


The Silent Commission: What Each Aggregator Order Really Costs You



By **Diego F. Parra** · Updated 2026-07-08 · Dark Kitchens & Foodtech

QUICK VERDICT

Verdict: the commission on your contract (28%–35%) is not what you actually pay. The real cost per aggregator order lands at 46%–58% of the ticket once packaging, platform waste, hidden CAC and tied-up capital are added. A restaurant that believes it wins on delivery is usually subsidizing it with dining-room margin. The executive decision is not 'leave the aggregator', it is to redesign the unit economics: own channel for the repeat customer, aggregator only as paid, measured acquisition.

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Across 8,400+ units audited by Masterrestaurant in 43 countries, the finding repeats: the owner looks at the aggregator's nominal commission and considers the analysis closed. It is the most expensive decision-architecture error of the foodtech decade.

This brief translates delivery noise into boardroom language: unit economics per order, real CAC, tied-up capital, and the exact point where a dark kitchen stops being a growth lever and becomes a liability with a nice logo.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Side-by-side comparison

	NAIVE READ (VISIBLE COMMISSION)	MASTERRESTAURANT METHOD (REAL TOTAL COST)
Declared nominal commission	✗ 30% of ticket	✓ 30% (starting point, not endpoint)
Total cost per order (% of ticket)	✗ ≈30% assumed	✓ 46%–58% measured
Target food cost for the delivery dish	✗ Dining-room figure kept (~30%)	✓ ≤32% recalculated for the channel
Packaging and disposables per order	✗ Not counted ("a detail")	✓ 6%–9% of ticket, measured by SKU

	NAIVE READ (VISIBLE COMMISSION)	MASTERRESTAURANT METHOD (REAL TOTAL COST)
CAC / promos to rank in the top	✗ Invisible in the P&L	✓ 4%–11% of ticket booked as acquisition
Waste from platform errors and refunds	✗ Absorbed, unrecorded	✓ 1.5%–3.5% of GMV, provisioned
Real contribution margin per order	✗ Positive (accounting illusion)	✓ Frequently negative before redesign
Ownership of customer data	✗ 0% (the platform owns it)	✓ Goal: recover repeat orders to own channel

1. What does each aggregator order really cost?

The real cost of an aggregator order runs 46%–58% of the ticket, not the 28%–35% printed in your contract. The nominal commission is only 50%–65% of the channel's total cost;

the rest lives off the page. Across +8,400 units we audited at Masterrestaurant in 43 countries, the owner reads the contract percentage and closes the analysis. It's the most expensive decision-architecture error of the foodtech decade. Add packaging (4%–8% of the ticket), platform shrinkage from errors and disputes (1.5%–3%), the hidden CAC of promos to rank higher (6%–12%) and the cost of capital tied up for 14–30 days. A dish with 30% food cost in the dining room yields positive contribution; that same dish cloned to delivery without its own spec sheet yields negative contribution. The order isn't the one shown in the app: it's the one that survives settlement.

2. Nominal commission versus total channel cost

The visible commission is only 50%–65% of the true cost of running delivery; treating it as the final number disguises the loss. A contract at 30% looks harmless until you stack the layers you didn't sign: premium packaging so the food arrives presentable (4%–8% of the ticket), the in-platform electronic payment fee (1.5%–2.5%), the logistics fee for far-zone delivery and the customer-refund adjustments the platform deducts without asking. I've seen in dozens of restaurants how a P&L celebrating 'only 30% commission' hides a channel eating 52% of the ticket. The boardroom rule is simple: anything eroding price between the customer and your bank account is channel cost, whether or not it's in the clause. Reconcile the deposit, not the order. Between the price the customer sees and what the platform deposits there's a 4%–9% gap the owner rarely reconciles.

3. Gross ticket versus net settlement: the gap no one reconciles

The app charges 20 dollars; between tax withholdings, adjustments for 'platform-funded' promotions, refunds for orders the customer flagged as incomplete and disputes resolved for the buyer by default, the real deposit drops to 17.80–19.20. Multiply that leak by 1,200 orders a month and it's 1,500–2,600 dollars vanishing with no invoice to explain them. At Masterrestaurant we enforce a monthly ritual: cross the platform report against the bank statement, line by line, for a full quarter. Nine of ten operators discover charges they never authorized. The gross order is marketing; the net settlement is accounting. Only the second pays payroll. Promotions to rank

higher in the app are paid acquisition, and without assigning them to each order the margin is disguised by 6%–12%. The owner runs a 2-for-1 or a 20% discount 'to gain visibility' and books it as generic marketing expense, blurred across the month.

4. Promos aren't diffuse marketing: they're CAC per order

It's a textbook costing error. That discount acquired a specific order from a specific customer; it's CAC, and it must be subtracted from THAT order's contribution. When we assign it correctly in the audit, the promoted ticket usually shows negative contribution of 1.50–4 dollars: the restaurant pays to sell. The discipline we demand: every campaign is modeled as variable cost per order, not as a fixed line. If the promoted order doesn't cover food cost plus packaging plus commission, it isn't growth, it's subsidizing the aggregator with your capital. Cloning the dining-room price to delivery destroys 8 to 15 margin points per order; the delivery dish demands its own spec sheet, its own packaging and its own price. In the room, that dish absorbs a 30% food cost and yields healthy contribution because the guest pays for the experience, the drink and the dessert that lift the ticket.

5. The delivery dish needs its own cost sheet

In delivery it travels alone, with no high-margin beverage, in packaging costing 0.80–1.60 dollars and a commission taking a third. Diego F. Parra repeats it in every engagement: the error I see again and again is the mirror menu, identical price in both channels. The Masterrestaurant method fixes it with a separately designed delivery menu, dishes that travel well, pricing set to the channel's real cost and combos that rebuild the ticket. The same dish in two channels is two different products. Platforms settle in 14–30 days, and that tied-up capital costs between 1.5% and 4% of GMV when the business is financed with credit at 25%–40% a year. The owner celebrates volume without seeing that every dollar sold takes weeks to return, while he pays suppliers at 7 days and payroll every fifteen. That cash-flow mismatch forces expensive credit lines or stretched payments, and the financial cost is real even if no one signs it.

6. Tied-up capital: the cost in no clause

In a dark kitchen with 40,000 dollars in monthly GMV and 21-day settlement, we're talking about 2,300 dollars permanently locked. This is where a dark kitchen stops being a growth lever and becomes a liability with a nice logo: when the channel grows faster than the cash that sustains it. Raising volume in a channel with negative contribution accelerates the loss instead of fixing it: each extra order deepens the hole, it doesn't fill it. It's the most common mental trap we correct in the boardroom: the operator sees aggregator GMV grow 20% month over month and reads it as success, when in reality he's scaling a business losing 2–4 dollars per transaction. Doubling 500 orders to 1,000 doesn't double profit; it doubles the bleed. The metric that matters isn't GMV or order count: it's contribution per order after food cost, packaging, total commission, promo CAC and cost of capital.

7. GMV that grows versus contribution that falls

If that number is negative, the correct order is to brake, not accelerate. At Masterrestaurant we rebuild the per-order sheet first; only when contribution is positive and stable do we authorize growing volume. Growing on a loss is the most expensive way to go bankrupt with rising sales. The concrete action is one: rebuild the real contribution per aggregator order before approving one more dollar of growth. Take your last 200 platform orders and subtract from each the real food cost, packaging (0.80–1.60), total commission reconciled against the bank, the CAC of the promo that generated it and the financial cost of 14–30 days of waiting. The number left is your truth,

not the app's optimistic report. If it runs 46%–58% total cost like most of the 8,400 audited units, you have three levers: redesign the delivery menu with its own price, push your direct channel with lower food cost and zero commission, and renegotiate the fee by volume.

8. What to do Monday: rebuild the order before scaling

Well-costed delivery is profitable; delivery cloned from the dining room is a monthly donation to the aggregator. Decide with the sheet, not the GMV. Nominal commission vs total cost: the visible commission is only 50%–65% of the channel's real cost; the rest lives outside the contract. Gross vs net-settled ticket: between the customer's price and the platform's deposit there are holdbacks, adjustments and disputes owners rarely reconcile. Fuzzy marketing vs CAC per order: promos to rank on top are paid acquisition; unassigned, they cosmetically inflate margin. Dining room vs delivery: the delivery dish needs its own cost card, packaging and price; cloning it from the dining room destroys margin. GMV growth vs contribution: scaling volume on a negative-contribution channel accelerates the loss, it does not fix it.

POINT BY POINT

Myth vs reality: how a CEO reads the aggregator cost

DEFINITION OF COST PER ORDER

A · NAIVE READ (VISIBLE COMMISSION)

Only the contract's nominal commission (≈30%).

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Total cost:

commission + packaging + CAC + waste + capital (46%–58%).

Verdict: B: without total cost there is no decision; commission alone flatters the margin.

AGGREGATOR'S ROLE IN THE BUSINESS PLAN

A · NAIVE READ (VISIBLE COMMISSION)

'Extra' sales that always add up.

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Paid acquisition

channel with CAC and LTV measured.

Verdict: B: treated as acquisition, the aggregator is governed; treated as free sales, it drains cash.

CHANNEL MENU AND PACKAGING

A · NAIVE READ (VISIBLE COMMISSION)

Dining-room menu cloned without recalculating.

B · MASTERESTAURANT Cost card, portion and packaging specific to delivery.

Verdict: B: the channel demands its own unit economics or it destroys contribution.

GROWTH STRATEGY

A · NAIVE READ (VISIBLE COMMISSION)

Scale GMV across all aggregators.

B · MASTERESTAURANT Scale only positive-contribution SKUs and brands; migrate recurrence to own channel.

Verdict: B: growing on negative contribution accelerates the loss; the redesign reverses it.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

The operational myth VISIBLE COMMISSION

- ✗ "I pay 30%, I keep 70%": the arithmetic error that sinks the margin.
- ✗ The dining-room dish's food cost is copied to delivery without recalculating portion or packaging.
- ✗ Promotions to rank on top are treated as fuzzy marketing, not CAC per order.
- ✗ App refunds and errors are absorbed with no provision and no record.

The boardroom reality **MASTERRESTAURANT**

- ✓ Total cost per order is measured as commission + packaging + CAC + waste + capital.
- ✓ Every virtual brand has its own unit economics and its own profitability threshold.
- ✓ The aggregator is treated as paid acquisition, with CAC and LTV measured, not as 'free' sales.
- ✓ Repeat business migrates to the own channel; the aggregator acquires, the own channel retains.

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THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

The real-cost dashboard (2026)

30%
Average aggregator commission on the gross ticket

52%
Real total cost per aggregator order (audit median)

7%
Average weight of packaging and disposables on the delivery ticket

63%
Consumers ordering delivery at least once a week

2.7%
Waste from refunds and platform errors on GMV

41%
Dark kitchens running with negative per-order contribution unknowingly

VISUALIZATION

The numbers, visualized

Average aggregator commission on the gross ticket



Real total cost per aggregator order (audit median)



Average weight of packaging and disposables on the delivery ticket



Consumers ordering delivery at least once a week



Waste from refunds and platform errors on GMV



Dark kitchens running with negative per-order contribution unknowingly



Sources: [National Restaurant Association 2026](#) · [Masterrestaurant internal data](#) · [Statista Foodtech Report 2026](#)

Chart by [masterrestaurant.com](#)

REAL CASE

“We billed 90,000 USD a month across two aggregators and congratulated the team. When Diego made us measure the total cost per order, contribution was -4%. We recalculated the delivery menu, changed packaging, and moved the repeat customer to our own WhatsApp ordering. In 90 days the same GMV went from losing 3,600 USD to leaving 11,200 USD of contribution. We didn't leave the aggregator: we stopped handing it our margin.”

— Owner of a dark kitchen with 3 virtual brands, Masterrestaurant audit 2026

HOW TO APPLY IT IN YOUR RESTAURANT

Strategic roadmap: from the order that bleeds to the order that pays

1

Phase 1 — Unit economics due diligence (weeks 1–3)

Deliverable: a dashboard per virtual brand with the real total cost per order (commission + packaging + CAC + waste + capital). Success metric: 100% of delivery SKUs with their own cost card and contribution margin; identify the $\geq 20\%$ of items running negative contribution today.

2 Phase 2 — Channel and menu redesign (weeks 4–9)

Deliverable: a redesigned delivery menu (portion, price and packaging per channel), promotion rules with a maximum CAC per order, and an acquisition flow into the own channel. Success metric: raise per-order contribution margin by ≥ 12 points and cut packaging weight below 6% of the ticket.

3 Phase 3 — Migration to own-channel recurrence (weeks 10–16)

Deliverable: a repurchase engine on the own channel (direct ordering + customer database) that treats the aggregator as paid acquisition. Success metric: move $\geq 25\%$ of recurring GMV to the own channel and push LTV/CAC above 3x in core brands.

FAQ

Boardroom questions on the real aggregator cost

Is the aggregator commission really the 30% my contract states?

No. The 30% is the starting point. Adding packaging, ranking promotions, refund waste and tied-up capital, the real total cost per order reaches 46%–58% of the ticket at the audit median. The visible commission is usually only 50%–65% of the channel's true cost.

Do I have to leave aggregators to be profitable on delivery?

Almost never. The right decision is not binary: use the aggregator as paid acquisition, with CAC and LTV measured, and migrate the repeat customer to your own channel. Leaving entirely sacrifices discovery; staying without measuring sacrifices margin. The method redesigns unit economics, it does not delete the channel.

Why does my dark kitchen bill more and earn less?

Because it scales GMV on negative-contribution orders. In Masterrestaurant audits, 41% of dark kitchens run negative per-order margin unknowingly. Adding volume there accelerates the loss. First fix the per-SKU cost card and packaging; then scale only what already pays.

How much can contribution improve with this redesign?

In typical interventions, recalculating the delivery menu, per-channel packaging and CAC rules raises per-order contribution margin by 10 to 15 points in 90 days at the same GMV. The biggest lever is usually migrating recurrence to the own channel and pushing LTV/CAC above 3x.

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
Comisiones de delivery	15–30% nominal · 30–45% efectivo	Nation's Restaurant News
Mercado global de ghost kitchens	~\$83.5 B en 2026 (CAGR ~10–15%)	Statista
Operación fuera del local	~75% del tráfico	Circana
Tráfico de foodservice	delivery como driver de crecimiento	National Restaurant Association
Foodtech LatAm	delivery y dark kitchens entre los verticales más fondeados de la región	Bloomberg Línea

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