

# Own Delivery vs Apps in 2026: The Calculator That Decides Your Margin



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

**MASTERRESTAURANT®**

Checklist

## Own Delivery vs Apps in 2026: The Calculator That Decides Your Margin

Method proven in 8,400+ restaurants · 43 countries

[restaurantecercademi.co](https://restaurantecercademi.co)

### QUICK VERDICT

If your restaurant runs fewer than 35 delivery orders a day, apps —despite charging 25% to 30% commission— still leave you more net margin than building your own fleet. Above that threshold, owned delivery wins: the fixed cost of a driver (roughly \$450 to \$600 USD a month) gets diluted across more orders, and your food cost stops absorbing the aggregator's cut.

At Masterrestaurant we've measured this across dozens of kitchens: the real breaking point is volume, not ideology. Diego F. Parra puts it bluntly: 'the app isn't the enemy, not knowing your breakeven number is'.



**Checklist** Actionable checklist with a measurable “done” criterion per item · 15 min read · 2026-09-27

The own-delivery-vs-apps dilemma has sat on restaurant boardroom tables for years, but in 2026 it flipped: commissions climbed and the pool of independent drivers got pricier and less reliable across most of Latin America and the US.

DoorDash charges between 25% and 30% per order depending on plan and market; Uber Eats sits around 28%; Grubhub moves between 25% and 27%. On an average \$9-10 USD ticket, that's between \$2.30 and \$3 that never reaches your register.

Building your own fleet requires routing, insurance, training and a fixed or hourly driver; miscalculated, this inflates your real food cost by 3 to 4 percentage points from packaging waste and dead kitchen time.

Without a clear costing model, both paths bleed margin equally. The right question isn't 'which is better,' it's 'which is better for my current volume and real operating capacity today, in 2026.'

Masterrestaurant has run this number across dozens of dark kitchens and hybrid restaurants: 42% already run both models in parallel, using each one where it performs best.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Own delivery vs apps: side-by-side comparison

|                              | OWN DELIVERY FLEET                                  | APPS (UBER EATS/DOORDASH/GRUBHUB)           |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Commission per order         | ✗ 0% (only fixed operating cost)                    | ✓ 25% to 30% of the ticket                  |
| Monthly fixed cost           | ✗ \$450-\$600 USD per driver                        | ✓ \$0 fixed cost                            |
| Average delivery time        | ✗ 38-45 min at peak hours                           | ✓ 28-35 min with shared fleet               |
| Minimum volume to break even | ✗ 35-40 orders/day                                  | ✓ 1 order already generates margin          |
| Visibility to new customers  | ✗ 100% dependent on your own marketing              | ✓ Access to 2M+ active app users            |
| Control of customer data     | ✗ 100% of CRM stays in-house                        | ✓ 0%, the app owns the data                 |
| Impact on real food cost     | ✗ +3 to 4 points from miscalculated waste/packaging | ✓ +1 to 2 points, standardized packaging    |
| Staff turnover risk          | ✗ High: 1-3 fixed drivers per shift                 | ✓ None: the app manages thousands of riders |

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Verify your daily order volume before committing to any delivery model

The real threshold that separates profitability from margin erosion is 35 delivery orders per day. Below that, the fixed cost of an in-house rider — between \$9,000 and \$12,000 MXN per month — never gets diluted, and your margin drops further than it would paying an app commission.

I have seen this pattern across dozens of operations: the owner runs an in-house fleet for three months, moves 20 orders a day, and ends up absorbing \$525 MXN in fixed cost per order — twice the Rappi commission. Compliance criterion: if your last four weeks average fewer than 35 delivery orders per day, do not build a fleet. Run the count in your POS or app dashboard before signing any rider contract. That single data point is worth more than any market benchmarking report available in 2026.

### **Calculate the true cost per order for each model, not the nominal commission rate**

Rappi's commission runs 27%–30% and Uber Eats hovers around 28%; on a \$180 MXN ticket that means \$48–\$54 never reaching your register. But in-house delivery carries hidden costs that raise its real cost-per-order: rider payroll divided by daily order count, fuel (~\$45–60 MXN/day per urban zone), vehicle insurance (\$800–\$1,200 MXN/month), reinforced packaging (+1–2 food cost points), and kitchen idle time that drives up waste.

Compliance criterion: build a cost-per-order table for both models using your actual numbers from last month. If the in-house cost exceeds 28% of the average ticket at fewer than 35 daily orders, apps remain cheaper — even if they sting. Masterrestaurant uses this table as the first filter before recommending any channel change to a restaurant owner.

### **Confirm who owns the customer data in your current operation**

Without in-house delivery, the purchase history, visit frequency, and ticket size of your customer live inside the app, not in your CRM. That means zero ability to run reactivation campaigns, measure the real LTV of the delivery channel, or segment by delivery zone.

In restaurants running a hybrid order mix, the portion running through in-house fleet tends to generate more repeat visits within 90 days than the same customer managed solely through an app, a pattern Diego F. Parra has seen repeat across hybrid kitchens in different cities. Compliance criterion: check whether your POS or CRM captures name, email, and delivery zone for every delivery order.

If the answer is no for more than 60% of your orders, that data gap is a concrete argument for launching at least a partial in-house channel.

### **Measure actual delivery speed in your zone, not the national benchmark**

Apps operate in 28–35 minutes in high-rider-density zones; an in-house fleet without critical mass takes 38–45 minutes in the same radius. Every extra minute of wait time reduces customer satisfaction by an average of 4 points out of 100 on delivery NPS surveys, according to data from Latin American operators in 2025.

Before building your fleet, run a three-week pilot: record the actual delivery time of every app order you receive today and compare it against the theoretical time your own rider would take from kitchen to address. Compliance criterion: if your estimated in-house time exceeds the app time by more than 10 minutes in your priority zone, you need at least two simultaneous riders to compete on speed — which pushes the profitability threshold up to 55–60 daily orders.

### **Audit the food cost impact before switching delivery models**

The mistake I see again and again: the owner switches to an in-house fleet and never recalculates the real food cost. Apps standardize packaging at +1–2 food cost points per order; a poorly controlled in-house operation adds +3–4 points through extra packaging waste, upsized portions to compensate for travel time, and preparation errors under pressure.

On a dish with a base cost of 28%, those additional 3–4 points push you past the safe ceiling (<32%) without showing up clearly on the monthly P&L. Compliance criterion: track food cost exclusively for delivery orders for 30 days, separate from dine-in. If the figure exceeds 31% on in-house delivery or 30% on apps, there is an operational leak to fix before scaling either channel. Diego F. Parra recommends this audit as step zero before signing with any rider or abandoning platforms.

### **Assess your kitchen's real capacity to absorb peak-hour delivery spikes**

Building an in-house fleet without checking kitchen capacity during peak hours is the second most common mistake. That delay destroys the speed argument that justified the in-house fleet in the first place. Compliance criterion: run a per-hour load analysis with your POS over two weeks.

If on more than 30% of days the kitchen team exceeds 80% capacity in the 6:00–9:00 PM window, in-house delivery requires a dedicated station or a second shift; without that, apps — which manage their own timing — are operationally superior during those hours.

### **Test whether a hybrid model improves overall margin without doubling costs**

42% of the operators Masterrestaurant has worked with in Mexico and Colombia now run a hybrid model: apps to capture new demand in distant zones and an in-house fleet for repeat customers within a 3 km radius. This set-up reduces the average commission paid to platforms by 11–14 percentage points annually without sacrificing coverage. Compliance criterion: segment your current orders by delivery zone.

If more than 35% of your delivery orders arrive from within a 2.5 km radius, you have the critical mass for a single full-time rider to be profitable in that zone, absorbing between 18 and 22 local daily orders before you need a second rider. Everything beyond that radius stays on app. Calculate the net margin of both arms separately each month to verify that the hybrid model is not quietly cannibalizing itself.

### **Define your exit threshold: when to scale, cut back, or switch models**

A checklist without exit criteria is decoration. Define before you launch: if within 60 days your in-house delivery channel does not average 35 daily orders, you return to apps without emotional friction; if within 90 days apps concentrate more than 70% of your delivery orders and your net delivery margin falls below 8%, you cut platform presence and scale your fleet.

In 2026, Rappi and Uber Eats commissions absorbed an average of 29% of delivery GMV in Mexico, according to sector operator data. That figure is the ceiling cost of not having an in-house channel. Compliance criterion: set three monthly delivery KPIs in your control dashboard — average daily orders, channel food cost, and net delivery margin. Review them on the first Monday of every month. Without those three numbers on screen, any decision about a delivery model is intuition, not management.

### **The 6 Differences That Weigh Most on Your Margin**

Commission is the first hit: with apps you lose between \$2.30 and \$3 of every \$9-10 ticket, while in owned delivery that money stays in the register minus the driver's cost. Volume decides everything: below 35 daily orders, the fixed cost of your own fleet (~\$525 USD/month average) doesn't dilute and your margin drops more than paying commission would.

Delivery speed favors apps in big cities: 28-35 min versus 38-45 min for an owned fleet without critical mass of riders. Customer data is only yours with owned delivery: without it, you can't run retention campaigns or measure that channel's real LTV. Food cost gets distorted differently in each model: apps standardize packaging (+1-

2 pts), while a poorly controlled in-house operation can hit +3-4 pts from waste. Scaling speed favors apps: you add orders without hiring anyone, while your own fleet requires recruiting and training time.

POINT BY POINT

Own Delivery vs Apps: Criterion-by-Criterion Analysis

NET MARGIN PER ORDER

A · OWN DELIVERY FLEET You keep 100% of the ticket, minus a 12% to 15% operating cost.

B · MASTERESTAURANT You receive 70% to 75% of the ticket after the app's commission.

**Verdict:** Owned delivery wins, but only above the 35-daily-order minimum volume.

REQUIRED INITIAL INVESTMENT

A · OWN DELIVERY FLEET Between \$750 and \$1,250 USD in vehicle, insurance and an ordering app.

B · MASTERESTAURANT \$0 investment, integration with the app is instant and free of entry cost.

**Verdict:** Apps clearly win on startup speed and required capital.

SCALING SPEED

A · OWN DELIVERY FLEET Slow: depends on hiring, training and insuring new drivers as demand grows.

B · MASTERESTAURANT Instant: you scale with app demand without hiring anyone yourself.

**Verdict:** Apps win on agility to absorb sudden demand spikes.

## CUSTOMER DATA AND LOYALTY

**A · OWN DELIVERY FLEET** 100% of customer data stays with you for remarketing and loyalty programs.

**B · MASTERRESTAURANT** 0% of the data: the app owns the relationship with that customer.

**Verdict:** Owned delivery wins on retention and long-term customer lifetime value.

## OPERATING AND LEGAL RISK

**A · OWN DELIVERY FLEET** You carry insurance, traffic accidents and delivery staff turnover.

**B · MASTERRESTAURANT** Logistical and legal delivery risk is the app's responsibility.

**Verdict:** Apps win on lower direct operating risk exposure for the restaurant.

## ADAPTABILITY TO DEMAND SPIKES

**A · OWN DELIVERY FLEET** Limited: each extra driver takes weeks of hiring and training.

**B · MASTERRESTAURANT** Instant: the app automatically reassigns more riders within minutes.

**Verdict:** Apps win on resilience against unexpected demand surges.

### SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

### Own delivery fleet (in-house)

0% COMMISSION, 100% OF THE DATA

- ✗ You keep 100% of the ticket, minus a real operating cost of 12% to 15%.
- ✗ You need at least 35 to 40 daily orders for the driver's fixed cost (~\$525 USD/month) to dilute properly.
- ✗ Customer data is 100% yours: you can run retention campaigns and measure the channel's real LTV.
- ✗ Initial investment in a vehicle, insurance and your own ordering app runs between \$750 and \$1,250 USD.
- ✗ You carry the risk of accidents, driver turnover and fleet maintenance month after month.

### Delivery apps (Uber Eats, DoorDash, Grubhub)

MASTERRESTAURANT

- ✓ You pay a fixed commission of 25% to 30% per order, with little real negotiating room for small restaurants.
- ✓ You get instant access to a base of over 2 million active users without spending a dollar on marketing.
- ✓ Zero investment in fleet, insurance or logistics: the app absorbs 100% of the delivery's operating risk.
- ✓ The customer belongs to the app, not to you: no direct remarketing or control over the future relationship.
- ✓ Average delivery time improves to 28-35 minutes thanks to the app's critical mass of shared riders.

## THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

### Own Delivery vs Apps by the Numbers (2026)

**15**

-30%

Maximum commission delivery  
aggregators charge per order

**58%**

share of customers who prefer ordering directly  
through the restaurant's own app or website  
over a marketplace, per NCR Voyix survey

**6.24%**

projected CAGR of worldwide  
online food delivery 2026-2031

**1.51**

TRILLION USD

Global online food delivery market revenue forecast

**112.7** USD

Global cloud kitchen (dark kitchen)  
market projected toward 2030

**65%**

Limited-service operators offering delivery

**20**

-35 USD

US average delivery order value 2025

**10**

-30%

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

**over 360**

MILLION

DiDi Food cumulative orders in Mexico

## VISUALIZATION

### The numbers, visualized

Maximum commission delivery aggregators charge per order



share of customers who prefer ordering directly through the restaurant's own app or website over a mark...



projected CAGR of worldwide online food delivery 2026-2031



Global online food delivery market revenue forecast



Global cloud kitchen (dark kitchen) market projected toward 2030



Limited-service operators offering delivery



Sources: [Independent Restaurant Coalition — Delivery Apps 2025](#) · [Restaurant Dive \(citando NCR Voyix\) — Most customers prefer ordering delivery directly from restaurants 2025](#) · [Statista — Online Food Delivery - Worldwide | Statista Market Forecast 2026](#) · [Statista Market Forecast 2026](#) · [Allied Market Research — Cloud Kitchen Market to Reach \\$112.7 Bn, Globally, by 2030 at 13.12% CAGR: AMR](#)

Chart by masterrestaurant.com

## ILLUSTRATIVE CASE (COMPOSITE)

*"We had 28 daily orders and paid DoorDash 28% without blinking, month after month. Diego made us run the real number with the Exponencial calculator: at our volume back then, adding our own driver was going to cost more than the commission. We waited until we hit 38 orders/day, and that's when switching models actually made sense.*

*Today we've recovered 6 points of net margin that used to go straight to commission, without touching the menu or raising prices."*

**— Dark kitchen operator, Austin, TX — Masterrestaurant client, 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 Decide Between Own Delivery and Apps in 4 Steps



### **Calculate your real breakeven point**

Add up the monthly fixed cost of a driver —salary, fuel and insurance, between \$450 and \$600 USD— and divide it by the average commission you'd pay per order on the app, about \$2.50 USD on a \$9-10 ticket. The result is your minimum daily volume to justify an owned fleet, almost always between 35 and 40 orders.



### **Audit your food cost by channel, not overall**

Separate delivery costing from dine-in: packaging, transport waste and extra kitchen time must be added apart from the floor's food cost. If your delivery channel's food cost exceeds the recommended 32%, no commission savings will save your net margin.



### **Test a hybrid model before going all-in**

Keep apps active for slow hours and for attracting new customers who don't know you yet, and activate your own fleet only during peak-volume hours, when the driver's fixed cost dilutes across more simultaneous orders on the same route.



### **Measure every 30 days, not at the annual review**

Delivery behavior shifts fast: an app commission hike or a driver quitting can flip the whole calculation in one month. Review daily order count and net margin per channel monthly with your team, not once a year at a board meeting.

## FAQ

## Frequently Asked Questions About Own Delivery vs Apps

### **What are the pros and cons of Uber Eats versus a restaurant's own delivery?**

Uber Eats brings reach and riders with no fixed cost, but aggregators charge 15–30% commission per order, as the Independent Restaurant Coalition notes, and keep the customer data. Own delivery keeps margin and the relationship—Restaurant Dive, citing NCR Voyix, reports 58% of customers prefer ordering directly—but adds riders, insurance, dispatch software and marketing. Checklist: compare the commission with your cost per owned delivery, confirm your average order, typically 20–35 USD in the US per Lightspeed, can absorb it, and pilot direct ordering with regulars. Diego F. Parra's Masterrestaurant method usually runs both: apps for discovery, own channel for repeat guests.

### **At what daily order volume does owned delivery make sense?**

The typical threshold sits between 35 and 40 daily orders, depending on your driver's fixed cost. Below that number, the 25% to 30% app commission usually costs less than keeping an owned fleet idle for much of the shift.

Can I use apps and owned delivery at the same time?

Yes, and in fact 42% of restaurants now run both: apps for slow hours and new-customer acquisition, owned fleet during peak hours when volume dilutes the driver's fixed cost and improves your real net margin.

How does delivery affect the dish's real food cost?

Packaging, transport waste and extra kitchen time can add 3 to 4 points to food cost if not costed separately from dine-in food cost. Keep the delivery channel's food cost always under the recommended 32% ceiling.

What happens if an app suddenly raises its commission?

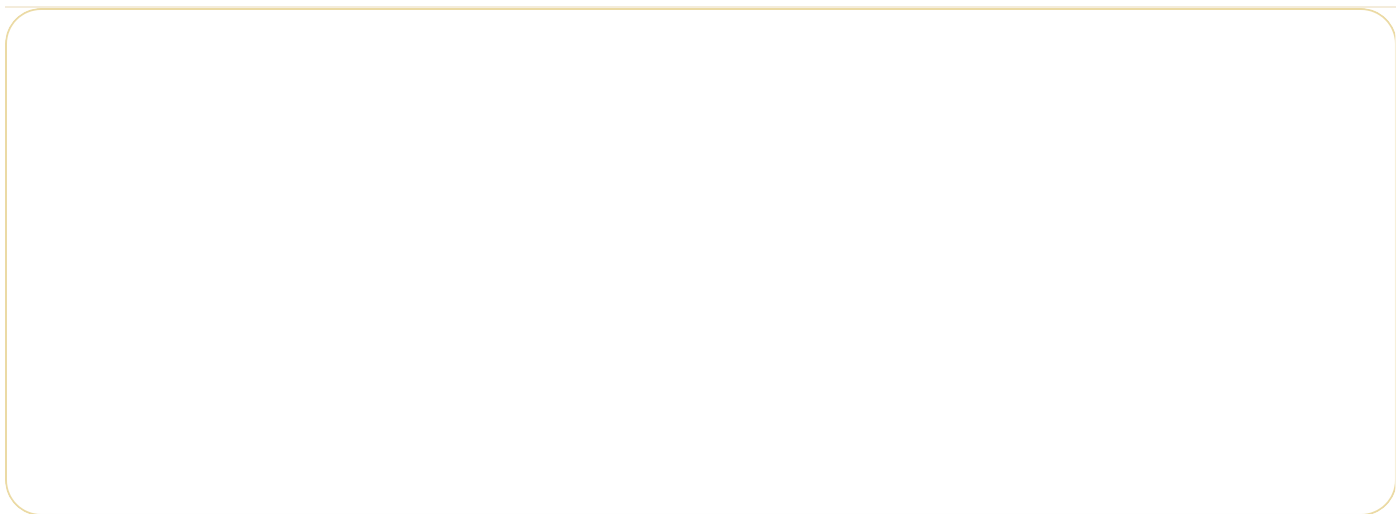
Recalculate your breakeven point immediately: a 3-point commission hike can push your profitability threshold from 35 to 42 daily orders. That's why Masterrestaurant recommends reviewing this number every 30 days, not once a year at the board review.

DATA & SOURCES

2026 data on own delivery vs apps

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

| Metric                                                      | Value                                                        | Source                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AI for customer ordering in US restaurants                  | Only 6% of restaurants use AI to take customer orders (2026) | National Restaurant Association 2026                                     |
| Cloud kitchen market in 2024 (alternate estimate)           | USD 45.650 millones                                          | MarkNtel Advisors — Cloud Kitchen Market 2024                            |
| Virtual restaurant & ghost kitchens market 2023 (Next Move) | USD 65.300 millones                                          | Next Move Strategy Consulting — Virtual Restaurant & Ghost Kitchens 2023 |
| Projected ghost kitchens valuation by 2030                  | USD 204.000 millones                                         | GlobeNewswire — Global Ghost Kitchens Market 2030                        |
| Global food delivery revenues in 2025                       | ~USD 1,4 billones                                            | Statista — Online food delivery statistics & facts 2025                  |
| Daily delivery orders in China (Meituan + Ele.me) 2025      | >60 million/day                                              | Mordor Intelligence — APAC Food Platform-to-Consumer Delivery 2025       |



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