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German hospitality businesses still struggle with basic digital ordering, survey finds

Kollex found one in two operators adopted a new tool in the past year, but disconnected systems keep raising costs.

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Many restaurants and beverage wholesalers in Germany are still dealing with basic digital problems even as the broader business debate moves toward artificial intelligence, according to a new survey by kollex published Wednesday.

The survey, which polled 600 hospitality operators, found that about half of respondents describe their own level of digitalization as only average. At the same time, it pointed to steady movement across the sector. Kollex said one in two businesses introduced at least one new digital tool during the past 12 months.

The central problem is not a lack of interest in technology, but the continued overlap between digital and analog work. Orders are still being placed through several channels at once, including apps, web shops, phone calls and email. In the beverage wholesale trade, messenger services and field sales staff are also still used as ordering channels. According to the survey, that mix creates extra manual work, breaks in the flow of information and a higher risk of mistakes.

In many companies, staff still have to transfer orders by hand into merchandise management or inventory systems after they come in through different channels. That adds time to a routine process and increases the chance of entry errors. For businesses that handle large volumes of beer, wine, spirits or soft drinks, fragmented ordering systems can also make day-to-day planning harder and may raise administrative costs across both hospitality venues and beverage distributors.

Kollex said the findings show a sector that has taken some important digital steps, but has not yet completed what it called the “last analog mile.” The survey suggests many operators are willing to modernize, but that the practical work of connecting tools and replacing manual routines remains unfinished.

Cost remains one of the biggest barriers. Respondents named lower costs, greater efficiency, time savings and fewer mistakes as their main goals for the coming years. But when asked about the obstacles to introducing new software, companies pointed first to investment costs and to the time needed to choose, install and learn new systems.

That tradeoff appears to be especially sharp for smaller businesses. The survey said digital tools may save time over the long term, but often require extra staff time and money in the short term. For small restaurants, bars and local operators, that can mean delaying new systems even when the benefits are clear.

The results come at a time when many companies are under pressure to modernize ordering, purchasing and stock control while also keeping labor and operating costs in check. In hospitality and beverage distribution, where orders often move quickly and product margins can be tight, repeated manual handling can slow processing and make coordination with suppliers more difficult.

Kollex Chief Executive Officer Stefan Kellner said the survey shows that basic digital infrastructure still needs work before more advanced tools can be used effectively. “Before AI can be used meaningfully, the digital foundation must first be in place,” Kellner said.

The survey points to a gap between industry ambition and daily practice. While businesses are adding new software, many still run core processes through a patchwork of old and new systems. That means the promise of digitalization is not yet fully reaching the ordering process, which remains one of the most important links between hospitality businesses and specialized beverage wholesalers.

According to the survey, further gains will depend less on adding isolated tools and more on creating continuous digital workflows that remove manual transfers and reduce system breaks. For operators in restaurants and for drinks distributors supplying them, that could shape how quickly companies improve order accuracy, labor efficiency and back-office control in the next few years.