

# That muffled voice on the other side of the McDonald's drive-thru could be replaced by a robot

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McDonald's on Tuesday announced plans to acquire a voice technology company to help speed up ordering at the drive thru, the latest in a series

of high-tech investments by the fast-food chain as it strives to improve wait times and draw customers to its restaurants.

McDonald's declined to disclose the terms of its agreement to buy Mountain View, Calif.-based Apprente, which it described as an early-stage leader in "voice-based platforms for complex, multilingual, multi-accent and multi-item conversational ordering."

The [voice-recognition technology](#) "is expected to allow for faster, simpler and more accurate order taking at the Drive Thru with future potential to incorporate into [mobile ordering](#) and kiosks," the company said in a news release.

Apprente, founded in 2017, also will be the founding member of a new Silicon Valley-based group within McDonald's called McD Tech Labs, which over time will hire additional engineers and data scientists to meet future business needs.

Automating the ordering process is among several steps McDonald's is taking to improve wait times at the drive-thru, which had increased for the past several years as the chain added more complex items to the menu.

The company has removed its signature craft sandwiches and streamlined its late-night and all-day breakfast menus, helping to cut drive-thru service times by 15 seconds in June compared with a year ago, CEO Steve Easterbrook said during the second-quarter earnings call in July.

The Apprente deal also marks McDonald's latest foray into the tech sector. The [fast food](#) giant in April paid \$300 million to acquire Dynamic Yield, whose technology personalizes digital menu displays at drive-thru based on time of day, weather, trending menu items and

restaurant traffic, and suggests additional items for customers to purchase. Now deployed in 8,000 U.S. restaurants, the technology has increased how much customers spend per order, Easterbrook said in the second-quarter conference call.

The company also invested in mobile app vendor Plexure to improve its global mobile app.

McDonald's has been grappling with how to innovate amid stiff competition from other fast food and fast casual chains and rein in swelling labor costs. Last quarter, it posted a 6.5% gain in same-store sales, the best improvement in seven years, but it continues to struggle to get people in its doors.

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