White Papers

Channel Margin Architecture: Dine-In, Delivery and Take-Away with a Separate P&L

By **Diego F. Parra** · Updated 2026-07-08 · Costing & Finance

QUICK VERDICT

Verdict: a consolidated margin that blends dine-in, delivery and take-away is blind accounting. Delivery can grow sales and drain EBITDA at once, because its real prime cost rises 9-14 points from platform commissions and packaging. Before you open the second location, split the P&L by channel: without theoretical vs actual cost per channel you don't scale profit, you scale the capital leak.

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The operator who consolidates all three channels into a single income statement decides on averaged data that hides the problem. A dish at 30% food cost in the dining room reaches 41% in delivery once you load platform commission and packaging, and that gap never surfaces in a blended P&L.

The question this white paper answers is not how much I sell, but how much margin each euro leaves depending on where it enters. Diego F. Parra repeats it in every Masterestaurant audit: the loudest channel in sales is usually the quietest in profit.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Side-by-side comparison

	BEFORE: CONSOLIDATED P&L	AFTER: SEPARATE ACCOUNTING BY CHANNEL
Visible prime cost	✕ 58% single average (hides the real range)	✓ Dine-in 54% / Take-away 56% / Delivery 68%
Platform commission	✕ Diluted in 'other expenses'	✓ Assigned by channel: 22-30% of delivery ticket
Contribution margin per order	✕ Single non-actionable figure	✓ Dine-in 46% / Take-away 44% / Delivery 21%
Break-even point	✕ One global threshold	✓ One per channel; delivery needs +38% volume

	BEFORE: CONSOLIDATED P&L	AFTER: SEPARATE ACCOUNTING BY CHANNEL
Menu decision	✕ Same price across channels	✓ Price and menu per channel by real margin
Attributable EBITDA	✕ Unknown which channel adds or subtracts	✓ EBITDA by channel audited monthly

Chapter 1 — Why a blended margin is blind accounting

A P&L that lumps dine-in, delivery and take-away into a single line lies to you by design. A blended prime cost of 58% sounds under control, yet it can hide a delivery channel at 68% dragging down the whole while dine-in runs at 51%. I have seen it in dozens of groups: the operator celebrates that sales climb 22% year over year and never notices EBITDA eroding three points, because the channel that grows is the one that leaves the least margin. A dish with 30% food cost in the dining room hits 41% in delivery once you load the platform commission and packaging. That 11-point gap never shows in the mixed account; the average absorbs it. Before signing for the second location, split the result by channel: each euro performs differently depending on how it enters the business. The delivery platform commission is a direct variable cost of that channel, not a general expense diluted across everyone.

Chapter 2 — The platform commission is a direct variable cost, not overhead

When you bury it in the "other expenses" line, you lose the most common capital leak Diego F. Parra finds while auditing groups of 3 to 10 locations. A 28-32% commission on the delivery ticket, plus 1.20-1.80 euros of packaging per order, plus a dedicated runner's time: that is 9 to 14 points of prime cost belonging to that channel alone. Treating it as shared fixed cost spreads the blame onto dine-in, which never caused it. The Masterestaurant rule is blunt: every cost is charged to the channel that triggers it. Only then do you see that a 24-euro delivery order leaves the same absolute margin as a 15-euro dine-in check. Contribution margin per order decides how many orders you need for the same profit, and between channels the difference is brutal. A delivery order contributing 21% versus a dine-in check at 46% means you need more than double the orders — 2.19 times exactly— to leave the same money in the till.

Chapter 3 — Contribution margin per order changes the whole scaling math

Without that figure, delivery volume reads as success: a thousand orders a month sounds like expansion. But if each one delivers half the margin, you are running the kitchen, staff and capital just to drain liquidity. I have seen restaurants with delivery at 40% of sales and 18% of real profit. The number that matters is not the average ticket or the order count, but how many cents of each euro survive after commission. That thermometer separates growing from merely billing. Standardizing the channel P&L before opening the second location turns each opening into the replica of a model with a known margin, not a bet. Once you know your dining room runs at 46% contribution, delivery at 21% and take-away at 38%, you can set the target mix of every new site instead of discovering it twelve months late. Diego F. Parra puts it this way in every Masterestaurant audit: scaling without channel accounting is photocopying an error three times.

Chapter 4 — Standardize channel accounting before you scale

The group that standardizes first can rule that no location exceeds 35% of sales in delivery unless its kitchen is designed for that margin. The gap between a group that makes money with ten locations and one that only stacks revenue with ten almost always sits in whether it disaggregated the channel before or after the third opening. A channel P&L is built with three columns —dine-in, delivery, take-away— that share the sales line but split each variable cost at its source. On top, the net sales of each channel. Below, that channel's real food cost, which is not identical: delivery usually weighs 2-4 points more because portions are adjusted for transport. Then packaging, charged in full to the channel that consumes it; dine-in barely uses any. Next the platform commission, zero in the dining room, 28-32% in delivery. The result is three contribution margins you never average again.

Chapter 5 — How to build a three-column P&L

Fixed costs —rent, base payroll, utilities— go at the bottom, to the location's break-even, not to the plate. This format takes an afternoon to build in a spreadsheet and saves five-figure losses a year in a mid-size group, because it exposes which channel finances which. Once you see the margin split by channel, decisions that looked obvious flip. The operator about to raise delivery advertising spend discovers each new order costs margin, and redirects that budget to filling dine-in tables, where contribution doubles. The one about to close take-away for being "too quiet" sees it runs at 38% with no commission and pushes it harder. Diego F. Parra has reordered the mix of dozens of locations with this single change of lens: in a group of six restaurants, moving from 42% to 28% of sales in delivery lifted aggregate EBITDA 2.8 points without touching a single recipe.

Chapter 6 — What decisions change once you see the margin split

Channel accounting is not a month-end exercise; it is the tool that decides where you put the next marketing euro, which dish you promote and through which channel you want your growth to enter in 2026. The consolidated P&L averages; channel accounting disaggregates. A single 58% prime cost can hide a delivery channel at 68% dragging the whole down: the average lies by design. Platform commission is not overhead, it is a direct variable cost of the delivery channel. Burying it in 'other expenses' is the most common capital leak Diego F. Parra finds in groups of 3 to 10 locations. Contribution margin per order changes radically between channels: a delivery at 21% versus a dine-in at 46% means you need more than double the orders for the same profit. Without that figure, delivery volume reads as success while it drains cash. Standardizing channel accounting before scaling turns every opening into a replica of a model with a known margin; scaling without splitting replicates an average nobody has audited.

POINT BY POINT

Before vs after: four decisions that change with a per-channel P&L

PRIME COST VISIBILITY

A · BEFORE: CONSOLIDATED P&L A single consolidated average

B · MASTERESTAURANT Real prime cost per channel monthly

Verdict: Separate accounting wins: the average hides delivery at 68%.

COMMISSION TREATMENT

A · BEFORE: CONSOLIDATED P&L Buried in overhead

B · MASTERESTAURANT Direct variable cost of the channel

Verdict: Assigning it to the channel is the only way to see the real capital leak.

PRICING POLICY

A · BEFORE: CONSOLIDATED P&L Same price across all channels

B · MASTERESTAURANT Price per channel by contribution margin

Verdict: Differentiated pricing restores delivery margin without touching dine-in.

BASIS OF THE OPENING DECISION

A · BEFORE: CONSOLIDATED P&L Total group sales

B · MASTERESTAURANT Audited EBITDA by channel

Verdict: Scaling on EBITDA by channel replicates profit; on sales it replicates risk.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Consolidated P&L (the model that breaks when you scale) BEFORE

- ✕ One average food cost for all three channels
- ✕ Delivery commissions buried in overhead
- ✕ Same menu price in dine-in, own app and aggregator
- ✕ Single break-even that ignores the channel mix
- ✕ Expansion decisions on sales, not attributable margin

Separate accounting by channel (the model that scales profit) MASTERESTAURANT

- ✓ Theoretical vs actual cost calculated per channel monthly
- ✓ Commission, packaging and last mile assigned to their channel
- ✓ Differentiated price per channel by contribution margin
- ✓ Break-even per channel and delivery profitability threshold
- ✓ EBITDA by channel as the input to the opening decision

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THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

The numbers that hold up channel architecture

30%
Maximum aggregator commission on the delivery ticket in 2026

14 pts
Prime cost rise of the same dish moving from dine-in to delivery (commission + packaging)

68%
Real prime cost of an unmanaged delivery channel vs 54% for dine-in

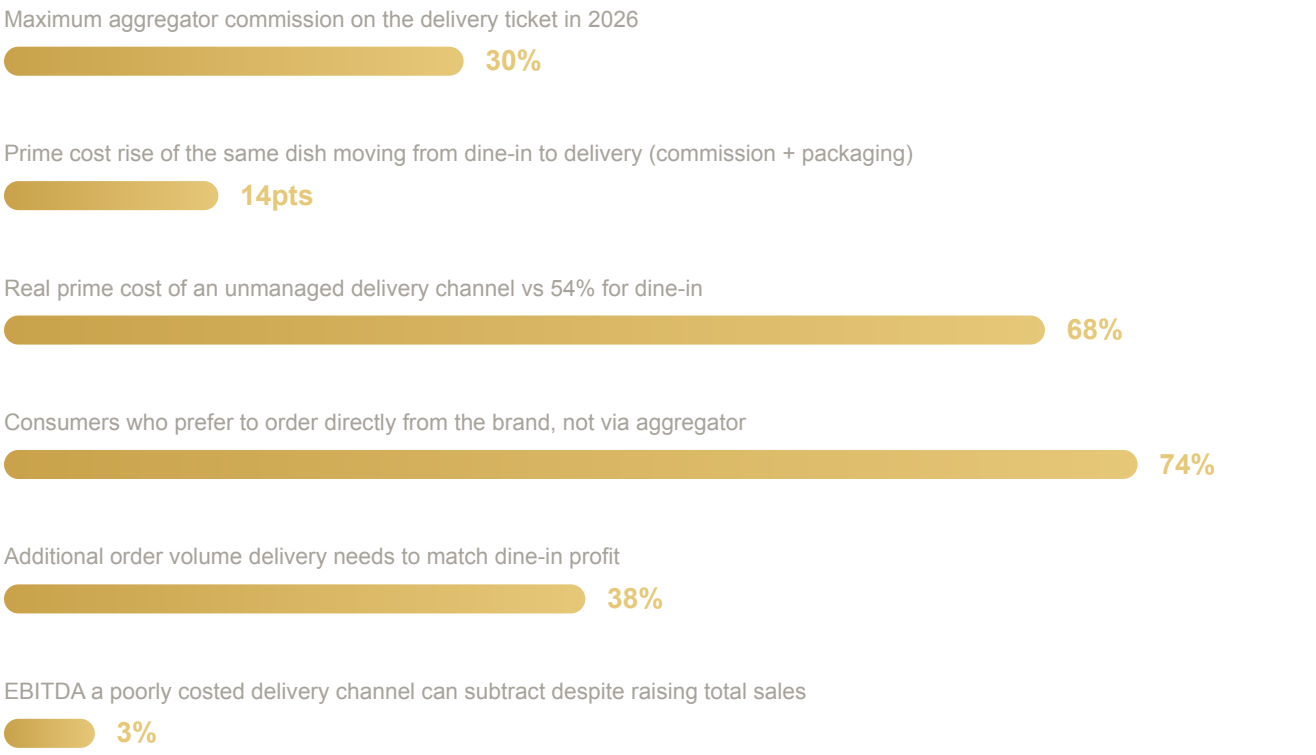
74%
Consumers who prefer to order directly from the brand, not via aggregator

38%
Additional order volume delivery needs to match dine-in profit

3%
EBITDA a poorly costed delivery channel can subtract despite raising total sales

VISUALIZATION

The numbers, visualized



Sources: Masterestaurant internal data · National Restaurant Association 2026 Chart by masterestaurant.com

REAL CASE

"When we split the P&L by channel in a seven-location group, delivery was 34% of total sales and contributed negative EBITDA. It wasn't a kitchen problem: it was 27% commission and packaging never passed through. We raised delivery-only prices 12%, pulled eight low-rotation dishes off the digital menu, and in 90 days the channel went from -2.1% to +6.4% operating margin without touching dine-in sales."

— Diego F. Parra, restaurant consultant, Masterestaurant

HOW TO APPLY IT IN YOUR RESTAURANT

How to build separate channel accounting in 90 days

1. **Tag every euro by channel at the POS**
   Configure the point of sale so each ticket is born marked as dine-in, take-away or delivery, and within delivery separate own app from aggregator. Without traceability at origin, any channel P&L is a guess. This is the foundation: two weeks of clean data beat six months of averages.

2 **Assign variable costs to their real channel**
Platform commission, disposable packaging, last-mile cost and transport waste go to the channel that generates them, not to overhead. Calculate the real prime cost per channel (food cost + direct labor + channel variable costs) and compare it against the theoretical.

3 **Set price and menu per channel**
With contribution margin by channel in view, raise delivery prices to absorb the commission and remove high-food-cost, low-rotation dishes from the digital menu. A dish profitable in the dining room can lose money in delivery: a per-channel menu stops being a luxury and becomes financial hygiene.

4 **Audit EBITDA by channel every month**
Close a monthly managerial P&L per channel with its own break-even. Turn EBITDA by channel into the input for the opening decision: you only replicate a channel whose profitability you have audited. Standardize before you scale means exactly this.

FAQ

Frequently asked questions about channel margins

Why separate the P&L by channel if the total margin is positive?

Because a positive total margin can hide a loss-making channel offset by another. If delivery subtracts EBITDA and dine-in covers it, every extra delivery euro destroys value. Splitting the P&L reveals which channel funds which and stops the leak before you scale.

How much does food cost actually rise in delivery?

The ingredient food cost doesn't change, but the channel's real prime cost rises 9 to 14 points from platform commission (22-30% of the ticket), disposable packaging and transport waste. That's why the same dish at 30% in dine-in can reach 41% effective food cost in delivery.

Should I charge different prices on delivery?

If the channel's contribution margin demands it, yes. With delivery at 21% margin versus 46% in dine-in, a 10-12% delivery increase restores profitability without penalizing the dine-in guest. It is margin arithmetic, not opportunism: you absorb a real variable cost of the channel.

When is my operation ready to open the second location?

When you have audited EBITDA by channel for at least three months and a stable break-even per channel. Scaling without separate accounting replicates an unaudited average; with it, each opening is the copy of a model with a known margin. Standardize before you scale.

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
Costo laboral	**25–35% de los ingresos**	U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
Ventas del sector (EE.UU.)	**proyección ≈US$1,55 billones en 2026 pese a presión de costos**	National Restaurant Association — SOI 2026
Food cost óptimo del sector	**28–35% (promedio full-service 32.4%)**	National Restaurant Association
Margen neto típico	**3–9% (full-service 3–5%)**	Statista
Flujo de caja en pymes	**la mala gestión de caja se asocia a ~82% de los cierres de pequeños negocios**	Inc. (estudio U.S. Bank)
Costos y demanda 2026	**alzas de costos persistentes con demanda resiliente en restaurantes**	Bloomberg Línea

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