experience. This means that the expectations and behaviours of people who go to restaurants has fundamentally shifted.

Because reservation software is deeply connected to how people discover, reserve and visit restaurants it provides significant competitive advantages in today's restaurant landscape.

As more and more restaurants begin leveraging the power of these types of system, those that do not fully embrace their potential, risk finding it increasingly difficult to compete.



## **Personalization**

With a digital system you can provide a more personalized experience for guests by recording preferences and keeping track of dining patterns.



## **Optimization**

Digital systems give managers data they need to make informed operational decisions; influencing restaurants bottom line.



## **Organization**

Both managers and staff use digital software to reduce errors with reservations, customer service and table allocation.

# HOW DO YOU FIND THE BEST RESERVATION SOFTWARE PROVIDER?

With the basics out of the way, we'll focus on what a buyer's perspective should be, by looking at what you should know when looking for a provider. Having an understanding of what every solution must include as a minimum, can remove some uncertainty.

- ✓ Restaurant reservation software must enhance your ability receive bookings from all the major digital channels, phone calls and walk-ins.
- ✓ In addition you should have to ability to cut off online reservations for individual tables, as well as the whole restaurant instantly.

- ✓ The right provider needs to automatically build your customer database from incoming reservations and also allow you easy, downloadable to access to the raw data.
- ✓ The tool should give you a customized, editable floorplan that provides you with a table management solution for tracking guests as they enter, eat and leave your restaurant.
- ✓ The system should fit into, and complement, your existing technology and customer lifecycle.

# What do switched-on restaurant managers and F&B directors tend to look for from reservation software?

At Eat we work with hospitality professionals from some of the world's biggest hotel chains, such as the Four Seasons, as well as high volume independent restaurants. From many discussions, here some key features they tend to look for:

## Speed

Whilst digital technology enables a much wider feature set, many people with experience of reservation systems point out that pen and paper is still much faster for inputting bookings from phone calls and walk-ins. This is due to the simple fact writing is usually faster than typing or tapping.

Switched on buyers tend to look closely at how reservation software is built for speed-of-use through its feature set and design elements. This is because in a busy restaurant front-of-house, speed is a crucial element of effective customer service. This is why buyers tend to reject solutions that slow down front-of-house staff.



### Questions to Ask

How do my staff enter reservations into the system and how long does it take?

Do you have any features that speed up this process?

## Powerful Booking Widgets

It's no secret that the rise of digital reservation systems has ushered in new customer behaviour around booking tables online. In the US, 20+% of all restaurant reservations are made online, with international markets catching up fast as restaurant ecosystems develop.

As a result, almost all restaurant booking software comes with 'widgets', small pieces of embeddable code connected to your digital reservation book, designed to allow customers to book tables online.

Today, as social networks and large technology platforms start to make restaurant websites less-and-less important, reservation widgets are now appearing across the web.

Sophisticated buyers are keenly aware that reservation widgets must be flexible enough to cater to this ever changing environment, and built to generate reservations across the web, e.g. from Google Business Pages or Facebook, rather than just directing people to a website.



### Questions to Ask

Can I use your widget to take reservations from Facebook, Google Business or any other website apart from my own?

Do your widgets load without loading my full website?

## Inventory and Demand Management

Digital reservation software has unlocked many advanced restaurant management features that switched on buyers are increasingly looking for in a solution. The newest software is helping solve some of the most common problems for restaurant managers, such as removing bottlenecks around peak times and matching the capacity of the kitchen with the volume of guests. In short, buyers want to take full advantage of digital systems rather than simply replace their reservation book.

At Eat we've built features that help managers overcome these challenges, for example auto-suggesting less popular times in our booking widgets.

We've also created a brand new interface called Grid View, which many of our busiest restaurants use to manage kitchen capacity effectively. Built working directly with the Four Seasons, Grid View gives an hourly update on guest volume at a glance so staff know when to make upcoming tables available.



### Questions to Ask

How does your system help me manage kitchen capacity?

How do you help me fill tables at less popular times?

# WHAT ELSE TO CONSIDER

Typically, buyers of restaurant software have differing requirements as no two restaurants are the same. To help highlight some of those difference here are a few other areas buyers often look at when considering a purchase. For you, maybe only one or two will be relevant, but it's helpful to get a more complete picture when evaluating a purchase.

<p><b>Table Management Feature Set</b></p> <p>When evaluating booking software, you should look in depth at the features for tracking guests through your restaurant and whether the provider meets your requirements.</p>	<p><b>Reducing no shows</b></p> <p>Reservation software can send automatic notifications via email and SMS. Evaluate how the system handles reservation notifications, including things like text customization.</p>
<p><b>Mobilty</b></p> <p>In the past reservation software was supplied through a large computer terminal installed at the front of the restaurant. Today you can run your front-of-house from iPads and Mobile Phones.</p>	<p><b>Waitlist</b></p> <p>If you require a waitlist and currently use pen and paper, or have been using a standalone digital provider, it's worth knowing that some systems include an integrated waitlist within the app.</p>



## RESERVATION SOFTWARE PRICING



There's no single pricing model which each vendor follows. In fact, pricing models can be quite different for each provider. For instance, Eat's pricing is a simple per month flat fee that includes SMS notifications for free.

A competitor might price their monthly fee extremely low and then charge per reservations over a certain threshold. There are pros and cons to each approach. Pricing that charges per reservation may seem like the best, but if you intend to grow you may see your costs exponentially grow as well. So this is something to bare in mind

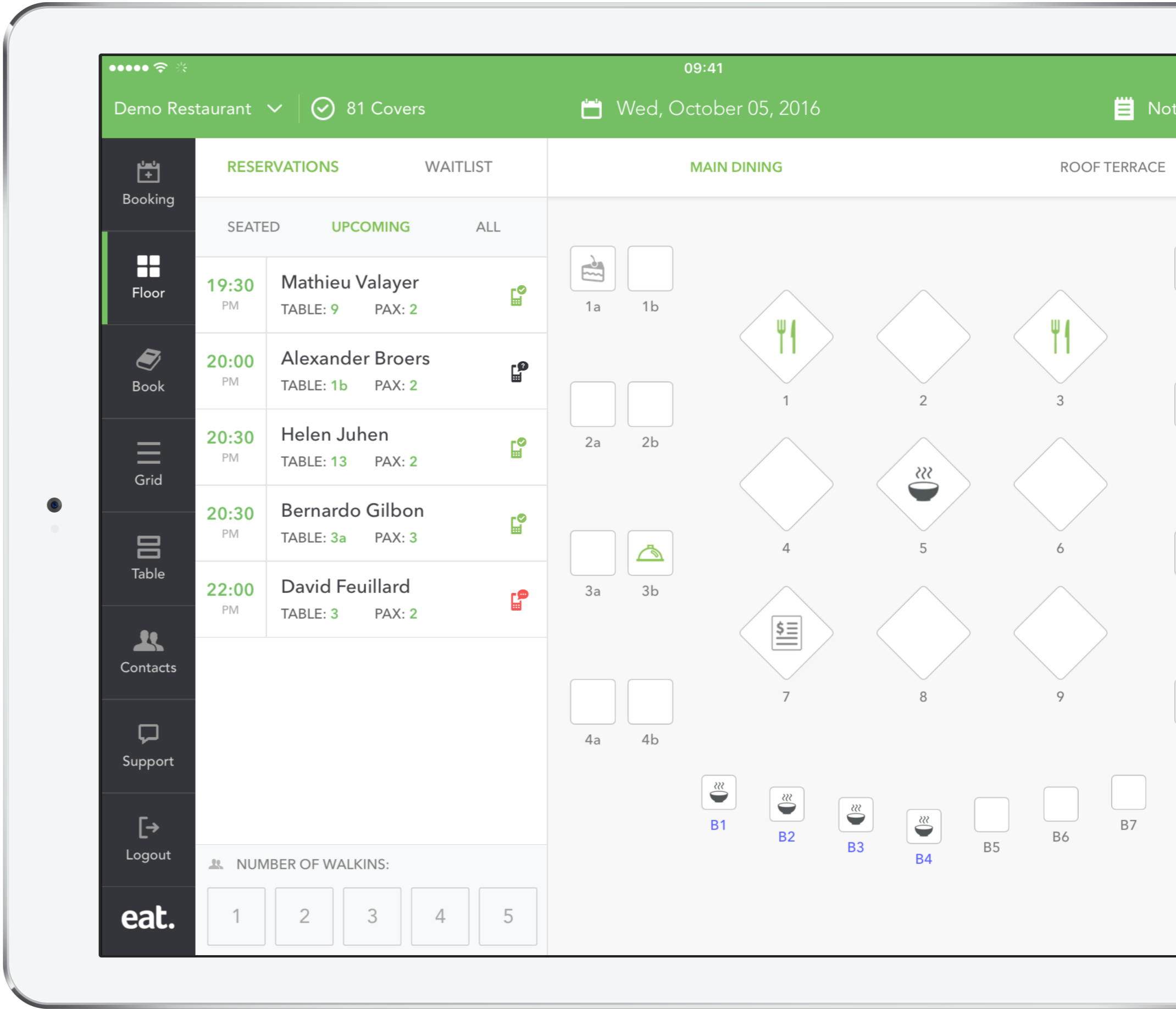
Things to watch out for with reservation software pricing include, installation and admin fees, per reservation charges, SMS charges and tiered pricing, which limits features on cheaper plans.

# HOW EASY IS IT TO SWITCH PROVIDERS?

Switching between reservation providers should be quite simple.

As long as your current solution has the ability to download your existing client database, and your new solution can receive it, there shouldn't be hiccups in the exchange, and your customers would be populated within a new database as soon as it's finished importing.

Beyond that, the best companies will always provide dedicated support for a switch, including staff training on the new system.



## HOW EASY IS IT TO SWITCH TO EAT APP?

Find out for yourself. Request a trial today, and you can try out our platform for free for 1 month.

Eat App is the reservation software provider of choice for some of the worlds biggest hospitality brands including the Four Seasons, Palazzo Versace, The Oberoi and The One and Only.

Visit [restaurant.eatapp.co](https://restaurant.eatapp.co) to request a demo

