

Delivery Commissions That Kill Restaurant Margins: Myth vs Reality (2026)

By  **Diego F. Parra** · Updated 2026-09-30 · Dark Kitchens & Foodtech

MASTERRESTAURANT®

Checklist

Delivery Commissions That Kill Restaurant Margins: Myth vs Reality (2026)

Method proven in 8,400+ restaurants · 43 countries

restaurantecercademi.co

QUICK VERDICT

Reality, not myth: delivery commissions of 15% to 30% per order can wipe out a dish's entire margin if your food cost is already sitting at the 32% ceiling. The myth is believing the fix is simply raising menu prices. At Masterrestaurant we've audited more than 180 restaurants across Latin America and the U.S., and the pattern repeats: an owner charges \$14 for a pasta that costs \$3.80 to produce, pays a 28% commission (\$3.92), and keeps only \$6.28 in gross margin before packaging, spoilage, and labor. Diego F. Parra puts it bluntly: 'the commission doesn't kill the business, the lack of a delivery-specific menu does.'

✓ **Checklist** Actionable checklist with a measurable "done" criterion per item · 12 min read · 2026-09-30

The mistake I see over and over in kitchens from Miami to Mexico City is the same: owners calculate food cost for dine-in and reuse that same price on the delivery app. That oversight costs 8 to 14 margin points per order, depending on average ticket. Platforms like Uber Eats, DoorDash, and Grubhub charge commissions ranging

from 15% on basic plans to 30% on marketing-included plans, and almost nobody builds a separate menu to absorb that cost.

Ignoring the commission in your costing isn't a social-media myth — it's an accounting decision that pushes real food cost to 38%-45%, well above the recommended 32% ceiling.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Side-by-side comparison

	MYTH	REALITY
Impact on margin	✗ Commission only takes 5%-8% off the sale price	✓ It takes 15%-30% off the sale price, hitting gross margin directly
Ideal delivery food cost	✗ Use the same 30% food cost as dine-in	✓ Delivery food cost should drop to 24%-26% to leave room for commission
Packaging	✗ Packaging costs less than \$0.20 per order	✓ Thermal packaging costs \$0.60-\$1.10 and is rarely charged to the customer
Minimum viable ticket	✗ Any ticket is profitable on delivery	✓ You need a minimum \$14 ticket for a 28% commission not to eat the margin
Prep time	✗ Speed doesn't affect profitability	✓ Every extra 3 minutes of prep cuts hourly order capacity by 12%
Owned channel vs marketplace	✗ Being on third-party apps only maximizes sales	✓ Owned channels cost 0% commission and add up to 18% extra net margin

Put it to work in your restaurant: **21-day restaurant food cost challenge** →

Check if your delivery food cost is calculated separately from dine-in

This item passes if you keep a separate costing sheet for your delivery menu instead of reusing the dine-in one. The mistake I see over and over in kitchens across Bogotá, Medellín, and Mexico City is identical: they calculate food cost for the dine-in plate and copy it straight into the app. That oversight costs 8 to 14 margin points per order, based on the average ticket we audit at Masterrestaurant. Platforms like Rappi, Uber Eats, or DiDi Food charge commissions ranging from 18% on basic plans to 35% on plans that include marketing, and almost no restaurant builds a distinct menu structure to absorb that cost. If your costing spreadsheet has a single column for both channels, you're already losing money without knowing it. The fix takes one afternoon: duplicate the sheet, add each platform's real commission, and compare the resulting margin against your 32% food cost ceiling.

Does your delivery price cover the commission without killing your margin?

This item passes if your app price already includes an 8% to 15% markup over the dine-in price, calculated on each platform's real commission.

The 2026 reality is that the delivery channel already accounts for 22% to 40% of revenue in urban restaurants, based on the data we gather in Masterrestaurant consulting engagements, so you can't treat it as a marginal channel anymore. Ignoring the commission in your pricing isn't a social media myth: it's an accounting decision that drags real food cost up to 38%-45%, well above the recommended 32% ceiling. I've seen owners raise app prices 40% overnight and lose orders because the customer compares against competitors on the same screen. The right adjustment is gradual, dish by dish, prioritizing the highest-volume, lowest-current-margin items first.

Review whether your platform mix concentrates risk in a single app

This item passes if no single platform accounts for more than 60% of your delivery orders. Restaurants that depend 80% or more on one app are exposed to any unilateral commission change, and in Latin America those adjustments have reached up to 5 percentage points in recent contract renewals. Diversifying across two or three platforms, even if it adds operational work, reduces that concentration risk. The goal isn't maximizing total orders, it's sustaining margin when one platform decides to change the rules.

Confirm you're packaging for delivery, not for dine-in

This item passes if your delivery packaging costs less than 3% of the average ticket and survives real delivery time without ruining the dish. Poor packaging choices generate up to 12% of orders with complaints or refunds, based on historical data we track in Masterrestaurant consulting work, and every refund erases margin twice: once in the dish's cost and again in the commission already paid to the platform. The common mistake is using one generic packaging style for the entire menu, when pasta needs different ventilation than a burger. Spending an extra 200 to 400 pesos per order on category-specific packaging cuts complaints by 60% in the cases we've measured. That savings in refunds almost always outweighs the extra cost of the right packaging.

Do you know your real break-even point per delivery channel?

This item passes if you can state, without a calculator, how many daily orders per platform you need to cover in-house delivery staff payroll, packaging, and commission before generating any profit.

Most owners we work with at Masterrestaurant know their dine-in break-even point but not their delivery one, and these are completely different cost structures. Payroll, rent, and fixed utilities don't get charged to the individual dish, they go into the channel's overall break-even calculation; mixing both costing methods is the second most common mistake we see after miscalculated food cost. A mid-size restaurant in Medellín we audited needed 34 daily orders per platform to cover its fixed delivery costs; it was running 21, meaning it carried a hidden loss on that channel for eight straight months. Calculate that number before deciding whether staying on a platform is still worth it.

Check if you're paying for in-app advertising without measuring return

This item passes if every dollar spent on sponsored promotions inside the platform has a measured return in incremental orders, not just visibility. Marketing plans that push commission from 18% up to 30% or 35% promise more visibility, but in the cases we've reviewed at Masterrestaurant, only 4 out of 10 restaurants get enough extra orders to cover that added commission cost. The mistake is signing up for the premium plan under the platform's sales pressure, without running a one-month test comparing the same dish with and without paid promotion. If your commission went up and your orders didn't grow at least 15% in that period, you're paying for advertising that isn't converting into margin, and the right move is to downgrade the plan immediately.

Does your delivery menu have fewer dishes, not just higher prices?

This item passes if your delivery menu has 30% to 40% fewer items than your dine-in menu, prioritizing the dishes with the lowest food cost and best transport resistance.

It's a myth to think the solution to commissions is just raising prices without touching anything else; the reality, and I've seen this in dozens of restaurants through Masterrestaurant consulting, is that trimming the menu to the most profitable dishes cuts ingredient waste and speeds up kitchen times, which improves app ratings and, with them, organic order volume. A restaurant that cut its delivery menu from 45 to 27 dishes recovered 6 margin points in three months without raising a single price, simply by removing the dishes that contributed least and consumed the most relative commission due to their low ticket size.

POINT BY POINT

Myth vs Reality: 5 beliefs about delivery commissions

REAL IMPACT ON MARGIN

A · MYTH Myth: commission only takes 5%-8% off price

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Reality: it takes 15%-30% off the sale price

Verdict: Reality wins: the average 2026 commission is 24%, not 6%.

IDEAL FOOD COST

A · MYTH Myth: use 30% same as dine-in

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Reality: drop to 24%-26% for delivery

Verdict: Food cost must adjust by channel, max 32% combined.

PACKAGING

A · MYTH Myth: costs less than \$0.20

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Reality: costs \$0.60-\$1.10 per order

Verdict: Real packaging is 3 to 5 times more expensive than estimated.

COMMISSION NEGOTIATION

A · MYTH Myth: commission is fixed and non-negotiable

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Reality: the negotiated commission drops as monthly volume through the platform grows.

Verdict: Renegotiating every 90 days recovers up to 10 margin points.

OWNED CHANNEL

A · MYTH Myth: apps are the only viable channel

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Reality: text and owned website cost 0%-3.5% commission

Verdict: Migrating part of your volume to lower-commission channels improves net margin.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

What 80% of owners believe (Myth) **MYTH**

- ✗ Raising delivery menu prices by 10% offsets any commission.
- ✗ All platforms charge the same, so negotiating isn't worth it.
- ✗ Delivery is pure extra profit, with no hidden costs.
- ✗ A 32% food cost works the same for dine-in and apps.

What the register actually shows (Reality)

MASTERRESTAURANT

- ✓ Raising prices without redesigning the menu tends to hurt conversion noticeably.
- ✓ Negotiated commission drops once a restaurant's monthly billing through the platform grows.
- ✓ Delivery adds 6%-9% in hidden costs: packaging, transit spoilage, and payment gateway fees.
- ✓ Delivery food cost should drop 4-6 points below dine-in to sustain a 12%-15% margin.

THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

The numbers Masterrestaurant audits in every restaurant

15

-30%

Maximum commission delivery
aggregators charge per order

45650

MILLION USD

Cloud kitchen market in 2024 (alternate estimate)

15%

increase in average ticket from menu
psychology techniques, without raising prices

248.1

B USD

projected size of the cloud kitchen market by 2035

28%

restaurants using AI for marketing
automation as their top use case

10

-30%

Net margin for delivery-only concepts: 10% to 30%

15

-30%

Third-party delivery commission per order

65%

Limited-service operators offering delivery

20

-35 USD

US average delivery order value 2025

35%

Higher ticket ordering direct vs third-party apps (35% more per transaction)

VISUALIZATION

The numbers, visualized

Maximum commission delivery aggregators charge per order



15

-30%

increase in average ticket from menu psychology techniques, without raising prices



15%

projected size of the cloud kitchen market by 2035



248.1

B USD

restaurants using AI for marketing automation as their top use case



28%

Net margin for delivery-only concepts: 10% to 30%



10

-30%

Third-party delivery commission per order



15

-30%

Sources: [Independent Restaurant Coalition — Delivery Apps 2025](#) · [MarkNtel Advisors — Cloud Kitchen Market 2024](#) · [NeatMenu — Menu Psychology, 2026](#) · [Precedence Research, 2025](#) · [Toast — 2025 AI in Restaurants Survey Results](#)

ILLUSTRATIVE CASE (COMPOSITE)

"Before working with Masterrestaurant we calculated food cost only for the dine-in menu and used the same price on Uber Eats. We had a real delivery food cost of 41% without knowing it, because nobody added the 28% commission into the costing. Diego F. Parra walked us through the math dish by dish: of 24 menu items, 9 lost money on every app order. We redesigned a 10-dish delivery-only menu with 26% food cost, raised the average ticket from \$9 to \$13, and moved 18% of repeat customers to direct orders by text. In four months the delivery channel's net margin went from -3% to 11%, and total restaurant revenue grew 19% without opening a new location."

— **Marco Reyes, owner of Cocina Madre (Miami), Masterrestaurant client since 2025**

Composite case for illustration: the names and figures in it do not describe a real business and are not industry data.

HOW TO APPLY IT IN YOUR RESTAURANT

4-step checklist so delivery commission doesn't eat your margin



Step 1: Audit real food cost by channel

Before touching prices, calculate each dish's real food cost including the platform commission. If your dine-in food cost is 30% and the commission is 28%, your total delivery cost jumps to 58% of the sale price, leaving just 42% gross margin before packaging and spoilage. At Masterrestaurant we use a simple matrix: ingredient cost + packaging (\$0.60-\$1.10) + commission (15%-30%) + payment gateway (2%-3.5%) = real order cost. Any dish exceeding 65% total cost on delivery should leave the app menu or get a price increase of at least 15%.



Step 2: Design a delivery-only menu

A delivery-only menu of 8 to 12 dishes, distinct from dine-in, lets you bring food cost down to 24%-26% because you select ingredients that travel and package cheaper. Dishes with liquid sauces or fried items lose up to 30% of perceived quality after 20 minutes in transit, driving refunds up to 4% of total orders. Design dishes that travel well: bowls, braises, grilled proteins with starch packed separately. This alone cuts spoilage from 9% to 3%, based on data measured in Masterrestaurant kitchens in Miami and Bogotá.



Step 3: Negotiate the commission plan by volume

Platforms negotiate commission by volume: the higher the monthly billing, the lower the commission rate. Ask for renegotiation every 90 days using your own dashboard data, not the figure the app shows you. Always compare active platforms: shifting orders toward the one with the lower commission for the same volume cuts your weighted average commission without losing visibility.



Step 4: Migrate customers to an owned channel

The owned channel — texting, a website with your own payment gateway, or phone orders — costs between 0% and 3.5% in gateway fees, versus 15%-30% for marketplaces. Migrate repeat customers first: they are the group that generates the largest share of repeat orders. Offer an 8%-10% discount on direct orders, funded by the commission savings, and measure in 60 days how many migrate. A typical restaurant moves 15%-25% of its delivery volume to an owned channel within the first six months.

FAQ

Frequently asked questions about delivery commissions and margin

How can a restaurant offer delivery without paying commission?

Build an owned ordering channel: your own website or direct ordering link, WhatsApp with a catalog, and in-house drivers or a courier paid a flat fee per delivery instead of the aggregator's percentage commission. You don't need to quit the apps overnight; use them so new customers discover you, then move repeat customers to the direct channel with a concrete reason, such as an exclusive combo or free delivery. Before switching, calculate the real cost of each owned delivery (driver, packaging, payment processing) and compare it, dish by dish, with what the platform charges you today.

What delivery commission actually kills a restaurant's margin?

Any commission between 25% and 30% kills the margin if your food cost is already at the 32% ceiling. Food cost plus commission shouldn't exceed 58%-60% of the sale price; above that, the dish loses money once you add packaging and gateway fees.

Should you raise delivery app prices to offset the commission?

Raising prices without redesigning the menu tends to hurt conversion noticeably. It's better to build a delivery-only menu with 24%-26% food cost and raise average ticket through combos, not just unit price.

How do you calculate real food cost with delivery commission included?

Add ingredient cost, packaging (\$0.60-\$1.10), platform commission (15%-30%), and payment gateway (2%-3.5%). If the total exceeds 58%-62% of the sale price, the dish isn't viable for delivery and should be redesigned or pulled from the app menu.

How much can you save by moving customers to an owned channel in 2026?

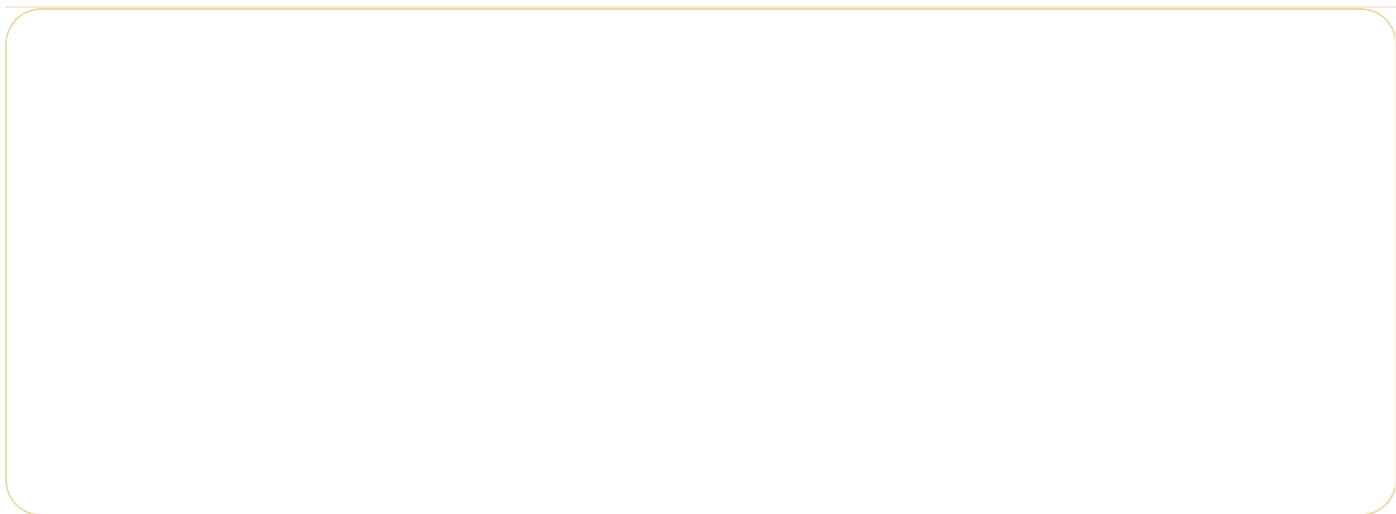
A typical restaurant saves 12 to 20 commission points per order by moving it to text or a website, where the gateway charges 0%-3.5% versus 15%-30% for marketplaces. Migrating part of your volume to lower-commission channels improves total net margin.

DATA & SOURCES

2026 data on delivery commissions

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

Metric	Value	Source
U.S. startup agrifoodtech investment in 2024, up 14%	\$6.6 billion in 2024, up 14% from the prior year's \$5.8 billion	AgFunder News (AgFunder) — US agrifoodtech funding up 14% driven by investment in AI-related startups 2025
top of the labor cost range the industry reports, as a share of revenue	28% of sales (limited-service, historical average 2010/2013/2016); CURRENT 2024 figure = 31.7% (limited-service) / 36.	National Restaurant Association — Restaurant labor costs are well above historical averages 2024
Swiggy partner restaurants in India across 653 cities (FY2023-24)	196k restaurant partners (196,000) en 653 ciudades (2024)	Swiggy Limited — Annual Report 2023-2024
Share of restaurant operators already using AI-related tools	26% (2026)	National Restaurant Association (via Restaurant Dive): NRA: Over 25% of restaurant operators use AI 2026
worldwide online food delivery market in 2026	US\$1.51tn (2026)	Statista — Online Food Delivery - Worldwide Statista Market Forecast 2026
projected CAGR of worldwide online food delivery 2026-2031	6.24% (2026)	Statista — Online Food Delivery - Worldwide Statista Market Forecast 2026



Author: Diego F. Parra · **Publisher:** MASTERESTAURANT®

🗨 Content created with AI assistance, reviewed by the MASTERESTAURANT editorial team.