How TouchBistro Helped Koyo Bring Fine Dining Sushi to Queens

Located in NYC's dynamic and diverse Queens borough, Koyo is a Japanese restaurant that's been serving a chef's tasting menu that changes with the seasons since 2016.

"'Koyo' means 'red maple' in Japanese, and a koyo signals the change of seasons," explains the restaurant's Chef Owner Jay Zheng. "We change our menu every three months according to the season: spring, summer, fall, and winter, so our menu is never the same."

Koyo's dynamic menu consists of a kaiseki meal served omakase style. Kaiseki is an haute-cuisine, multi-course Japanese dinner, while omakase "essentially translates to 'leave it up to the chef,'" Jay says. Koyo's current menu includes an amuse bouche, a grilled dish, soup, sushi, a rice dish, and a selection of seasonal sweets.

As the first omakase in Queens, and one of the area's first fine dining establishments, Koyo needed to introduce this elevated cuisine to the neighborhood and make it stick. With an iPad POS from TouchBistro, Koyo is able to course meals seamlessly, reduce clutter in the kitchen, and help diners spread the word with gift cards. This is the story of how Koyo found success with TouchBistro.

Challenge: Succeeding as a Fine Dining Restaurant in Queens

"The biggest challenge of opening this restaurant was opening in Queens. When we first opened, we were the very, very first omakase in Queens. Initially, we weren't sure if we were going to succeed over here," Jay says.

Queens is a melting pot of immigrant communities with rich gastronomic heritages, which are exemplified through the restaurants in Astoria, Koyo's neighborhood. Despite this extensive diversity of flavors, Astoria wasn't known for fine dining at the time.

Fine dining requires precise coursing, seamless communication between the front of the house (FOH) and the back of the house (BOH), the highest quality ingredients, and superb service that matches an elevated price point. Koyo needed a POS system that would facilitate an unforgettable dining experience for diners, whether they sat in the main dining room, chef's counter, or patio.

However, the legacy POS systems Jay used in previous restaurants were "dinosaurs" that ran on "big, clunky computers" that detracted from the fine dining experience. Koyo needed a POS system that not only facilitated the fine dining experience, but also looked great.

Solution: A POS System That Facilitates Hospitality & Elevates Service

Jay found what he was looking for in TouchBistro's POS system, which Koyo has been using since day one in 2016.

With Koyo **"being a fine dining location, every little detail has to be integrated perfectly. I realized for fine dining, TouchBistro works a lot better [than previous systems I've used],"** Jay says.

TouchBistro's restaurant management system comes with everything Jay and his team need to bring the fine dining experience to life, including tableside ordering, powerful reporting, and a kitchen display system.

With TouchBistro's digital Kitchen Display System, Koyo doesn't need to print paper tickets to keep track of orders, which helps the restaurant protect the environment.

"We're very proud to be environmentally friendly, especially being a Japanese restaurant. We're very conscious about food waste and paper waste," Jay says.

Koyo also uses TouchBistro Gift Cards, in both physical and digital formats.

"We started a gift card system because we had quite a lot of demand for it. A lot of guests come here for special occasions so they like to buy gift cards for birthdays or celebrations. [Gift cards are] an easy way for one customer who enjoys our restaurant to give a gift to somebody else," Jay says.

Results: Seamless Operations...

Thanks to TouchBistro, Koyo is able to deliver the fine dining experience customers have come to expect from the restaurant.

Koyo's servers have meaningful – rather than purely transactional – interactions with guests. And thanks to tableside ordering on TouchBistro's iPad-based POS system, FOH staff can send orders to the kitchen faster and spend more time with diners.

"TouchBistro has helped us in customer experience by cutting down the amount of time the server spends on a computer, and the amount of time that chef needs to take to look at all the tickets because everything's there at a glance," Jay says.

Making sure dishes reach guests at the perfect time is critical in fine dining and for a multi-course meal. Koyo's kitchen staff, led by Chef Darren De Jesus, can improve kitchen efficiency and time courses perfectly thanks to digital order tickets, which note how long an order has been open.

"They help us get all our food out in a timely manner, maintain our standards, and ensure food reaches the customers as we want it," Darren says.

Speaking of standards, presentation is everything when it comes to a kaiseki-style meal. Digital tickets eliminate distractions from the dining experience.

"We have an open kitchen and we don't have paper tickets flying everywhere, [which is helpful] for the amount of covers we do and how small our kitchen is. TouchBistro is clutter free and saves us room," Darren says.

This simplicity carries through to making changes in the POS. Whenever Darren needs to update Koyo's seasonal menu or add daily specials, he can do so in just a few taps.

"As a chef, I like TouchBistro because we can add new menu items on the fly or even 86 something," he explains.

... and Informed Decision-Making

In the fast-paced and competitive restaurant industry, each wrong decision costs precious time and money, which are usually scarce resources. Fortunately, Jay and his team can reach the right business decision faster with data from TouchBistro POS.

Through cloud-based reporting features, **"it's very easy to control our food costs, labor costs, and overall restaurant costs, which is great,"** he says.

Beyond day-to-day operations, Jay can focus on building his restaurant empire while seeing how Koyo is doing from anywhere.

"I'm expanding my business to Manhattan so sometimes I'm not in the restaurant to close out, but at a glance through TouchBistro's cloud reporting system, I can see how many sales we did, how many covers we did, and what the average check per guest is," he says.

Raising the Bar

If there's anything Jay has learned from being a third-generation restaurateur, it's that "having the proper technology set up in a restaurant is very important as it makes everything a lot more seamless and helps us save a lot on overhead costs," he says. **"TouchBistro is a perfect system for us because it helps the restaurant be efficient."**

With TouchBistro, Koyo's team can continue to innovate, expand, and raise standards for their guests.

"We hope as our customers leave Koyo they have higher expectations of what a Japanese restaurant is," Chef Darren says.

Six years since opening, Koyo has established itself as a culinary destination, attracting diners from every NYC borough and beyond.