

Top Ten iPhone Food-Related Apps

by Fred Wohlstein, Independent Restaurant Owner

Boasting around 100,000 apps and growing daily, iPhone users have a mind numbing amount of Apple iTunes apps to choose from. As a member of the food hospitality community, I narrowed my focus to my "Top 10" food related apps that offer general utility to the user across a broad spectrum of food service categories from quick service chains to independent restaurants. Specifically, the criteria for the apps I selected was as follows: 1) no cost [free] to the user, 2) applicable to restaurants or food service in some tangible way and 3) not limited to a specific food service entity (e.g. an ordering app for a particular chain). Hence, the apps retain their functionality in major cities across the United States. Furthermore, I grouped them into categories based upon their primary function. The three categories are: apps that offer locations and peer reviews, apps that assist the user such as breaking down food and wine offerings and apps that offer multiple services including restaurants based on the user's geo-location.

Restaurant Locating Apps with Reviews

Presented in no particular order, the following apps offer restaurant specifics, reviews and menus to the app user. By allowing the app to use the iPhone's built-in GPS, users are automatically given a selection of restaurants based upon their proximity to them from the nearest then proceeding outwardly. Also, most of the apps allow the user to manipulate the selection by manually changing the settings or filtering.

Urbanspoon – Not only does the popular Urbanspoon app allow you to locate restaurants around you by using GPS, it also allows you to randomly choose a restaurant by shaking the iPhone until you see a restaurant you want to try on the simulated slot machine.

Local Picks by TripAdvisor – Allows the user to locate restaurants using sort filters including popularity, name, distance, rating and price as well as the proximity. If you're a fan of TripAdvisor then you'll like this app.

Restaurantica – A mobile restaurant guide - is probably the least widely known but it allows the user to input a city and state and then select the restaurant cuisine type (e.g. Korean). As with the other apps, it can also use GPS, if allowed, to locate restaurants.

Apps that Assist with Selection

Once again, the following apps are presented in no particular order. Their functions vary from app to app but have great utility for their designed purposes. These apps give specific information about reservations, nutrition, best seafood selections and wine.

OpenTable – This app is based on the online version of OpenTable which is a real time dining reservation network. Thusly, allowing a mobile iPhone user to locate a table reservation while in transit. Saves the user from having to call multiple restaurants to ascertain if there is an open reservation at a particular time. There is no fee to the user for this service.

Restaurant Nutrition – This app is great for dieting users or those that just want to know the nutritional value in what their consuming. One shortcoming, the information is limited to chain restaurants which is understandable based on the nutritional information given. By entering the name of a restaurant chain, the user can drill down to a particular menu item and view the nutrition breakdown including calories, sodium, trans fats, etc.

Seafood Watch – By Monterey Bay Aquarium, this environmentally conscience app allows the user to select seafood that is good for the consumer as well as the oceans. For the various seafood selections, it yields Best Choice, Good Alternative and Avoid. Plus, the reasoning behind the rating given.

Hello Vino – A wine pairing and suggestion service - assists the user in finding the correct wine to accompany a meal by answering simple questions. It also displays the correct pronunciation and notes about the wine. If you do not agree with the selection, alternatives are also suggested.

Apps that Offer Multiple Services Location

And lastly, we have a unranked listing of apps with broader usefulness. Not only are they able to locate food establishments but other services as well. For frequent travelers, the ability to quickly locate a bank or drugstore in unfamiliar territory is very comforting.

Yelp – A social reviewer site that is handy for business travelers. Though primarily known for locating restaurants, Yelp also allows the user to locate banks, gas stations, drugstores and more. When used for restaurant location, it allows the user to filter information in miles, dollar amount and opened now.

Where – An app that allows users to find places, people and other things around them. Unlike other apps, it automatically presents set information based on GPS location such as: gas prices, local weather, the nearest Starbucks, news, etc. The app does include a search function so you can enter a specific search item as well.

Around Me – Like Where, this app allows the user to find a host of information including hospitals, hotels, theatres, parking, banks, etc. However, the app waits for the user to select a category before displaying the information (which I prefer). The listing algorithm is unknown to me but it yields the desired results.

The only caveats I would like to add to this short article are 1) there are no digital substitutions for word-of-mouth when it comes to finding wonderful local restaurants. If you can afford the time to ask the locals for their recommendations, you

normally will find a dining experience and a true expression of the area you are visiting and 2) there are many more food apps. If you have a favorite, please share with me fwohlstein@azurrestaurant.com