Executive Briefs

Cut delivery commissions: the traditional method negotiates the rate, the *Masterestaurant* method changes where the order comes from

 By **Diego F. Parra** · Updated 2026-08-29 · Dark Kitchens & Foodtech

QUICK VERDICT

You do not cut delivery commissions by negotiating with the aggregator; you cut them by moving 18% to 30% of volume into an owned channel until the aggregator stops owning your customer. Fighting for one percentage point across all volume moves contribution margin by decimals. Moving a third of your orders into a channel where you control ticket, customer data and repeat frequency rewrites your unit economics. The aggregator stays on the table — with Uber Eats gross bookings at USD 74.6 billion in 2024 according to Statista (2024), nobody switches it off — but it gets reclassified from sales channel to paid acquisition, and that accounting move is what saves EBITDA.

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The delivery order arrives, the POS books the full sale, and weeks later the P&L reveals that channel contribution margin sits at roughly half of dining-room margin. That gap is where the problem starts.

The boardroom conversation I keep hearing is the wrong one: how far can we negotiate the rate. The question that moves money is different — what share of our digital volume originates in an asset we own. Global online food delivery reaches USD 1.51 trillion in 2026 according to Statista (2026), growing at a 6.24% CAGR through 2031 per the same source, so the channel is not going anywhere. Your margin, on the other hand, can leave quietly, one point per quarter.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Side-by-side comparison

	TRADITIONAL METHOD (NEGOTIATE THE RATE)	MASTERESTAURANT METHOD (CHANNEL ARCHITECTURE)
Effective commission on gross digital sales	✕ 25-30% of ticket on standard marketplace terms, with the rate as the only negotiable variable	✓ Blended effective commission under 20% once 25% of volume runs through an owned channel at 0% platform commission
Contribution margin per digital order	✕ Calculated on gross sales rather than net of commission, so leadership sees profit where there is leakage	✓ Calculated order by order with commission inside channel prime cost and food cost held below 32%
Customer data ownership	✕ None: name, phone and frequency stay with the platform; the restaurant rents the relationship	✓ Owned database, benchmarked against the roughly 74,000 restaurants competing on DiDi Food Mexico according to DiDi Food (2024)
Origin of the digital order	✕ Marketplace only; visibility depends on the aggregator algorithm and in-app paid placement	✓ Blend of marketplace, local search on Google Maps, an optimized listing and direct ordering from the owned site
Acquisition cost of a repeat customer	✕ Full commission paid on every reorder, indefinitely, even when the customer already knows the brand	✓ Paid once at acquisition; repeat purchase migrates to the owned channel where marginal cost trends to zero
Channel menu engineering	✕ Dining-room menu cloned to the app, low-margin items that travel badly destroying contribution	✓ Delivery-specific menu built on contribution margin and transport resilience
Territory risk and dependency	✕ One aggregator concentrates volume; an algorithm or rate change hits the month's cash flow	✓ Territory risk spread across three fronts with a hard 60% ceiling of volume on any single aggregator

	TRADITIONAL METHOD (NEGOTIATE THE RATE)	MASTERESTAURANT METHOD (CHANNEL ARCHITECTURE)
Local search visibility	✕ Abandoned Google Business Profile, no product photography, no review responses	✓ Active listing, managed 5★ reviews and geo-targeted paid media matched to the real delivery radius

1. Commissions aren't negotiated, they're diluted: shift 18% to 30% of volume to your own channel

Cutting delivery commissions doesn't come from negotiating with the aggregator, it comes from moving between 18% and 30% of your digital volume onto a channel you control, until the platform stops owning the customer. The arithmetic is uncomfortable but clear: pulling two points off a 28% commission across 100% of volume gives you two points of a channel that still belongs to someone else, while shifting a quarter of that volume to a direct order with 6% processing cost returns more than five points of contribution on that slice, and hands you the guest's email and phone. The global online delivery market reaches 1.51 trillion dollars in 2026 and grows at 6.24% compound annually through 2031 according to Statista (2026): the channel is staying, the question is who owns the customer inside it. An aggregator commission is a revenue reduction, not a marketing expense, and booking it wrong is what makes a board celebrate growth that never happened.

2. Why does the commission sit on the wrong line of the P&L?

When that 28% lands below, among promotional costs, the channel's gross sale enters the top line whole and the dashboard shows a 20% revenue jump while real contribution falls.

Booked above, as a deduction from revenue, the same order shows what it is: a 12 dollar ticket that reaches the register as 8.64 before food cost touches it. Diego F. Parra pushes the boards Masterestaurant works with to break the P&L out by channel, with its own net revenue line and its own contribution margin, because until delivery has a column of its own nobody can make a decision about it. A channel without a column is a channel without an owner. Below 500 thousand dollars in annual revenue there is one decision worth making: separate the channel price from the dining room price before attempting anything else. A 15% to 18% uplift on the delivery menu absorbs most of the commission without disturbing how the in-house guest perceives value, and it's the only lever an operator this size can execute on Monday morning.

3. Under 500 thousand dollars: differentiated pricing and a 25-order weekly threshold

Direct ordering at this level starts with an order-and-pay link, not an app: under 25 direct orders per week the infrastructure costs more than it saves. With 76% of U.S. operators convinced technology gives them a competitive edge according to the National Restaurant Association (2024), the risk here isn't owning too few tools, it's buying too many before you have volume that justifies them. Start with price. Between 500 thousand and 1 million dollars a year the goal shifts from price to ownership, and the number governing the decision is 18% of digital volume originating in your own channel within twelve months. At this scale the business already generates 40 to 90 digital orders per week, enough for a customer database to start being worth money: bringing back 12% of those guests one extra time per month through a direct channel pays for the whole toolset and leaves change.

4. From 500 thousand to 1 million: the band where you buy your first owned customer

Operators who fail in this band are the ones who build direct ordering and then leave it without demand, waiting for the guest to find it. He doesn't find it. You have to buy him inside the aggregator's own bag, with a physical insert and a concrete reason to come back, which is the one contact surface the platform still can't take away from you. Past a million dollars in annual revenue the direct channel needs a budget, an owner and a quarterly target, or it dies of neglect no matter how well the technology works. The operating threshold is 25% of digital volume direct and an acquisition cost recovered inside three orders: if the second direct order still hasn't paid for bringing that customer in, your problem isn't the commission, it's the offer. Negotiating with the aggregator makes sense at this scale, but from a different chair, because a restaurant already routing a quarter of its orders elsewhere negotiates with a real alternative on the table.

5. Above 1 million: direct ordering stops being a project and becomes a business line

Uber Eats moved 74.6 billion dollars in gross bookings during 2024 according to Statista (2024): nobody hands points back out of goodwill, they hand them back when your volume can walk. Beyond 5 million a year the lever stops being commercial and turns structural: owned satellite kitchens that shorten the delivery radius, and virtual brands that load the idle capacity of a kitchen already paying rent. The global dark kitchen market is projected at 171.3 billion dollars by 2033 according to Global Growth Insights, and that figure doesn't describe a fashion, it describes a change in where the order gets produced. Here appears the high-end case worth naming by profile: the celebrity-chef restaurant or the large-format themed venue, with a brand capable of generating demand on its own, that still hands 90% of its digital volume to a third party out of operational convenience.

6. Over 5 million: satellite kitchens, virtual brands and the high-end case

That profile leaves the most money on the table, because it pays commission on demand it created itself. From 10 million dollars a year upward, a group or chain stops buying rates and starts buying position: a master agreement with tiered pricing on aggregate volume, direct interface integration that removes the duplicate terminal, and order data returned to the group as a contract condition. The threshold here is 30% of digital volume in the owned channel, held for two quarters, because that's the figure that turns a discount conversation into a mutual-dependency conversation. Swiggy operated with 196,000 partner restaurants across 653 Indian cities in fiscal 2023-24 according to its annual report (Swiggy, 2024): against that scale a standalone group has no leverage, but a group with a consolidated direct channel and data on its own guests does. You build that difference before you sit down. Assume the platform lifts your commission from 28% to 31% next quarter, without warning and without room to argue, exactly as it has happened in several markets.

7. What would happen if the aggregator raised the commission three points tomorrow

A restaurant with 95% of its digital volume there loses three clean points across nearly all its digital sales and has no available answer inside six months. A restaurant with 30% direct loses three points on the remaining 70%, a bit over two effective points, and can push that owned base with a win-back campaign the same week. The tension in this trade is real: the aggregator brings volume you wouldn't bring alone, and that volume is useful. I resolve it firmly and without a comfortable middle: use it as a paid acquisition channel, never as a retention channel. This week, print an insert with one concrete reason to order direct and drop it into every bag that leaves. Commission is not a marketing expense, it is a revenue reduction. Booked on the wrong P&L line, leadership reads growth that does not exist and celebrates volume while contribution erodes.

8. Where the equation breaks

The aggregator does not sell you delivery, it sells you demand. And the demand you rent every month is the same demand you could buy once by building the asset. With 76% of US operators convinced technology gives them a competitive edge according to National Restaurant Association (2024), the gap is not conviction but architecture. Cutting delivery commissions starts with an accounting decision rather than a commercial one: separate channel price from dining-room price. A dish priced at USD 12 in the room and USD 12 in the app is not the same product, because one carries up to 30% commission and the other carries none. The dark kitchen vs brick and mortar restaurant debate gets framed badly when it collapses into square footage. A hidden kitchen lowers occupancy cost, certainly, but inherits the commission problem intact and loses the foot traffic that amortizes acquisition. The global dark kitchen market projects USD 171.3 billion by 2033 according to Global Growth Insights, which confirms the format works; it does not confirm it works without an owned channel.

9. Where the equation breaks — in practice

Increasing sales on Rappi and lowering blended commission look like opposing goals and are not: the marketplace is an excellent discovery engine and a terrible repeat-purchase engine. Use each for what it does.

POINT BY POINT

Comparison table for the leadership committee

STARTING POINT OF THE STRATEGY

A · TRADITIONAL METHOD (NEGOTIATE THE RATE)

The rate in the aggregator contract

B · MASTERESTAURANT The composition of digital volume by order origin

Verdict: The Masterestaurant method wins: the rate is a market fact, the channel mix is your decision.

BOARD-LEVEL METRIC

A · TRADITIONAL METHOD (NEGOTIATE THE RATE)

Gross revenue of the delivery channel

B · MASTERESTAURANT Blended effective commission and contribution margin net of commission

Verdict: The Masterestaurant method wins: gross revenue hides the problem; effective commission puts it on the table monthly.

PRICING TREATMENT

A · TRADITIONAL METHOD (NEGOTIATE THE RATE)

Identical price in room and app, with commission absorbed against margin

B · MASTERESTAURANT Differentiated channel pricing, calculated against a target contribution margin

Verdict: The Masterestaurant method wins, with one honest caveat: channel pricing demands consistency and communication, or the customer reads it as a penalty.

SPEED OF RESULT

A · TRADITIONAL METHOD (NEGOTIATE THE RATE)

Immediate if the aggregator concedes, but the effect is decimal and does not compound

B · MASTERESTAURANT Takes six to nine months, and from there the effect is structural and compounding

Verdict: A tie in quarter one, a clear Masterestaurant win from quarter three onward.

RISK MITIGATION

A · TRADITIONAL METHOD (NEGOTIATE THE RATE)

None: an algorithm or rate change hits 100% of digital volume

B · MASTERESTAURANT A 60% concentration ceiling per aggregator plus the owned channel as a buffer

Verdict: The Masterestaurant method wins: territory risk is governed with thresholds, not with trust.

REQUIRED INVESTMENT

A · TRADITIONAL METHOD (NEGOTIATE THE RATE)

Zero direct investment, high opportunity cost sustained over time

B · MASTERESTAURANT Investment in a transactional site, local listing and geo-targeted media, recoverable within the first year

Verdict: The traditional method wins month-one cash; it loses on present value at 24 months.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

What the operator who negotiates the rate does

TRADITIONAL APPROACH

- ✕ Calls the aggregator account manager asking for two points off and accepts more funded promo days in exchange.
- ✕ Uploads the entire dining-room menu at dining-room prices and absorbs commission against margin.
- ✕ Measures the channel by gross revenue at month-end close, never by contribution net of commission.
- ✕ Leaves the Google Business Profile with three-year-old photos and zero review responses.
- ✕ Joins the marketplace discount war whenever volume dips, without running the break-even on the discount.
- ✕ Discovers the dependency the day the algorithm shifts and volume drops 30% in a week.

What the operator who redesigns the channel does MASTERESTAURANT

- ✓ Classifies the aggregator as paid acquisition, not as a sales channel, and demands the same return as any media line.
- ✓ Builds a dedicated delivery menu with channel pricing and items chosen by contribution margin and transport behavior.
- ✓ Sets a dependency ceiling — 60% maximum digital volume on one aggregator — and reviews it in the monthly committee.
- ✓ Turns the Google Business Profile into a second storefront: product photography, delivery hours, a reply to every review.
- ✓ Launches direct ordering from the owned site, paying only the payment processor and keeping the customer relationship.
- ✓ Tracks blended effective commission as a board-level KPI and carries it into the EBITDA report.

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Origin of the digital order	✕ Marketplace only; visibility depends on the aggregator algorithm and in-app paid placement	✓ Blend of marketplace, local search on Google Maps, an optimized listing and direct ordering from the owned site

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THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

The numbers behind the decision

1.51 bn

USD global online food delivery market in 2026, at a 6.24% CAGR through 2031

74600 M

USD in worldwide Uber Eats gross bookings during 2024

76 %

of US operators believe technology gives them a competitive advantage

74000

REST.

restaurants compete on DiDi Food Mexico and 70% are local small businesses

171300 M

USD projected for the global dark kitchen market by 2033

473.49 bn

USD in online food delivery within the United States alone during 2026

REAL CASE

"We were billing USD 1.4 million a year across three locations and 71% of digital came from a single aggregator; blended effective commission sat at 27.4% and nobody on the board looked at it, because the report showed gross revenue. We separated channel pricing, pulled seven items that travelled badly, rebuilt the Google Business Profile with new photography and review responses, and opened direct ordering. Within seven months the owned channel reached 24% of digital volume, effective commission fell to 19.8%, and delivery contribution margin rose 6.1 points without losing orders in the app."

— Operations director of a three-unit group in the above USD 1 million annual revenue band, Latin American market

HOW TO APPLY IT IN YOUR RESTAURANT

Three-phase strategic roadmap

1. **Phase 1 · Operational due diligence on the channel (weeks 1 to 4)**
   Deliverable: a unit economics table per item and per channel, with commission inside the cost rather than outside it. Rebuild the true contribution margin of every item sold through the app, including commission, packaging, transport waste and funded promotion. You will find items that sell heavily and contribute negatively. Success metric: 100% of the delivery menu with calculated contribution margin, blended effective commission measured to the decimal, and food cost below 32% on every surviving item.

2. **Phase 2 · Channel pricing and menu redesign (weeks 5 to 12)**
   Deliverable: an independent delivery menu with channel pricing and items reordered by menu engineering. Retire what travels badly, raise channel pricing where the market absorbs it, build bundles that lift average ticket without touching food cost. In parallel, get the Google Business Profile ready to compete: real product photography, correct category, delivery hours, a reply to every review within 48 hours. Success metric: digital average ticket up 12% and channel contribution margin up 4 points against the phase 1 baseline.

3 **Phase 3 · Building the owned channel (month 4 to 9)**
Deliverable: live direct ordering on your own site, with payment processing, a customer database and geo-targeted media matched to the real delivery radius. This is where the money changes pockets: every order that migrates from marketplace to owned channel releases the full commission differential. Drive migration with what you control — packaging with a call to action, an owned-channel price advantage, a repeat purchase program — and not with discounts that break your break-even. Success metric: 25% of digital volume in the owned channel and blended effective commission below 20%.

4 **Phase 4 · Governing territory risk (month 10 onward)**
Deliverable: a monthly board dashboard with four figures: blended effective commission, share of volume in the owned channel, concentration on the primary aggregator, and channel contribution margin. The rule I impose in the boardroom is simple: no aggregator above 60% of digital volume. Success metric: four consecutive quarters with concentration under the ceiling and effective commission flat or falling.

FAQ

Questions a board actually asks

What does it cost NOT to act on delivery commission?

It costs the commission differential applied to digital volume that grows every year. With the global market at USD 1.51 trillion in 2026 and a 6.24% CAGR through 2031 according to Statista (2026), your commission exposure grows even if you do nothing, because the channel keeps gaining share of your total revenue.

Can you lower commission by negotiating directly with the aggregator?

You can, within narrow margins and almost always in exchange for concessions that cost more: funded promotion, exclusivity or volume commitments. With roughly 74,000 restaurants competing on DiDi Food Mexico alone according to DiDi Food (2024), individual bargaining power is limited. The real lever is channel mix.

Does a dark kitchen solve the commission problem?

It relocates it rather than solving it. A hidden kitchen lowers occupancy and front-of-house cost, which is why the format projects USD 171.3 billion by 2033 according to Global Growth Insights, but it is born fully dependent on the marketplace with no foot traffic to amortize acquisition. Without an owned channel, a ghost kitchen pays commission on 100% of sales.

Won't migrating customers to my own channel damage my marketplace position?

No, provided you keep volume in the app and only capture the reorder. Aggregators reward conversion and fulfilment, not customer exclusivity. Increasing sales on Rappi and building an owned channel reinforce each other: the marketplace discovers, the owned channel retains, and blended commission falls without absolute volume falling.

What happens to the physical menu when ordering is all digital?

The physical menu stays, always. At Masterestaurant we recommend keeping a printed menu in the dining room with the QR menu as a complement: the printed menu controls service pace, menu narrative and suggestive selling; the QR handles delivery, accessibility, price changes and analytics. The verdict is BOTH, each in its own role.

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
Robots de Serve Robotics a desplegar en Uber Eats	**hasta 2.000 robots**	Serve Robotics — Form 8-K FY2024 (SEC)
Cuota conjunta de Serve, Starship y Nuro en flotas globales 2024	**18%**	Mordor Intelligence — Autonomous Delivery Robots Market 2024
Mercado de entrega de paquetes por dron en 2023	**USD 585,9 millones**	Grand View Research — Drone Package Delivery Market 2023
Proyección de entrega de paquetes por dron a 2030	**USD 5.238,8 millones (CAGR 38,7%)**	Grand View Research — Drone Package Delivery Market 2030
Entregas comerciales por dron de Zipline (abril 2024)	**1 millón (primera empresa en lograrlo)**	Grand View Research — Drone Package Delivery Market
Unidades de drones de reparto proyectadas 2024 a 2030	**de 32.456 a 275.703 unidades**	Grand View Research — Drone Package Delivery Market

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