USE CASES // HOSPITALITY AND FOOD

AI in Hospitality and Food: what's already working, and what's next

Five practical uses of AI and automation for cafes, restaurants and small accommodation, sorted by how proven they are.

> **The short version:** hospitality is already one of the more active sectors. Marketing, invoices and rostering are well trodden. Answering the phone and pricing rooms with AI are the next wave.

Where the sector sits

In NAB's SME survey (April 2026), **50% of accommodation, cafe and restaurant businesses** said they use AI, with another 39% planning to. A SevenRooms survey of 258 Australian restaurant decision-makers found **65%** use AI, with marketing the most common use at 46%. Definitions of "AI" vary, so these figures differ between surveys.

What's typically painful

Owners are squeezed on cost and time. Phone calls go unanswered during service, supplier invoices are keyed by hand, and small properties run bookings from notebooks and spreadsheets. SiteMinder's global survey found 29% of small accommodation providers keep static room pricing.

Established: businesses like yours are already doing this

Use case	The everyday problem	What the AI does	What the evidence says
Marketing posts, promotions and review replies	No time to write posts, emails or replies to reviews.	Drafts from your menu and events. The owner approves and schedules.	Survey: 89% of AI-using accommodation SMEs use it for marketing and sales (NAB). No results figure.
Supplier invoice capture	Staff key supplier invoices by hand and reconcile them against delivery notes.	Reads invoices from email or photo, codes them and sends them to Xero or MYOB for approval.	Vendor claim (Lightyear, one WA group of two venues): manual processing down over 80%. A single case study.
Digital rostering	Rosters built in spreadsheets and text messages; labour out of line with trade.	Rostering software with time and payroll sync. Some tools forecast staffing from past sales.	Survey (SevenRooms 2024): 26% of operators use AI for scheduling. No verified saving.

Emerging: early adopters are starting, worth planning for

Use case	The everyday problem	What the AI does	What the evidence says
AI phone answering and order-taking	Calls go unanswered during service, so orders and bookings are lost.	A voice agent answers, takes the order or booking and sends it to the kitchen or reservation system.	Vendor claim (Otto): 34% of restaurant calls go unanswered. Survey (SevenRooms): 27% of operators use AI for reservations. No independent result.
Room rates and channel management (accommodation)	Rates are set by gut feel, with double-booking risk across online agents.	Syncs availability across channels and suggests rates from demand.	Vendor claim (Little Hotelier): a 14-room hotel reports 60-70% more bookings. Much of that is from going online.

Before you start

Protect personal information. The Privacy Commissioner's guidance (OAIC) advises against entering personal information into public AI tools, and asks you to check whether a vendor can see or train on what you enter. Check whether the Privacy Act applies to your business, and tell customers when they are dealing with an AI. Guest names, phone numbers and dietary or allergy notes can be sensitive. **Check call-recording rules.** AI phone agents that record or transcribe calls raise state consent rules, so confirm before switching one on. **Keep a person on complaints and refunds.**

Sources: NAB SME AI adoption report, April 2026; SevenRooms 2025 Australia Restaurant Trends (Censuswide); SevenRooms 2024 via eCommerceNews; Lightyear 3Sheets case study; Otto launch (ITWire, Oct 2025); Little Hotelier Mercantile Hotel case study; SiteMinder survey, Oct 2025 (Hospitality Net); OAIC guidance on commercially available AI products. Outcome figures marked vendor claim or company claim are the supplier's own and have not been independently verified. Survey figures reflect the businesses surveyed and may not match every firm.

Want to talk this through for your business?

Book a free 15-minute call. We'll look at your situation and give you a straight answer, with no jargon and no sales pitch.

Let's Chat

Opens the request form on our website. Free, no obligation.