

Own delivery vs app commissions: myth vs financial reality

 By **Diego F. Parra** · Updated 2026-07-17 · Costing & Finance

QUICK VERDICT

The cost of own delivery vs app commissions is not settled by picking the cheaper channel, but the one that leaves more contribution margin per order after subtracting the FULL real cost. Apps charge 15% to 30% of the ticket, yet in-house delivery shifts that expense into driver payroll, insurance, fuel and CapEx that almost nobody accounts for. **Diego F. Parra's verdict:** it is not own or apps, it is a two-channel architecture where apps buy customer acquisition and the owned channel recaptures the repeat buyer. Whoever measures the real cost per order—not the theoretical one—and protects the break-even wins; whoever decides on instinct burns cash flow.

 **Executive Brief** Strategic brief · CEOs, boards & investors · 12 min read · 2026-07-17

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY OF MASTERRESTAURANT® — EXCLUSIVE FOR SECTOR LEADERS

This brief is for the owner already selling through Uber Eats, DiDi Food, Rappi or PedidosYa who suspects the commission is eating the profit but has not modeled what an in-house delivery operation would actually cost. The public debate is binary and emotional —'apps are a rip-off' vs 'without apps I don't sell'— and that false dichotomy costs money. Diego F. Parra and the Masterrestaurant methodology treat the problem as a unit-economics decision: each channel is a business unit with its own food cost, logistics cost and contribution margin.

The mistake seen again and again is comparing the theoretical cost (the commission on the contract) against an idealized in-house delivery that ignores insurance, motorbike maintenance, driver turnover and the upfront CapEx. Real cost almost never matches the theoretical one. This document delivers the decision architecture: when apps are legitimate paid acquisition, when the owned channel protects EBITDA, and how to structure both without leaking capital or breaking the operation's break-even.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Side-by-side comparison

	OWN DELIVERY	APP COMMISSIONS
Cost per order on ticket	✗ 18%–25% (payroll + bike + insurance + fuel)	✓ 15%–30% platform commission

	OWN DELIVERY	APP COMMISSIONS
Pressure on prime cost (COGS+labor)	✗ Raises labor; target ≤60% of sales (Toast)	✓ Doesn't touch prime cost; hits gross margin
Upfront investment (CapEx)	✗ High: fleet, app/web, integration	✓ Zero CapEx; 100% variable OpEx
Customer data ownership	✗ Full (own base, repeat purchase)	✓ None; the customer belongs to the platform
New-acquisition reach	✗ Limited to own traffic	✓ Millions of marketplace users
Territory risk and cash flow	✗ Fixed cost even with no orders	✓ Variable: no sale, no commission

1. Which channel yields the most contribution margin per order, not the lowest fee?

The right decision is not choosing the cheapest channel but the one that leaves the most contribution margin per order after subtracting ALL real cost.

Apps charge 15% to 30% of the ticket; on a \$250 MXN order, a 25% fee takes \$62.50 before you touch profit. Diego F. Parra and the Masterrestaurant methodology treat each channel as a business unit with its own food cost, logistics cost and margin. The mistake seen again and again is comparing the contract fee against an idealized in-house delivery. With the sector's target prime cost at 55-65% of sales (Toast), a channel that raises labor without raising the ticket breaks that goal. The National Restaurant Association reports 98% of operators saw labor costs rise in 2024: building your own delivery adds exactly that pressure to the wrong side of the income statement. App cost is 100% variable —no sale, no charge—; in-house delivery mixes high CapEx with fixed payroll that runs even if not a single order comes in.

2. App cost is pure OpEx; in-house mixes CapEx with fixed payroll

A scooter, its insurance and the delivery gear are sunk investment before the first dispatch; the average restaurant insurance premium runs about \$1,359 a year, roughly \$113 a month (MoneyGeek, 2025), and that is just one line. With the restaurant industry representing 12.2% of Mexico's economic units (INEGI-CANIRAC, 2024), most are small operations with no cushion to absorb a slow month of courier payroll. The financial rule is simple: if your delivery volume is irregular, the app's variable cost protects your cash in bad weeks; if your volume is high and steady, fixed payroll dilutes per order and starts beating the commission. The crossover point is set by your order count, not by emotion. Apps and in-house delivery chase different financial goals, they are not substitutes: apps buy acquisition and reach, the owned channel buys repeat business and ownership of customer data. Paying a 25% fee on a new customer who never returns is expensive acquisition; paying that same 25% on a customer who already buys weekly is giving away margin you could capture yourself.

3. Apps buy acquisition; the owned channel buys repeat business and the data

With Mexico's lodging and food-service GDP at \$838,530 million MXN in Q3 2025, growing 4.85% year over year (Data México, Secretaría de Economía), the market rewards those who control their customer base, not those who rent it. The Masterrestaurant consultant read is to treat app fees as customer-acquisition marketing budget: acceptable for new customers, indefensible for repeat orders. The mature strategy uses the app to win the customer and the owned channel —WhatsApp, web, phone— to retain them with data the apps never hand over. The theoretical cost —the fee in the contract— rarely equals the real cost per order of in-house delivery

once you add insurance, fuel, turnover and delivery waste. A badly packed order arriving cold is delivery waste as real as kitchen loss: the average restaurant already wastes between 4% and 10% of what it buys (The Restaurant HQ, 2025), and in-house delivery adds a layer of loss from in-transit damage.

4. The theoretical contract cost rarely equals the real cost per order

Add courier turnover in a sector where 98% of operators reported rising labor costs in 2024 (National Restaurant Association): every new rider costs to recruit, train and equip. The classic error is modeling in-house delivery with today's fuel cost and zero turnover. The real cost per order includes the scooter down for maintenance, the returned order and the shift paid without dispatches. Model the worst month, not the best. In-house delivery shifts the commission expense to the labor line and pressures prime cost; apps leave it out of prime cost but bite gross margin per order. This is the accounting difference almost no one models. App fees hit gross margin but never touch payroll; in-house delivery raises labor, and with the sector's target prime cost at 55% to 65% of sales —healthy goal $\leq 60\%$ (Toast)— a courier team can push you over the ceiling without the ticket rising.

5. In-house delivery shifts the cost to labor and pressures prime cost

In a market where the peak of restaurant price inflation hit 8.8% in March 2023 (National Restaurant Association), margin is already compressed. The right question is not 'how much fee do I pay' but 'where do I want that cost to live': if your prime cost has slack, absorbing delivery labor is viable; if it already brushes 65%, the app's variable fee is the lesser evil that protects your structure. In-house delivery wins when your volume is high and steady and your prime cost has slack to absorb fixed labor; the app wins when your volume is irregular or your prime cost already brushes 65%. The Masterrestaurant operating rule is not to pick one or the other but to structure both: the app as a paid-acquisition channel for new customers and the owned channel for profitable repeat orders. Calculate your crossover point by dividing the monthly fixed cost of in-house delivery by the fee savings per order; that result is how many orders you need for the owned channel to win.

6. When does each channel win, based on your volume and prime cost?

With the median sale price of a small restaurant at \$773,000 in 2025, up 24% from 2021 (BizBuySell), protecting EBITDA and ownership of customer data directly raises the value of your business.

This is cold unit economics: model both channels, measure real contribution margin and let the number —not the noise— choose. The app cost is 100% variable (pure OpEx); in-house delivery mixes high CapEx with fixed payroll cost that runs even when not a single order comes in. Apps buy acquisition and reach; the owned channel buys repeat purchase and data ownership —they are different financial objectives, not substitutes. The theoretical cost (contract commission) almost never equals the real cost per order of in-house delivery once insurance, fuel, turnover and delivery waste are added. In-house delivery shifts the commission expense into the labor line and pressures prime cost; apps leave it out of prime cost but bite the gross margin per order.

POINT BY POINT

Head to head: where each channel wins

COST STRUCTURE

A · OWN DELIVERY High CapEx + fixed payroll cost running with no orders

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Zero CapEx, 100% variable OpEx tied to the sale

Verdict: Apps win on cash-flow flexibility; own wins when volume amortizes CapEx in <12 months.

CUSTOMER OWNERSHIP

A · OWN DELIVERY Own base: repeat purchase, reactivation and menu engineering

B · MASTERRESTAURANT The customer belongs to the platform, not the restaurant

Verdict: The owned channel wins the strategic asset: no customer data, no repeat purchase, no compounded EBITDA.

ACQUISITION REACH

A · OWN DELIVERY Limited to the restaurant's own traffic

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Millions of active marketplace users

Verdict: Apps win acquisition: paying commission for a new customer is performance marketing, not a rip-off.

TERRITORY RISK

A · OWN DELIVERY Fixed cost even if an area generates no volume

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Demand test with no investment before expanding

Verdict: Apps win as a territory probe; own only enters an already-validated area.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

When own delivery wins REPEAT CHANNEL

- ✗ When you already have a base of repeat customers who would order direct if you gave them the channel.
- ✗ When daily volume amortizes the fleet and CapEx in under 12 months.
- ✗ When the contribution margin of the owned order beats the app order after subtracting ALL the real logistics cost.
- ✗ When you want to own the customer data for reactivation and menu engineering.

When apps win MASTERRESTAURANT

- ✓ When you need new-customer acquisition your own traffic cannot reach.
- ✓ When you have no CapEx or operation to sustain an in-house fleet without breaking break-even.
- ✓ When your volume is irregular and you prefer a 100% variable cost (no sale, no commission).
- ✓ When entering a new area and using the marketplace as a territory test before investing.

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THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

Indicators that frame the decision

98%

operators reporting higher labor costs
(2024): pressures in-house delivery

60%

prime cost target (COGS+labor) on sales:
ceiling in-house delivery must not break

8.8%

peak restaurant menu-price inflation
(March 2023): erodes margin per order

65%

upper recommended prime cost ceiling on
sales: red flag for an unprofitable channel

773
K USD

median sale price of a small restaurant (2025),
+24% vs 2021: value is set by EBITDA per channel

10%

upper bound of inventory an average restaurant wastes: delivery waste worsens delivery food cost

VISUALIZATION

The numbers, visualized

operators reporting higher labor costs (2024): pressures in-house delivery



prime cost target (COGS+labor) on sales: ceiling in-house delivery must not break



peak restaurant menu-price inflation (March 2023): erodes margin per order



upper recommended prime cost ceiling on sales: red flag for an unprofitable channel



median sale price of a small restaurant (2025), +24% vs 2021: value is set by EBITDA per channel



upper bound of inventory an average restaurant wastes: delivery waste worsens delivery food cost



Sources: [National Restaurant Association 2024](#) · [Toast 2025](#) · [National Restaurant Association 2023](#) · [Restaurant365](#) / [Toast](#) · [BizBuySell 2025](#)

Chart by [masterrestaurant.com](#)

REAL CASE

"They ran 220 daily orders through apps and swore the 27% commission was killing them. We modeled the real cost: building an in-house fleet cost them 24% of the ticket once payroll, insurance and bikes were added, and it wrecked their cash flow in slow months. The play wasn't leaving the apps, it was moving the repeat customer—the 40% already reordering—to an owned repeat channel and keeping apps ONLY for new acquisition. In six months blended contribution margin rose without touching break-even."

— Diego F. Parra, Masterrestaurant — delivery channel architecture audit

HOW TO APPLY IT IN YOUR RESTAURANT

Strategic roadmap in 3 phases

1 Phase 1 — Due diligence on real cost per channel (weeks 1-3)

Deliverable: a scorecard separating the real cost per order of apps (commission + service fee + delivery waste) from the projected real cost of in-house delivery (payroll, bike, insurance, fuel, amortized CapEx). Success metric: contribution margin per order computed for BOTH channels with food cost $\leq 32\%$ per dish. Without this number, any decision is instinct.

2 Phase 2 — Two-channel architecture (weeks 4-8)

Deliverable: apps positioned as paid acquisition of new customers and an owned channel (WhatsApp, web or app) activated for the repeat customer, with delivery-specific menu engineering (dishes that travel well and protect margin). Success metric: $\geq 25\%$ of repeat orders migrated to the owned channel without a drop in total volume.

3 Phase 3 — Break-even hardening (weeks 9-12)

Deliverable: a cash-flow model that guarantees the fixed cost of in-house delivery does not break break-even in the lowest-sales months, with a minimum volume threshold to sustain the fleet. Success metric: blended prime cost $\leq 60\%$ of sales and zero months with negative cash flow attributable to the owned channel.

FAQ

Owner's frequently asked questions

Is in-house delivery cheaper than paying app commissions?

Not necessarily. The real cost of in-house delivery (payroll, insurance, fuel, bike and amortized CapEx) usually lands between 18% and 25% of the ticket, very close to app commissions (15%-30%). The cheap channel is the one with the higher contribution margin per order after subtracting ALL the real cost, not the theoretical one.

Should I leave the apps if the commission is 30%?

Leaving entirely rarely pays. Apps buy acquisition of new customers your own traffic cannot reach. The profitable play is to keep apps for acquisition and move the repeat customer to an owned repeat channel, protecting prime cost (target $\leq 60\%$ of sales, per Toast) and break-even.

How much CapEx do I need to launch in-house delivery?

It depends on volume, but the CapEx (fleet, web/app integration, initial insurance) is only justified if daily volume amortizes it in under 12 months. With apps CapEx is zero: it is 100% variable OpEx. If your volume is irregular, the fixed cost of in-house delivery can break your cash flow in slow months.

How do I keep delivery from destroying my food cost?

With delivery-specific menu engineering: dishes that travel well, control delivery waste (up to 10% of inventory is wasted, per The Restaurant HQ 2025) and keep food cost ≤32% per dish. Packaging and logistics are part of the dish cost in the delivery channel, not an invisible extra.

DATA & SOURCES

Sector data 2026 (official sources)

Verifiable industry benchmarks from official, non-commercial sources (government, industry associations, market research) - not competitors.

Metric	Benchmark 2026	Source
Food cost servicio limitado (mediana)	32,4% de las ventas en 2024	National Restaurant Association, Restaurant Operations Data Abstract 2025
Food cost servicio completo (mediana)	32,0% de las ventas en 2024	National Restaurant Association, Restaurant Operations Data Abstract 2025
Food cost servicio completo con ventas bajo \$2M	33,7% de las ventas en 2024 (vs 31,0% en los de \$2M+)	National Restaurant Association, Restaurant Operations Data Abstract 2025
Costo laboral servicio completo (sueldos+beneficios, mediana)	36,5% de las ventas en 2024	National Restaurant Association, Restaurant Operations Data Abstract 2025
Costo laboral servicio limitado (sueldos+beneficios, mediana)	31,7% de las ventas en 2024	National Restaurant Association, Restaurant Operations Data Abstract 2025
Nómina como parte del gasto del restaurante	Más del 25% de los gastos en 2024, arriba del 23% en 2021	Toast / Restaurant Dive 2024