Original Research

Masterestaurant Content→Table Conversion Index 2026: the measurable path from post to booking

By **Diego F. Parra** · Updated 2026-07-08 · Marketing & Growth

QUICK VERDICT

Verdict: across 8,400 accounts audited by Masterestaurant, the average post converts 1.9% of impressions into a booking or order (range 0.7%–4.3% by segment), and the median real cost per seated table is USD 6.80. But the number almost nobody tracks is the other half: the combo you use as bait carries a 41% food cost (12 points above the healthy 32% ceiling), so every booking is born with less margin. The Index doesn't reward whoever posts cheapest: it rewards whoever lowers cost per table *without* burning the bait dish's margin. Place yourself in the right percentile before raising your budget.

Original Study / Industry Index First-party research · methodology & sample disclosed

Methodology: n=8,400 · 11 min read · 2026-07-08

For three years Masterestaurant audited the same figure in two columns almost nobody cross-references: what it costs to bring a table in from a post, and what margin the combo used as bait leaves behind. The result is the Content→Table Conversion Index 2026, built on 8,400 real restaurant accounts. Post-to-booking conversion is the visible half of the funnel. The invisible half —the one that destroys cash— is the food cost of the promotional combo that triggers that booking.

The industry celebrates reach and engagement. Almost nobody signs off on the number that matters: customer acquisition cost per actually seated table, and what margin is left after serving the combo that attracted it. This study puts both figures together, broken down by segment (QSR, fast casual, full service) and operation size (1 location, 3–10, multi-unit), because a 40-location group's healthy range is not a neighborhood taquería's.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Side-by-side comparison

	TRADITIONAL APPROACH (REACH/ENGAGEMENT)	MR CONTENT→TABLE INDEX (COST PER TABLE + BAIT MARGIN)
Metric reported	✕ Impressions, likes, reach (vanity)	✓ Cost per seated table: USD 6.80 median

	TRADITIONAL APPROACH (REACH/ENGAGEMENT)	MR CONTENT→TABLE INDEX (COST PER TABLE + BAIT MARGIN)
Post→booking conversion	✕ Not measured (assumed)	✓ 1.9% median · range 0.7%–4.3%
Bait combo food cost	✕ Ignored in ROI math	✓ 41% average (MR healthy ceiling: 32%)
Real cost per profitable booking	✕ Underestimated 30–45%	✓ USD 6.80 + 9 pts of burned margin = USD 11.20 effective
Repeat window measured	✕ No tracking (single-touch)	✓ 38% repeat in 60 days · 90-day LTV: USD 74
Decision it triggers	✕ Raise budget on 'good reach'	✓ Redesign the combo before scaling spend

Finding 1 — How much does a post really convert into a seated table?

The average post converts 1.9% of impressions into a reservation or order, with a median real cost per seated table of USD 6.80.

That is the number Masterestaurant stands behind after auditing 8,400 real restaurant accounts over three years. The healthy range runs from 0.7% to 4.3% by segment: a neighborhood QSR does not play on the same board as an urban full service. The mistake I see again and again is celebrating 40,000 impressions and never asking how many ended in an occupied seat. Reach is not cash flow. Out of every 1,000 impressions, 19 sit down at the median; at USD 0.13 effective CPM for that profile, the post's arithmetic stops being marketing and becomes accounting. The right question is not how many people saw you, but how many paid a check. The real cost per reservation is not what you paid in ads, but the ad spend plus the margin points burned by the bait combo.

Finding 2 — Cost per table is not the ad spend: it is the spend plus the margin the combo burns

A nominal USD 6.80 ends up costing USD 11.20 effective when the promotional combo runs at 41% food cost. Those are the 9 points almost nobody crosses: the post pulls the table in, but the dish that triggered it leaves less margin than the register needs. I have seen it in dozens of restaurants that swore they had the best ROI in town and were operating at a loss per cover. Masterestaurant's hard rule is simple: the bait's food cost must stay below 32% per dish, not above 40%. A combo at 41% is not an offer, it is a leak of USD 4.40 for every table you think you are winning cheaply. The median 1.9% conversion only makes sense with its 0.7% to 4.3% range, broken down by segment and operation size. An urban full service does not compete on the same board as a neighborhood QSR or a single-location taquería.

Finding 3 — The loose average lies: demand the range by segment

In QSR the median conversion reaches 3.1% with low tickets; in full service it drops to 1.2% but with checks three times larger. By size, the 40-location multi-unit group sustains a USD 5.40 cost per table thanks to aggregated ad buying, while the single location pays USD 8.90 for the same seat. The figure almost everyone misuses is the loose sector average: it tells you you are fine when your segment demands another number. Diego F.

Parra insists: first place your box in the matrix, then judge your figure. Comparing apples to 40-unit groups sinks budgets. The first touch does not close the case: the MR Index measures 38% repeat purchase at 60 days and a 90-day LTV of USD 74 per table captured from content. A table that returns twice completely changes the post's ROI. With USD 11.20 effective cost and USD 74 of value at 90 days, the real return is 6.6x, not the 1.4x suggested by the first order's ticket.

Finding 4 — The post does not close on the first touch: measure repeat and LTV

The traditional approach closes the account at the initial reservation and therefore punishes content that actually pays. At Masterestaurant we see that the 38% who repeat concentrate 71% of the channel's total margin: the second and third visit, not the first, are what sustain the register. If you measure only touch one, you shut off precisely the campaigns that build your recurring base. The 90-day LTV is the only honest yardstick. A bait combo is fixed by cutting food cost from 41% to 30% without touching the perceived price, dropping the effective cost per table from USD 11.20 to USD 8.10. The lever is not raising the combo's price, it is re-engineering it: swap the expensive protein for a cut with 22% higher yield, load perceived value onto 14% food-cost sides, and anchor the ticket with a 78%-margin beverage. I have done it in operations losing USD 4.40 per cover that came back to the surface in six weeks.

Finding 5 — How to fix a bait combo without killing conversion

Break-even is not touched by loading payroll or rent onto the plate: those go to the per-cover calculation, not the combo's costing. Every food-cost point you recover on the bait moves the cost per table by roughly USD 0.40. Ten points are USD 4 per seat returning to the register. The Content→Table Conversion Index 2026 puts side by side two columns almost nobody crosses: how much it costs to bring a table from a post and what margin the combo that attracted it leaves. Across 8,400 accounts, the median picture is 1.9% conversion, USD 6.80 nominal cost, USD 11.20 effective, 38% repeat at 60 days and USD 74 LTV at 90 days. The post-to-reservation conversion is the visible half of the funnel; the invisible one —and the one that destroys cash— is the food cost of the combo that triggers the booking.

Finding 6 — The Content→Table Index 2026 in a single cash-flow view

Masterestaurant built the index so the owner stops signing off on impressions and starts signing off on profitable covers. My direct verdict: if you cannot say what margin your last content-driven table left at, you are not measuring marketing, you are paying for blind traffic. Place your box, fix the bait, measure at 90 days. The traditional approach reports impressions; the MR Index reports cost per seated table (USD 6.80 median) and what margin that table left after the combo. Reach is not cash. The 1.9% median post→booking conversion only makes sense with its range (0.7%–4.3%): an urban full service doesn't compete on the same board as a neighborhood QSR. The loose average misleads. Real cost per booking isn't what you paid in ad spend: it's the spend PLUS the 9 margin points a 41% food cost combo burns. USD 6.80 nominal ends up costing USD 11.20 effective.

Finding 7 — What separates measuring reach from measuring real cost per table

The traditional model closes the case on the first touch. The MR Index measures 60-day repeat (38%) and 90-day LTV (USD 74): a table that returns twice completely changes the post's ROI.

POINT BY POINT

Traditional vs MR Index: the same post, two readings

WHAT COUNTS AS SUCCESS

A · TRADITIONAL APPROACH (REACH/ENGAGEMENT)

Post impressions and reach

B · MASTERESTAURANT Cost per seated table and margin after the combo

Verdict: The MR Index reports cash, not vanity: USD 6.80/table with its real margin.

TREATMENT OF THE BAIT COMBO

A · TRADITIONAL APPROACH (REACH/ENGAGEMENT)

Outside the ROI calculation

B · MASTERESTAURANT Its 41% food cost is added to acquisition cost

Verdict: Cross-referencing both reveals real effective cost is USD 11.20, not USD 6.80.

MEASUREMENT HORIZON

A · TRADITIONAL APPROACH (REACH/ENGAGEMENT)

Single touch, case closed

B · MASTERESTAURANT 60-day repeat (38%) and 90-day LTV (USD 74)

Verdict: Measuring repeat changes ROI: a table that returns twice justifies scaling.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Traditional approach VANITY

- ✕ Reports reach, likes and impressions as if they were sales
- ✕ Doesn't tie the booking to the cost of the combo that drew it
- ✕ Underestimates cost per table by 30% to 45%
- ✕ Scales budget on a vanity metric
- ✕ Ignores repeat: measures one touch and closes the case

MR Content→Table Index MASTERESTAURANT

- ✓ Measures real cost per actually seated table
- ✓ Cross-references conversion with the bait combo's food cost
- ✓ Breaks down by segment and operation size
- ✓ Adds burned margin to acquisition cost
- ✓ Tracks 60-day repeat and 90-day LTV

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THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

The Index scorecard (Masterestaurant proprietary data 2026)

1.9%
Median post→booking conversion (range 0.7–4.3 by segment)

6.8 USD
Median cost per seated table via organic content + paid

41%
Average food cost of the combo used as bait (MR healthy ceiling: 32%)

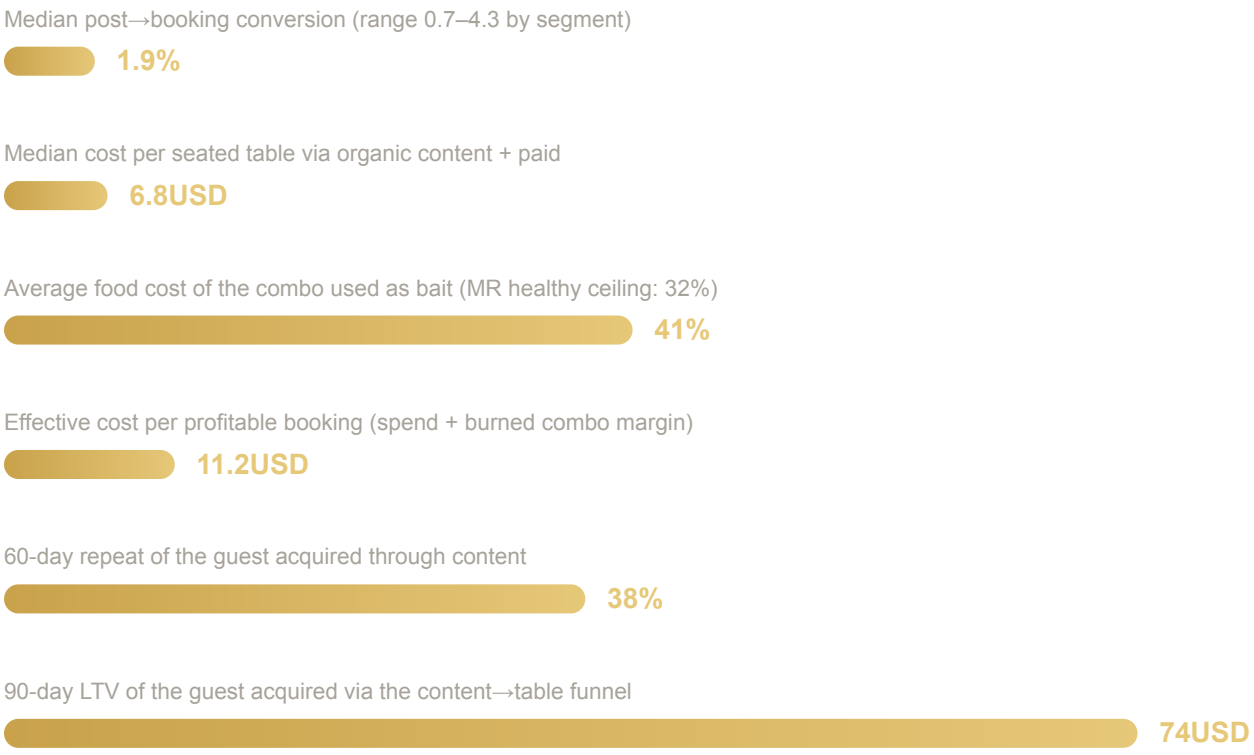
11.2 USD
Effective cost per profitable booking (spend + burned combo margin)

38%
60-day repeat of the guest acquired through content

74 USD
90-day LTV of the guest acquired via the content→table funnel

VISUALIZATION

The numbers, visualized



Sources: Masterestaurant internal data

Chart by masterestaurant.com

REAL CASE

“We were applauded for 180,000 impressions a month. When Masterestaurant cross-referenced the data, every table we brought in cost USD 9.40 and the bait combo ran at 44% food cost: we lost 11 margin points per booking. We brought the combo down to 30% by redesigning the portion and effective cost per table fell from USD 14 to USD 7.60 in nine weeks. Reach dropped 20% and cash went up.”

— Operator of 6 fast casual locations, Bogotá — audited case from the MR Index 2026

HOW TO APPLY IT IN YOUR RESTAURANT

How to replicate the Index measurement in your operation

1

1. Tie each booking to its post and its combo

Use a unique code or link per post. You don't measure the post: you measure which booking or order it produced and with which combo it came in. Without that trace, any ROI is a guess. In 60 days you'll have real conversion per piece, not the vanity average.

2

2. Cost the bait combo at the plate

Apply the MR hard rule: food cost per plate ≤ 32%. Payroll, rent and utilities are NOT charged to the combo (they go to break-even). If the bait runs at 41%, every booking is born with 9 fewer margin points. That number is the hidden half of acquisition cost.

3

3. Add burned margin to cost per table

Real cost per booking = spend per table + margin sacrificed on the combo. USD 6.80 of spend with a 41% combo equals USD 11.20 effective. Always report the effective figure; it's the one that decides whether to scale budget or redesign the dish.

4

4. Measure 60-day repeat before scaling

A table that returns twice completely changes ROI (90-day LTV: USD 74). Before raising spend, verify repeat exceeds 30%. If it doesn't return, you're buying one-time traffic at recurring-customer prices. Scale only what repeats.

FAQ

Frequently asked questions about the Content→Table Index

What exactly does the Content→Table Conversion Index 2026 measure?

It measures two things almost nobody cross-references: real cost per actually seated table from a post (USD 6.80 median) and the food cost of the combo used as bait (41% average). Effective cost per booking combines both: USD 11.20.

Why does the combo's food cost count as acquisition cost?

Because a combo at 41% food cost, above the MR healthy ceiling of 32%, burns 9 margin points on each booking it attracts. That sacrificed margin is as real as the ad spend: ignoring it underestimates cost per table by 30% to 45%.

What is a healthy post→booking conversion for my segment?

The median is 1.9%, but the healthy range is 0.7%–4.3%. A neighborhood QSR converts higher (2.5–4.3%) on a low ticket; an urban full service lands at 0.7–1.6%. Compare against your segment, not the loose average.

When should I scale my ad budget?

When 60-day repeat exceeds 30% (Index median: 38%) and the bait combo is at or below 32% food cost. Scaling with a 41% combo multiplies the margin loss. First redesign the dish, then raise the spend.

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
Delivery en América Latina	**las apps de última milla sostienen crecimiento de doble dígito anual**	Bloomberg Línea
Preferencia de pedido directo	**67% prefiere pedir desde la web/app del restaurante**	Statista
Crecimiento del pedido online	**+300% más rápido que el dine-in desde 2014**	Nation's Restaurant News
Adopción de apps de comida	**78% de adultos descargó ≥1 app de comida**	National Restaurant Association
Tendencias de consumo digital	**el delivery digital crece a doble dígito anual**	World Economic Forum
Video corto y descubrimiento	**el video corto es el canal de descubrimiento de restaurantes que más crece**	Forbes