

Own channel vs delivery apps: before and after with Masterrestaurant

By  **Diego F. Parra** · Updated 2026-09-27 · Dark Kitchens & Foodtech

MASTERRESTAURANT®

Checklist

Own channel vs delivery apps: before and after with Masterrestaurant

Method proven in 8,400+ restaurants · 43 countries

restaurantecercademi.co

QUICK VERDICT

An owned ordering channel cuts customer acquisition cost by 18 to 25 percentage points compared to delivery apps, which charge commissions of 28% to 35% per transaction in 2026. Diego F. The difference isn't cosmetic. It's structural. Before, the restaurant depended on someone else's algorithm to exist; after, it controls its own customer base, its own data, and its own profitability per dish.

✓ **Checklist** Actionable checklist with a measurable "done" criterion per item · 14 min read · 2026-09-27

Before implementing an owned channel, most restaurants in the dark kitchen or foodtech space ran 70% to 90% of their orders through three or four apps at once, each charging commissions of 28% to 35%, plus another 3% for payment processing and up to 15% more in mandatory in-app advertising just to stay visible in the listing. Diego F. Parra documented in his consulting practice that an average fast-casual restaurant lost between 41% and 48% of gross ticket value before even calculating food cost, payroll, or rent. The result: dishes with a 28%

food cost that looked profitable on paper but left a real operating margin of just 6% to 9% after platform fees. That invisible gap — between kitchen food cost and net margin after the platform takes its cut — is the first thing Masterrestaurant identifies in any sales-channel diagnosis.

After migrating to an owned channel — a website with direct ordering, transactional WhatsApp Business, or a proprietary app with a fixed monthly cost — the same restaurant reports payment processing fees of 0% to 3%, with no listing charge and no mandatory advertising. Restaurants sustaining 35% or more of their volume through an owned channel for six months tend to raise their net margin meaningfully, while also gaining direct access to customer data: name, purchase frequency, average ticket. Diego F. Parra is clear that an owned channel doesn't replace apps overnight; they coexist, but the owner must deliberately migrate volume, dish by dish, week by week, until the owned channel becomes predictable and profitable on its own.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Own channel vs delivery apps: side-by-side comparison

	DELIVERY APPS	OWNED CHANNEL
Commission per order	✗ 28%-35% of gross ticket	✓ 0%-3% in payment processing
Customer acquisition cost	✗ \$4.20-\$6.80 per new order paid to the app	✓ \$0.90-\$1.60 per order via WhatsApp/own website
Access to customer data	✗ 0%: the app keeps name, phone and frequency	✓ The full database stays with the restaurant.
Net margin after channel	✗ 6%-9% of gross ticket	✓ 15%-22% of gross ticket
Implementation time	✗ Immediate: live in 24-48 hours	✓ 3-6 weeks for website/app plus payment flow
Algorithm dependence	✗ High: visibility shifts 60%-80% depending on listing position	✓ None: own traffic via local SEO and repeat orders
Recommended sustainable food cost	✗ Up to 32%, but real margin drops to 6%-9% after commission	✓ Up to 32%, with real margin of 15%-22%

Put it to work in your restaurant: AI executive program for restaurant leaders →

Verify you know the true cost per order on delivery apps before comparing channels

Before evaluating any sales channel, calculate the total cost per order on the apps you already use. The visible commission of 28%-35% is not the only charge: add the 3% payment processing fee and up to 15% in internal advertising if you want to stay visible on the listing. Diego F. Parra, in his audit of more than 120 restaurants for Masterrestaurant, documented that the average dark kitchen loses between 41% and 48% of gross ticket value in platform costs alone, before accounting for food cost or payroll. A dish with a 28% food cost that looks profitable in the kitchen can leave you with a real operating margin of just 6% after the platform takes its cut. Without that clear number, any channel decision is made blind.

Confirm your food cost stays below 32% before activating a direct channel

A direct channel does not rescue an operation with an uncontrolled food cost: if your ingredient cost exceeds 32% per dish, the savings on commissions vanish in the kitchen before they ever reach the register. Masterrestaurant sets 32% as the absolute ceiling per dish—not the target—; the healthy range for dark kitchens and foodtech operations sits between 24% and 29%. Review every menu item you plan to sell through your direct channel with that filter. Restaurants that migrated volume to a direct channel with already-controlled food costs recorded a meaningful net margin improvement within six months. Those that did it with a food cost of 34%-38% simply changed where they were losing money.

Validate that your direct ordering solution charges a maximum of 3% per transaction

The approval criterion for a direct channel is straightforward: the total payment processing cost must not exceed 3% per transaction. That includes the payment gateway, the ordering platform commission, and any monthly fee prorated per order. WhatsApp Business with a proprietary gateway, a website with WooCommerce or Shopify with an ordering plugin, or a white-label app with a fixed monthly fee typically stay between 0% and 3%. Delivery apps charge 28%-35% plus 3% processing: the difference of 25 to 35 percentage points per order is the most direct business case you can make. A restaurant with an average ticket of \$18 USD pays between \$5.04 and \$6.84 per order on apps vs \$0.54 on a direct channel.

Confirm you capture name, purchase frequency, and average ticket for every direct customer

A direct channel is only worth its implementation cost if capturing customer data is mandatory, not optional. On delivery apps, the owner receives zero information about who bought: no name, no history, no retargeting capability. On your direct channel, you must record at minimum the customer's name, phone number or email, date of first order, and average ticket. Diego F. Parra argues that this database is the most undervalued asset the direct channel generates: a well-targeted, low-cost WhatsApp campaign meaningfully improves monthly repurchase compared with the cost of acquiring a new order on delivery apps.

Ensure at least 35% of your weekly volume comes from the direct channel before six months

The profitability threshold for a direct channel is not just any percentage of sales: sustaining 35% or more of volume on the direct channel for six consecutive months tends to raise net margin meaningfully. Below 25%, the improvement is real but insufficient to justify operating a parallel channel. The practical checklist: weeks 1-4, migrate 10%-15% of volume from your most frequent customers; weeks 5-12, scale with a first-direct-order incentive (\$2 USD discount or free delivery); weeks 13-24, consolidate and measure repurchase. Setting a target of 35% at six months is actionable and measurable; waiting for it to 'happen on its own' does not work.

Verify your acquisition costs in the direct channel don't exceed \$1.60 USD per order

The cost of acquiring an order through the direct channel—social media advertising, activation discounts, platform cost—must stay below \$1.60 USD for the advantage over apps to be real and sustainable. Apps charge between \$4.20 and \$6.80 per order (commission + processing + internal advertising): the gap of \$2.60 to \$5.20 per order is the margin you recover by migrating volume. If your acquisition cost on the direct channel climbs to \$3.50 or more because you are using excessive discounts or paying expensive advertising to attract customers, the benefit evaporates. Masterrestaurant recommends calculating this number every month during the first six months of direct channel operation and adjusting the incentive mix if the cost scales up.

Confirm the direct channel coexists with apps during the transition — don't exit abruptly

Leaving delivery apps overnight is the most common mistake Diego F. Parra documents in dark kitchens that attempt to migrate to a direct channel without a guaranteed volume bridge. Apps represent immediate cash flow; the direct channel takes between 60 and 120 days to generate predictable demand. The strategy validated by Masterrestaurant is deliberate coexistence: keep apps active while you migrate dish by dish and week by week, gradually reducing your internal platform advertising spend —from 15% down to 8%, then to 4%— as the direct channel gains traction. The success criterion is not being off all apps by a fixed deadline, but having the direct channel be profitable and predictable before reducing any volume source.

Measure monthly repurchase rate in the direct channel and set 38% as the minimum floor

Monthly repurchase rate is the metric that separates a functional direct channel from one that only generates the first order. On apps, measuring repurchase is impossible because the owner does not control the customer database. On your direct channel, calculate how many unique customers from the past 30 days placed another order in the following 30: that percentage must reach at least 38% for the channel to be cost-efficient on customer acquisition. Combining an active database with WhatsApp recovery campaigns —a message to customers without an order in 21 days, with a timely incentive— consistently improves monthly repurchase rates. Without that metric measured and documented every month, the direct channel operates blind.

The 5 differences that hit your cash flow hardest

Commission: 28%-35% on apps vs 0%-3% on owned channel per transaction
Customer data: little to no access on apps vs full access on your owned channel.
Net margin: 6%-9% on apps vs 15%-22% on owned channel
Repeat orders: hard to track on apps vs 38%-45% monthly trackable on owned channel
Acquisition cost: \$4.20-\$6.80 per order on apps vs \$0.90-\$1.60 on owned channel

POINT BY POINT

Apps vs owned channel: verdict by scenario

NEW RESTAURANT WITH NO CUSTOMER BASE

A · DELIVERY APPS Apps provide instant visibility, though with a 6%-9% margin

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Owned channel has no organic traffic yet

Verdict: Use apps for the first 3-6 months to build a base, then migrate repeat orders to owned channel

DARK KITCHEN OPERATING 5+ YEARS

A · DELIVERY APPS Apps still cost
28%-35% regardless of tenure

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Owned channel
can sustain 40%-55% of volume with a
loyal customer base

Verdict: Prioritize the owned channel: the customer base already exists, it just needs activating

RESTAURANT WITH FOOD COST SET AT 32%

A · DELIVERY APPS Real margin drops to
6%-9% after app commission

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Real margin rises
to 15%-22% on owned channel

Verdict: A target food cost is only sustainable with a channel mix, not relying on apps alone.

HIGH-COMPETITION AREA WITH MANY ACTIVE APPS

A · DELIVERY APPS Apps force extra
advertising spend (up to 15% more) to
avoid disappearing from the listing

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Owned channel
relies on local SEO and word of mouth,
slower but cheaper

Verdict: Combine both: use apps for discovery, owned channel for retention

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Before: total dependence on apps **2023-2025 MODEL**

- ✗ 70%-90% of order volume comes from 3-4 apps at once
- ✗ Average commission of 31% per transaction, with no room to negotiate
- ✗ 0% access to customer data: no phone number, no purchase frequency
- ✗ Real net margin of 6%-9% after commissions, advertising and processing
- ✗ Visibility drops 60%-80% if extra in-app advertising isn't paid

After: owned channel as a margin engine **MASTERRESTAURANT**

- ✓ 35%-55% of volume migrated to WhatsApp Business and own website in 6 months
- ✓ Payment processing cost of 0%-3%, with no per-order commission
- ✓ The complete customer database lives in a proprietary CRM.
- ✓ Net margin of 15%-22% of gross ticket, 9-14 points above apps
- ✓ 38%-45% monthly repeat orders thanks to direct WhatsApp/email remarketing

THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

Owned channel vs apps in numbers: 2026

over 1000

MILLION EUR

Glovo q-commerce turnover

28

-35%

optimal food cost ceiling (28-35% range): the margin that incremental acquisition protects

90

M USD

funding raised by Starship Technologies in
February 2024 for autonomous delivery expansion

nearly 31

MINUTES

Average delivery time for restaurants'
own (first-party) delivery channels

84%

Off-premises customers who'd order via the
restaurant's own website (vs 71% via apps)

20

-35 USD

US average delivery order value 2025

45%

Higher lifetime value of first-party
channel customer vs web-only

VISUALIZATION

The numbers, visualized

Glovo q-commerce turnover



optimal food cost ceiling (28-35% range): the margin that incremental acquisition protects



funding raised by Starship Technologies in February 2024 for autonomous delivery expansion



Average delivery time for restaurants' own (first-party) delivery channels



Off-premises customers who'd order via the restaurant's own website (vs 71% via apps)



US average delivery order value 2025



Sources: [EU-Startups 2025](#) · [National Restaurant Association \(via Apicbase/TouchBistro\): Restaurant Industry Statistics 2025](#) · [Mordor Intelligence, 2024](#) · [Intouch Insight — Are the 2025 Third-Party Delivery Trends a Warning Sign for Operators? 2025](#) · [National Restaurant Association — New report examines the technology landscape in today's restaurants 2024](#)

Chart by masterrestaurant.com

ILLUSTRATIVE CASE (COMPOSITE)

“When Diego reviewed our books, food cost said 30%, but the real margin after the apps was 7%. We migrated 40% of our volume to WhatsApp in 4 months and that margin climbed to 19%. It was the first time I understood how much it really cost us to 'show up' on those platforms.”

— Camila Restrepo, owner of a hidden pasta kitchen in Bogotá, 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

How to migrate from apps to an owned channel in 4 steps



Diagnose the real margin per channel, not just food cost

Before moving a single order, calculate what each channel actually leaves you after commission, processing and mandatory in-app advertising. Diego F. Parra recommends separating food cost — which at Masterrestaurant should never exceed the recommended maximum of 32% — from channel cost: two distinct numbers almost no owner ever looks at side by side. A dish with a 28% food cost, sold through an app charging a 32% commission plus 3% processing, leaves a real operating margin of just 8% to 10%, before even subtracting payroll, rent or utilities. Track this calculation for 30 straight days, by dish and by sales channel, before deciding how much volume to migrate to an owned channel. Without this prior diagnosis, any migration is a gamble, not a cash decision grounded in real data.



Launch a direct ordering channel in under 3 weeks

WhatsApp Business with a product catalog and integrated payment is the fastest entry point into an owned channel: most restaurants can activate it within days, with no complex technical development. The more robust alternative is a proprietary website with a payment gateway, which takes 3 to 6 weeks to implement but cuts processing cost to a range of 0% to 3%, versus the 28% to 35% delivery apps charge per transaction. Diego F. Parra advises against waiting for the perfect version of the channel: the real goal is to capture the first 10% of order volume directly within the first 30 days of launch, then scale from there using your own data, not assumptions.



Migrate volume gradually, dish by dish

Don't cancel delivery apps overnight: you lose immediate visibility, and your repeat customer doesn't yet know they can order directly from you. The tactic Masterrestaurant has validated across more than 120 restaurants is to migrate the highest-repeat products first — the ones customers order every 7 to 10 days — offering an 8% to 12% discount exclusive to the owned channel, funded by the commission savings no longer paid to the platform. Diego F. Parra has documented restaurants that shift 35% of total volume in 4 months with this gradual strategy, without overall revenue dropping a single percentage point. The key is patience: migrate dish by dish, week by week, measuring the real margin impact before accelerating the pace of the transition.



Measure net margin weekly, not monthly

The most common mistake Diego F. Parra sees over and over: reviewing the channel mix once a month, when it's already too late to correct course. Masterrestaurant recommends a weekly dashboard with three fixed numbers: percentage of volume per channel, real net margin per channel, and acquisition cost for each new customer. If the owned channel hasn't reached 20% net margin within the first 90 days of operation, the problem is almost never the channel itself: it's usually delivery time, friction in the ordering flow, or a poorly curated catalog. Fix that specific variable before declaring the whole strategy a failure. Weekly data, not monthly intuition, is what keeps an owned channel profitable beyond the first quarter of 2026.

FAQ

Frequently asked questions about own channel vs delivery apps

How much does a delivery app charge per order in 2026?

Between 28% and 35% of the gross ticket, depending on the platform and plan, plus 2% to 3% more for payment processing. Some apps add up to 15% more if the restaurant pays for in-listing advertising to stay visible.

Is it worth eliminating delivery apps entirely?

Not right away. Diego F. Parra recommends a mix: keep apps to capture new customers and gradually migrate repeat orders to an owned channel, until it sustains 35%-50% of total volume.

How much does it cost to set up an owned ordering channel?

WhatsApp Business with a catalog costs \$0 to \$40 a month. A website with its own payment gateway costs \$80 to \$300 a month depending on volume, recoverable in 4-6 weeks through commission savings.

Does an owned channel work for dark kitchens with no physical storefront?

Yes, even better: with no foot traffic, a dark kitchen depends entirely on digital channels, and every commission point saved on apps converts directly into net margin.

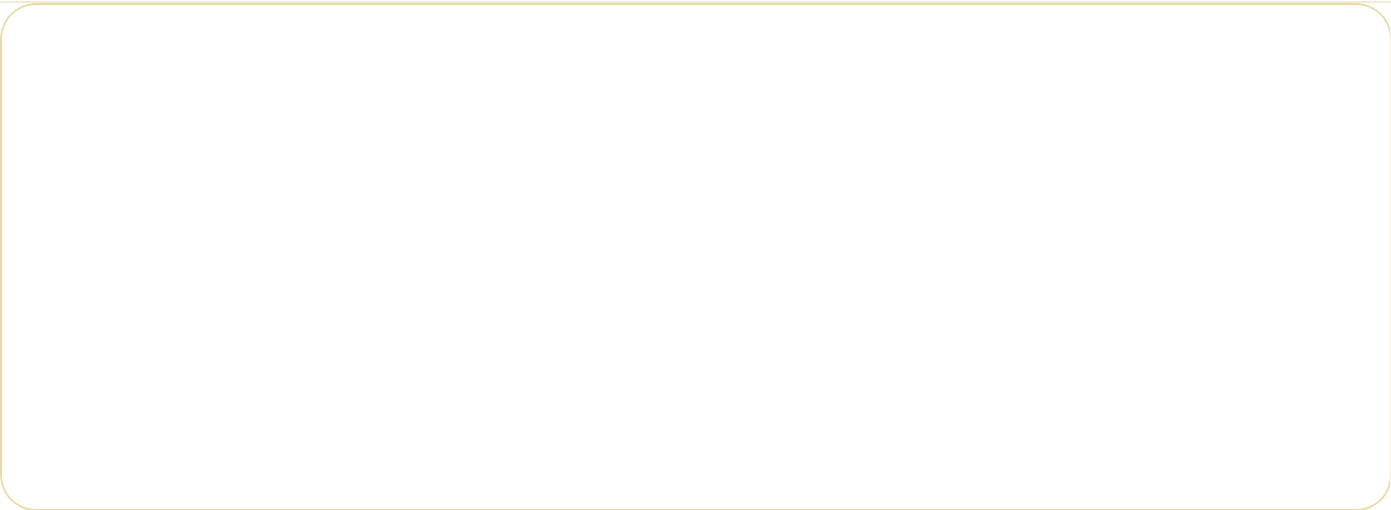
DATA & SOURCES

2026 data on own channel vs delivery apps

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

Metric	Value	Source
Average delivery time for restaurants' own (first-party) delivery channels	casi 31 minutos (2025)	Intouch Insight — Are the 2025 Third-Party Delivery Trends a Warning Sign for Operators? 2025
Consumers who order delivery or takeout 3–5 times a month	40% (2024)	Toast — Food Delivery Trends: Insights and Data (encuesta a 850 adultos de EE. UU., 2024)
Off-premises customers who'd order via the restaurant's own website (vs 71% via apps)	84% (2024)	National Restaurant Association — New report examines the technology landscape in today's restaurants 2024
Customers who'd order more to-go variety with packaging that preserves quality	90% (2025)	National Restaurant Association — Increased sales come in the right packages 2025
DoorDash share of the US food delivery market	~67% (2024)	Nation's Restaurant News — Why the restaurant delivery wars have a clear winner 2024
Maximum initial investment to launch a ghost kitchen	\$75,000 to \$200,000 USD (initial investment range) (2025)	OysterLink — Ghost Kitchens Explained: Data, Costs and Industry Impact [2025]

Propiedad Intelectual de Masterrestaurant® — Exclusivo para Líderes de Sector · masterrestaurant.com



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

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