

# **DRIVE-THRU SURVEY**

*The State of Drive-Thru Dining Access and Assistance  
for Customers who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing*

**Conducted by Inclusion Solutions  
January 10, 2004**



inclusion=solutions

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Drive-Thru service at fast food restaurants is taken for granted by many. But for millions of Americans with disabilities such as those who are deaf, hard of hearing, have speech difficulties, or other communication barriers, this basic service can be difficult or impossible to access.

Lack of access to Drive-Thru services is a major concern to millions of Americans with disabilities. It is also an issue that several restaurant chains are struggling to address. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires restaurants to make both physical and policy changes to serve customers with disabilities – both inside the restaurant and at the Drive-Thru windows.

After hearing feedback from people with disabilities asking for a solution to Drive-Thru service problems, Inclusion Solutions launched the *Drive-Thru Access Survey* to secure comprehensive feedback on the current state of access.

In the late fall of 2003, 6,422 people nationwide participated in a study about the deaf and hard-of-hearing (hereafter “deaf”) experience at Drive-Thru restaurants. The study was created to understand the touch points (exchanges between customer and employee) of the Drive-Thru dining experience and identify opportunities for improving the experience for deaf customers.

The *Drive-Thru Access Survey* was designed to measure the following:

1. Drive-Thru habits and demographics among survey participants
2. The usage of Drive-Thrus and specific needs related to the deaf population
3. Responses to potential solutions to the problem
4. Propensity of customers to support restaurants with accessible Drive-Thrus.

Participants’ feedback is revealed in the following key findings and detailed survey results.

For additional information on the survey, or to learn more about Inclusion Solutions please visit us online at [www.InclusionSolutions.com](http://www.InclusionSolutions.com) or call toll free 1-866-232-5487 (TTY: 312-444-1967)

Contact:

Patrick Hughes, Jr.  
President  
773-338-9612  
[phughes@inclusionsolutions.com](mailto:phughes@inclusionsolutions.com)

## KEY FINDINGS – SURVEY OF MORE THAN 6,400 PARTICIPANTS



### *Drive-Thru habits and demographics among survey participants:*

- 79% of respondents are deaf, 17% hard of hearing, 1% speech impaired, 1% mobility impaired, and 2% “other”.
- 75% of respondents are frequent or daily patrons of fast food restaurants
- 86% of respondents dine at fast food restaurants – and over 41% dine there several times a week.

### *The usage of Drive-Thrus and the specific needs related to the deaf population:*

- 32% of respondents have never been able to use Drive-Thrus as a result of their disability.
- Only 29% of respondents found it satisfactory or easy to use Drive-Thrus. The large majority of responses were that it is difficult or impossible.
- 78% of respondents have had difficulty placing a fast-food order and 42% have left a Drive-Thru line in frustration because they were unable to communicate.

### *Responses to Potential Solutions to the Problem:*

- 18% believe that current solutions to the issue are adequate.
- 95% of respondents expressing a preference would like to see restaurants install electronic ordering systems.
- 78% of respondents expressing a preference would like to see restaurants install a call button that allows the customer to communicate that they need assistance and pull ahead to place the order in an alternative way (e.g. pen and paper, picture menu, etc.).

### *Propensity of customers to support restaurants with accessible Drive-Thru services:*

- 67% of respondents said that they did not believe there was a chain that was a leader on the issue. However, respondents did point to individual store locations that were making an effort.
- 94.4% of people surveyed indicated they would be likely or highly likely to visit a restaurant that put in a Drive-Thru system to improve access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- 24% of respondents said that their top consideration in choosing a Drive-Thru was accessibility – and ranked this above factors such as attitude, price, and location.

### *Conclusions:*

- Access is a major concern to the deaf community and others.
- Solutions such as electronic order systems or call buttons and written orders would be very well received by the deaf community.
- Customers with disabilities will reward restaurants that make changes to improve access.

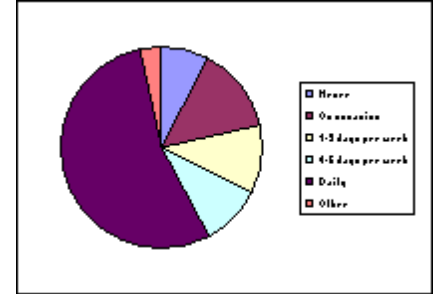
# SURVEY RESULTS

*Drive-Thru habits and demographics among survey participants :*

	<b>Result</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	
<b>1. Gender:</b>	Male	33.2%	
	Female	66.8%	
<b>2. Age:</b>	Under 18	1.0%	
	18-30	15.4%	
	31-50	55.7%	
	51 and above	27.9%	
<b>3. Disability:</b>	Deaf	79.3%	
	Hard of Hearing	16.8%	
	Speech	1.0%	
	Mobility Impairment	0.8%	
	Other	2.0%	
<b>4. Do you use a phone?</b>	Yes	60.6%	
	No	39.4%	

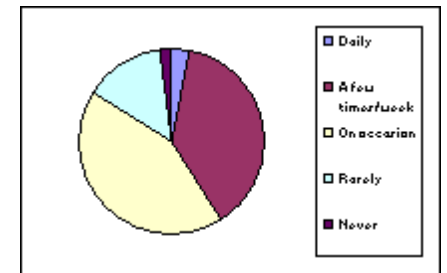
## Drive-Thru Access: Survey Report

<b>5. How often do you drive?</b>	Never	8.0%
	On occasion	13.9%
	1-3 days per week	10.6%
	4-6 days per week	9.5%
	Daily	55.0%
	Other	3.0%

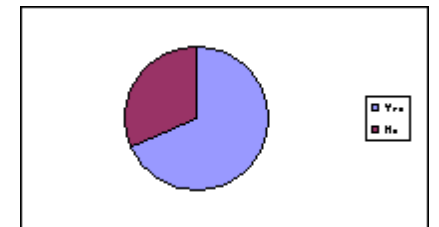


### *The usage of Drive-Thrus and the specific needs related to the deaf population:*

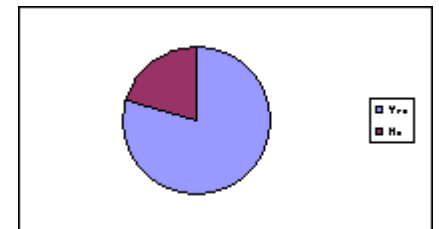
<b>6. How often do you eat at fast-food restaurants (such as McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King, Taco Bell):</b>	Daily	3.7%
	A few times/week	37.1%
	On occasion	42.8%
	Rarely	14.9%
	Never	1.5%



<b>7. Do you use Drive-Thru services at restaurants (or have you in the past)?</b>	Yes	68.3%
	No	31.7%



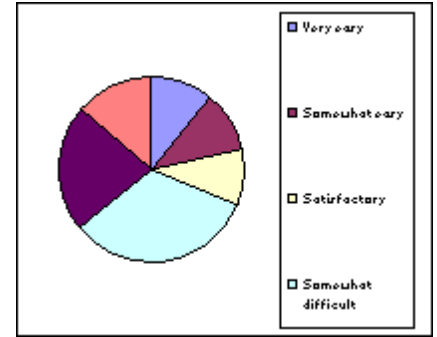
<b>8. Would you like to use Drive-Thru services but are unable?</b>	Yes	79.3%
	No	20.7%



## Drive-Thru Access: Survey Report

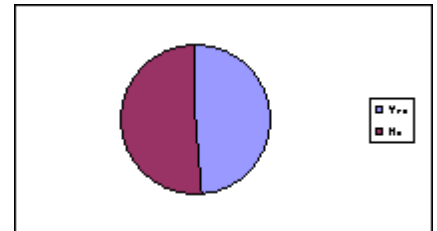
9. Do you think that using the Drive-Thru at restaurants is...

Very easy	11.4%
Somewhat easy	10.6%
Satisfactory	9.2%
Somewhat difficult	32.4%
Very difficult	22.4%
I do not use Drive-Thrus, this doesn't apply to me	13.9%



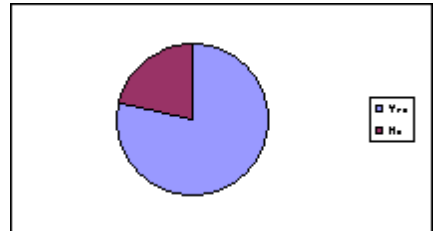
10. Do you avoid Drive-Thrus?

Yes	48.2%
No	51.8%



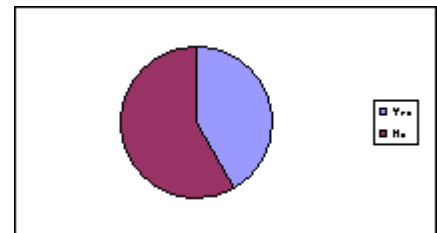
11. Have you ever had difficulty placing your order at a drive-up window as a result of a communication problem?

Yes	78.4%
No	21.6%



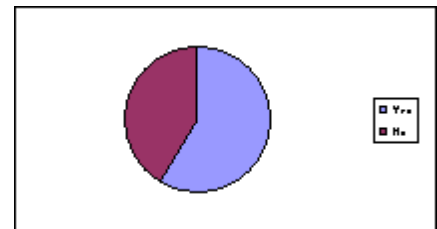
12. Have you ever left a fast food restaurant without making a purchase because you couldn't communicate with the staff?

Yes	41.6%
No	58.4%



13. Did you ever have this experience when the main restaurant lobby was closed and the Drive-Thru was the only means of visiting the restaurant but you were not able to use the Drive-Thru?

Yes	57.9%
No	42.1%



*Responses to Potential Solutions to the Problem:*

**A. Restaurant does nothing. This problem doesn't need to be fixed.**

I like/agree with this approach

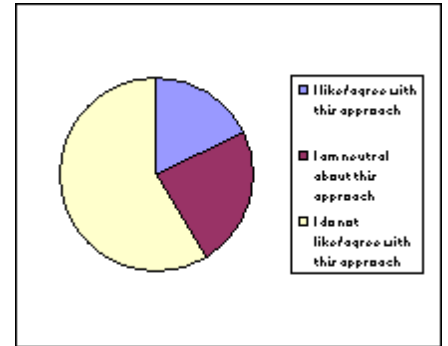
18.1%

I am neutral about this approach

23.3%

I do not like/agree with this approach

58.7%



**B. Restaurant installs electronic ordering system at Menu Board (TTY/Electronic system to interactively place order)**

I like/agree with this approach

86.1%

I am neutral about this approach

10.1%

I do not like/agree with this approach

3.8%



**C. Restaurant installs a call button letting the employee know that the customer needs assistance. Customer pulls up to Pick-Up Window and places order with employee there (through pad and paper, picture menu, or other alternative).**

I like/agree with this approach

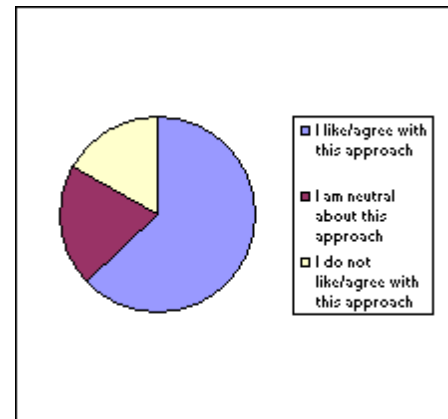
62.7%

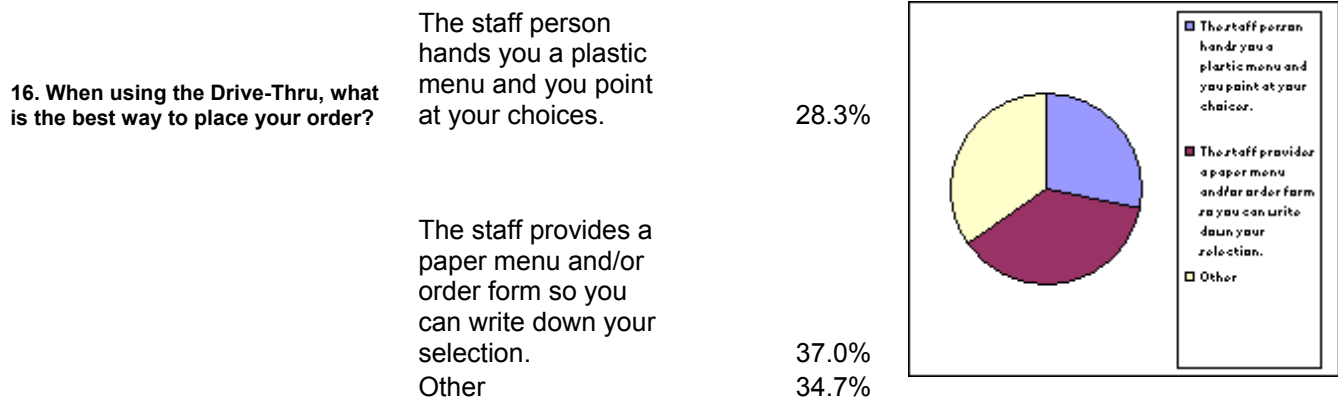
I am neutral about this approach

20.4%

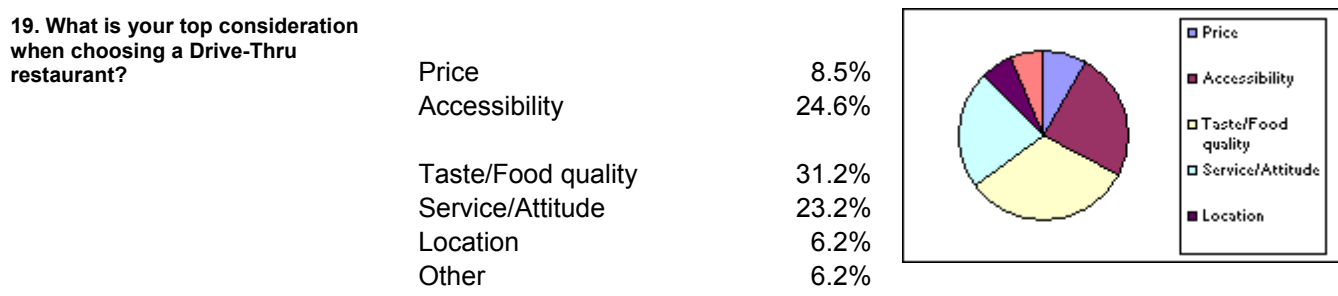
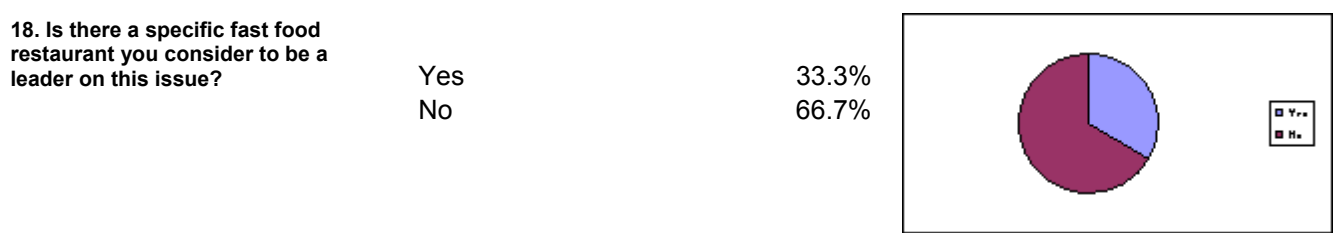
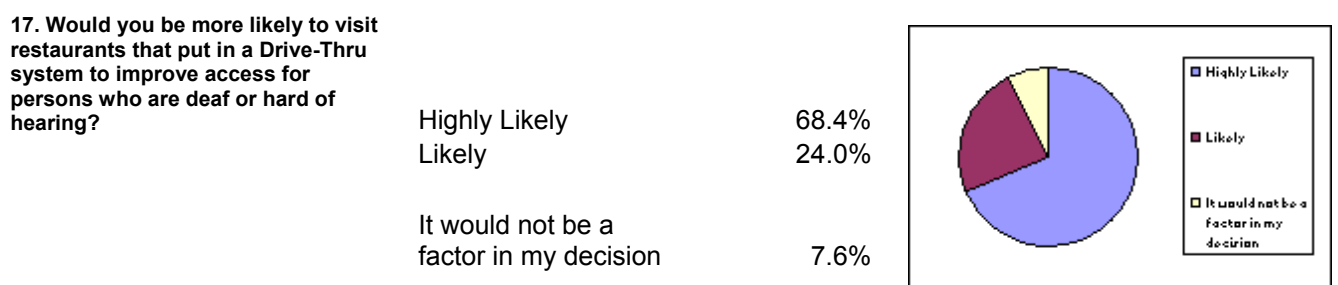
I do not like/agree with this approach

16.9%





*Propensity of customers to support restaurants with accessible Drive-Thru services:*





### *Additional Feedback*

#### **Sample comments of dissatisfaction:**

- “BIG TIME BAD ATTITUDE toward deaf people as if we are infected! We all are human beings and treat everyone fairly. Deaf people are no difference from hearing people; it’s just that they can’t hear that’s all!”
- “I pulled up to the drive through window and the manager of the establishment told me to leave because I didn’t order through the intercom”
- “They always make their facial expressions when I tell them that I’m hearing impaired. I hate it!”
- “People don’t deal with me.. People give me an attitude.. People expect me to be hearing as if every body on Earth is hearing..”
- “Fast Food places sometimes want to ignore customers like us!”
- “I have had people who work at the fast food restaurants get very impatient and not order exactly what we want. I often get a rude attitude from them and leave feeling insulted.”
- “Employee did not have paper and pen ready, and there were a lot of cars behind me, then it took 5 minutes to put in order at pick up window. It was embarrassing for me, and it probably pissed off a lot of car drivers behind me.”
- “I went into the restaurant but it was closed. The Drive-Thru was the only option for service during the late night. How can I communicate with that worker? I flopped and drove up to Drive-Thru and I wrote the note what I want to order the food. I did not care that there were cars behind me. I was very hungry...”
- “Waiters/waitresses panic when deaf people are at their restaurant.”
- “On the way to work I had to get out of my car waiting in the line to order. I watched the hearing people use the Drive-Thru... It is not FAIR!”
- “The employee asked me to park elsewhere and pick up the food inside while I had my son sleeping in my car seat, which meant I had to wake him up to get the food.”

#### **Some comment of satisfaction:**

- “...gave me a menu to point out what I wanted to order. I was surprised they were kind enough to provide excellent service for the deaf and hard of hearing”
- “...they allow their staff to come out and take order in person”

### *The Development of “Order Assist”*



Based on the survey results, as well as discussions with advocates and others, Inclusion Solutions has sought to create a dignified, affordable solution to the issue.

Our concerns, in developing this solution included:

- The solution must, first and foremost, be dignified for customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.
- It must be universally designed and usable for not only a wide-range of disabilities, but also for people with language barriers or other communication difficulties
- It must be simple to install and should be able to work in conjunction with other ordering systems without requiring a complete rebuilding of the ordering system
- It must give the customer flexibility in placing his/her order. For example, one should be able to order a hamburger with any combination of sauces or condiments available to the general population.
- It must have a concept that is simple enough so that customers and employees understand it.
- It must be affordable so that *any* fast-food restaurant, whether corporate or franchisee owned, can afford it easily

### *Electronic Menu Ordering System -- Analysis*

A few restaurants have installed electronic push-button ordering systems that the deaf can use without oral communication. We considered first the option of a widespread electronic menu system, as this was the system that was favored by the largest percentage of respondents. We rejected this concept for several reasons, including:

- Cost-prohibitive for many fast-food restaurants
- Difficult to integrate with existing systems
- A different system would be required for different restaurant chains
- Such an electronic system does not provide flexibility in ordering

At least one response to the survey specifically mentioned these concerns:

“I feel the electronic device option would be quite costly and time-consuming as many deaf persons are not good readers, spellers or typists and there would be much more confusion in ordering than a face-to-face speak/write or point option.”

### *Pushbutton Alert and Alternative Order System – Inspiration for Order Assist*

We then evaluated the second most popular option – a system with a call button allowing drivers to push it, and pull ahead, where they can place their order in an alternative manner (paper and pen, paper menu, picture menu, etc.) We found these to be well-received, affordable, dignified, and flexible. These systems have been installed in a few locations and have generated a positive response.

- “McDonald’s in Jacksonville Illinois is good because they have a button that informs the teller I am deaf and then lets me place my order at the pay window.”
- “[I like] a push button and tell them that I am deaf and cannot hear the speaker and wait for them to come to me at the parking stalls (Sonic Restaurant in Northern CA.)”
- “There was a button that you can push to letting them know a hearing impaired is driving by. It was located in Washington DC near Gallaudet University.”
- “I usually push the bell button to let the employees know I’m deaf and drive up to the pick-up window - as suggested by the employees - never had any problem with them (Taco Bell).”

#### **Many additional comments supported this concept:**

- “I would like to see a special button that I could push to tell them to send help or a sound that informs them that I can’t hear the speaker.”
- “I would like it if there a ‘Press button and wait a short time’ then say: I am deaf and cannot give you my order I will drive up to the window to place my order. Then I can drive up to window.”
- “I believe a ‘flag’ button would help to inform someone at window that someone is coming up to the window without ordering through the menu.”
- “Best Solution: Install a push button to let them know the Deaf Driver pulls up and will place an order.”
- “Maybe have some way to signal the order-taker at the speaker phone by pressing a signal button or something in order to alert the person that a paper order menu pad would be needed and would avoid misunderstandings and frustration on both parts.”
- “So the call button which makes me feel lobotomized but does give fair warning to the window workers not to have an attitude when we skip the menu board. And they would have the order forms ready.”
- “Write down order from menu speaking area hit the call button then give the order to the employee up front”
- “They can install push button to indicate them we’re deaf and install pocket of papers with menu and chained pencil.”

From these responses and this inspiration we are proud to introduce our “*OrderAssist*” solution for Drive-Thru restaurants. Please call us at 1-866-232-5487 (TTY: 312-444-1967) or email us at [phughes@inclusionsolutions.com](mailto:phughes@inclusionsolutions.com) for more information. Please feel free to share these results.

