

First-Party vs Aggregator Delivery: A Hybrid Architecture to Reclaim Margin and Data

By  **Diego F. Parra** · Updated 2026-07-09 · Dark Kitchens & Foodtech

MASTERRESTAURANT®

White paper

First-Party vs Aggregator Delivery: A Hybrid Architecture to Reclaim Margin and Data

Method proven in 8,400+ restaurants · 43 countries

masterrestaurant.com

QUICK VERDICT

Verdict: neither 100% aggregator nor 100% first-party. In 2026 the operator who protects EBITDA runs a hybrid architecture: aggregators as an *acquisition* channel (you pay 15-30% nominal —up to 30-45% effective, per Nation's Restaurant News— for discovery and off-premise volume, already 29% of sales and heading to 35% in 2026 per the National Restaurant Association) and a first-party channel to retain the repeat customer, capture first-party data and lower the cost to serve. The cash rule: if an order doesn't leave a positive contribution margin after commission, it isn't a sale, it's a subsidy. The 12-month goal is to migrate 25-40% of platform volume to the first-party channel without losing the discovery reach only Rappi, iFood or DoorDash provide.

 **White Paper** · Technical document · C-Suite & multilateral banking · 15 min read · 2026-07-09

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY OF MASTERRESTAURANT® — EXCLUSIVE FOR SECTOR LEADERS

This white paper addresses the gastro-group leader —CFO, Expansion Director, multi-unit operator— who watches delivery sales climb while EBITDA stalls or falls. The symptom is familiar: the aggregator ticket comes in, but after commission, packaging and logistics shrinkage, the contribution margin that reaches the till is a fraction of what the same dish leaves in the dining room. Diego F. Parra has seen it again and again across operations in 43 countries: the aggregator isn't the enemy, it's an expensive partner whose cost must be managed with the same discipline as prime cost.

The analytical frame is Masterrestaurant: each channel is judged by unit economics —contribution margin after commission, acquisition cost, customer lifetime value (LTV) and data ownership— not by gross sales. The core thesis: aggregators are unbeatable for discovery (off-premise is already 29% of U.S. sales and projected to 35% by 2026, per the National Restaurant Association 2025), but they destroy unit economics and blind you to the customer. The first-party channel inverts the equation. The hybrid architecture doesn't choose: it orchestrates both by function.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Side-by-side comparison

	FIRST-PARTY DELIVERY	THIRD-PARTY AGGREGATORS
Commission / cost per order	✗ 0% platform commission; real cost 8-15% (gateway + own logistics)	✓ 15-30% nominal; up to 30-45% effective (Nation's Restaurant News)
Reach / discovery	✗ Low: you depend on your own traffic and marketing	✓ Very high: Uber Eats >1M merchants; Rappi 9 countries, 350 cities (2024)
Customer data ownership	✗ Full: name, contact, history, frequency — you own 100%	✓ None: the platform owns the customer; you see an anonymous order
Acquisition vs retention cost	✗ High to acquire; very low to retain and re-order	✓ Low for discovery; re-orders charged again at 15-30%
Experience and brand control	✗ Full: packaging, timing, promos, brand tone	✓ Limited: you compete in a crowded marketplace next to your rival
Capturable off-premise volume	✗ The recurring and the geo-nearby customer	✓ Mass discovery; off-premise heads to 35% of sales 2026 (NRA)

Chapter 1 — Should you go 100% aggregator or 100% owned in 2026?

Neither extreme protects EBITDA: the disciplined operator runs a hybrid architecture. Aggregators are the best discovery channel on the planet —off-premise already accounts for 29% of U.S.

sales and is projected to hit 35% by 2026 (National Restaurant Association 2025)— but they charge for that discovery every single time an order lands. The owned channel pays once to acquire, then retains for nearly free. Across the operations Diego F. Parra has audited in 43 countries, the recurring mistake is watching aggregator gross sales instead of the contribution margin that reaches the till. The Masterrestaurant framework rule is simple: use the aggregator so they find you, and the owned channel so they come back. With commissions running

from 15-30% nominal to 30-45% effective (Nation's Restaurant News), putting 100% of volume on one side leaves margin on the table every day. The aggregator's real cost is not the listed 15-30% rate but the 30-45% effective per order once you add co-funded promotions, in-platform advertising and penalties (Nation's Restaurant News).

Chapter 2 — Nominal commission lies: the effective cost is what bleeds you

Food On Demand 2026 confirms the pattern: typical commission of 15%-30% climbing to 30%-40% real per order. That gap is dangerous because it never shows up obviously in the P&L; the operator sees a healthy sales line and an EBITDA that won't grow. Diego F. Parra insists on treating that commission with the same discipline as prime cost: every percentage point on the ticket is contribution margin that never reaches the board. A dish with 28% food cost that earns well in the dining room can slip into an effective loss when the aggregator takes 40 points. The first move is to calculate post-commission margin dish by dish, not channel by channel. The owned channel wins because it pays the acquisition cost only once and then retains for nearly free, while the aggregator charges for discovery even on the repeat purchase of a customer you already know.

Chapter 3 — Why does the owned channel win on LTV even while selling less?

That difference compounds: over twelve months, the lifetime value (LTV) of a customer acquired and retained on the owned channel comfortably beats the same customer recycled through the platform.

The market validates the scale of discovery —DoorDash moved a Marketplace GOV of ≈US\$ 80.2 billion in 2024 (DoorDash 2024) and Just Eat Takeaway posted GTV of EUR 26.3 billion (Just Eat Takeaway.com 2024) — but that volume belongs to the platform, not to you. In the Masterrestaurant framework, the owned channel doesn't compete on gross volume: it competes on margin per retained customer. The lever is converting that first aggregator order into a second direct one, where the LTV stays in your till. On the aggregator the customer belongs to the platform and you receive an anonymous order; on the owned channel you own the name, the frequency and the purchase history. That data ownership is the asset that feeds the CRM, menu engineering and the AI recommendation shortlists that leading operators already use.

Chapter 4 — First-party data: the asset the aggregator denies you

Adoption is real: 86% of operators say they are comfortable using AI, and the main use cases are marketing automation (28%), real-time insights (27%) and menu optimization (26%) (Toast 2025). Without first-party data, none of those capabilities work. Platforms like iFood closed 2024 with 55 million active customers (iFood 2024): that base is their competitive edge, not yours. Diego F. Parra puts it bluntly: whoever doesn't own the customer is renting their own growth. The hybrid architecture exists precisely to recover that data order by order. The hybrid model doesn't pick between channels: it assigns each the function where it wins. The aggregator serves as the acquisition engine —discovery and trial— because off-premise is heading toward 35% of sales by 2026 (National Restaurant Association 2025) and that's where new traffic lives. The owned channel becomes the retention and margin engine, capturing the name and the repeat order.

Chapter 5 — How is the hybrid architecture orchestrated by function?

The operating mechanics: a physical insert in the aggregator's packaging offering an incentive to order direct, a ready-to-use domain and app, and a CRM that triggers the second purchase.

The dark kitchen market grows 12.7% annually 2025-2033 (Global Growth Insights) and cloud kitchens at a 12.6% CAGR 2026-2033 (Grand View Research): off-premise capacity will keep expanding, so the question isn't whether to use aggregators but how much margin you migrate to the owned channel each quarter. The Masterrestaurant framework goal: let the aggregator fund acquisition while the owned channel keeps the LTV. The recent drive-thru story is the warning against depending on a single channel. Its share of QSR orders fell from 83% in 2020 to 65% in 2025 (Intouch Insight 2025), even though drive-thru still generates more than 50% of U.S. QSR revenue (Business Research Insights 2024).

Chapter 6 — The drive-thru teaches the lesson: never depend on a single channel

The channel that dominates today can erode fast when customer behavior shifts —exactly what happens with delivery. The operator who parked all their off-premise on one aggregator is exposed to every commission hike, algorithm change or penalty. Channel diversification isn't theory: it's the EBITDA insurance policy. Diego F. Parra recommends measuring channel concentration the way you'd measure single-supplier risk on your inputs. If one aggregator represents more than 50% of your orders, you don't have a channel: you have a dependency that sets your margin from the outside. The aggregator is irreplaceable when you enter a new territory or need discovery density your brand doesn't yet have. The scale of those networks is hard to replicate: Uber Eats passed one million merchant partners in 2024 (Uber Technologies 2024), Meituan reported more than 14.5 million annual active merchants (Meituan Q4 2024) and Rappi operates in 9 countries and 350 cities with over 500,000 registered partners (Rappi 2024).

Chapter 7 — Territory and scale: where the aggregator is still irreplaceable

Fighting that density with owned marketing from scratch just burns cash. The Masterrestaurant consultant's read: pay the aggregator commission as an acquisition cost in zones where nobody knows you, and as soon as repeat purchase rises, push the customer to the owned channel. DoorDash's pickup commission is just 6% (CloudKitchens 2024) versus the 27%-30% independents pay on Uber Eats (eLogii 2024): even inside the aggregator there are margin levers the disciplined operator pulls before settling for the full rate. Nominal vs effective commission: the 15-30% listed fee hides co-funded promos, in-app advertising and penalties that push the real cost to 30-45% per order (Nation's Restaurant News). That gap bleeds EBITDA without showing up obviously in the P&L. Acquisition vs retention: the aggregator charges for discovery every time, including the re-order from a customer you already know. The first-party channel spends once to acquire, then retains almost for free.

Chapter 8 — The differences that decide your EBITDA

The compounded LTV difference is the 12-month margin lever. First-party data vs blindness: on the aggregator the customer belongs to the platform; you see an anonymous order. On your own channel you own the name, frequency and history —the asset that feeds CRM, menu engineering and AI recommendation shortlists. Cost to serve by channel: first-party forces you to solve logistics (fleet, gateway, routing) with CapEx and OpEx; the aggregator externalizes all of it for a commission. The hybrid architecture decides PER ORDER which channel yields better unit economics.

POINT BY POINT

Criterion-by-criterion analysis

REAL COST PER ORDER

A · FIRST-PARTY DELIVERY 8-15%
(gateway + own logistics in near radius)

B · MASTERESTAURANT 30-45% effective
(commission + co-funded promos + advertising)

Verdict: First-party wins on the near repeat customer; aggregator is justified only by the discovery it provides.

ABILITY TO ACQUIRE NEW CUSTOMERS

A · FIRST-PARTY DELIVERY Low: you depend on your own traffic

B · MASTERESTAURANT Very high: marketplace reach with millions of users

Verdict: Aggregator clearly wins: for acquisition, no one matches its discovery.

CUSTOMER DATA OWNERSHIP

A · FIRST-PARTY DELIVERY Full: you own name, frequency and history

B · MASTERESTAURANT None: the customer belongs to the platform

Verdict: First-party wins hands down: data is the asset that sustains LTV.

SCALABILITY WITHOUT CAPEX

A · FIRST-PARTY DELIVERY Requires investing in own logistics and technology

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Zero CapEx: you externalize fleet and app for a commission

Verdict: Aggregator wins to start and for peaks; first-party is justified when recurring volume amortizes the CapEx.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

When the first-party channel wins RETENTION & MARGIN

- ✗ Already-won repeat customer: re-ordering on your channel costs a fraction of the 15-30% platform fee.
- ✗ Dense, nearby delivery zone (radius <3 km) where own logistics is viable.
- ✗ High ticket or combos where the 30-45% effective commission eats the whole contribution margin.
- ✗ When customer data is worth more than the one-off sale: for CRM, cross-sell and LTV.

When the aggregator wins MASTERRESTAURANT

- ✓ New-customer acquisition: no one matches the discovery reach of Rappi, iFood or Uber Eats.
- ✓ Launching a virtual brand or dark kitchen with no customer base: the marketplace is your initial storefront.
- ✓ Coverage of far zones where your own logistics would cost more than the commission.
- ✓ Demand peaks your own fleet can't absorb without degrading service.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Side-by-side comparison

	FIRST-PARTY DELIVERY	THIRD-PARTY AGGREGATORS
Commission / cost per order	✗ 0% platform commission; real cost 8-15% (gateway + own logistics)	✓ 15-30% nominal; up to 30-45% effective (Nation's Restaurant News)
Reach / discovery	✗ Low: you depend on your own traffic and marketing	✓ Very high: Uber Eats >1M merchants; Rappi 9 countries, 350 cities (2024)
Customer data ownership	✗ Full: name, contact, history, frequency — you own 100%	✓ None: the platform owns the customer; you see an anonymous order
Acquisition vs retention cost	✗ High to acquire; very low to retain and re-order	✓ Low for discovery; re-orders charged again at 15-30%
Experience and brand control	✗ Full: packaging, timing, promos, brand tone	✓ Limited: you compete in a crowded marketplace next to your rival
Capturable off-premise volume	✗ The recurring and the geo-nearby customer	✓ Mass discovery; off-premise heads to 35% of sales 2026 (NRA)

THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

2026 figures framing the decision

35%

of sales will be off-premise in 2026 (29% today)

30-45%

effective cost per order on aggregators (15-30% nominal)

80.2

B USD

DoorDash Marketplace GOV in 2024

27%

commission independent restaurants pay on Uber Eats (up to 30%)

55M

iFood active customers at year-end 2024

12.6%

cloud kitchen market CAGR 2026-2033

VISUALIZATION

The numbers, visualized

of sales will be off-premise in 2026 (29% today)



DoorDash Marketplace GOV in 2024



commission independent restaurants pay on Uber Eats (up to 30%)



iFood active customers at year-end 2024



cloud kitchen market CAGR 2026-2033



Sources: [National Restaurant Association 2025](#) · [DoorDash 2024](#) · [eLogii 2024](#) · [iFood 2024](#) · [Grand View Research](#)

Chart by [masterrestaurant.com](#)

REAL CASE

“The group had three virtual brands billing strong on aggregators, and the owner thought he was winning. We put contribution margin after commission per order and per channel on the table: on two brands the platform ticket left less than half the margin of the same dish ordered through the first-party channel. We touched neither the menu nor the price. We set up WhatsApp with a direct menu and payment gateway, a 3 km own delivery radius for the repeat customer, and kept the aggregator for acquisition. In six months we migrated 31% of volume to the first-party channel: the portfolio’s average effective commission fell from 34% to 23%, and delivery EBITDA went from red to positive without raising a single gross sale. The aggregator kept bringing new customers; we kept the ones who already knew us.”

— Diego F. Parra, Masterrestaurant — operations consultant across 43 countries

HOW TO APPLY IT IN YOUR RESTAURANT

A 90-day roadmap to the hybrid architecture

1 Days 1-30 — Unit economics diagnosis by channel

Compute contribution margin after commission PER ORDER and PER CHANNEL (first-party vs each aggregator). Separate nominal from effective commission: add co-funded promos, in-app advertising and packaging. Flag every dish/combo whose contribution margin is negative or marginal on the platform. This is the bleed scanner: without this number, any channel decision is blind.

2 Days 31-60 — Stand up the minimum viable first-party channel

Activate a low-friction first-party channel: a direct menu on WhatsApp or web with a payment gateway and a 3 km own delivery radius for the repeat customer. Don't try to replicate aggregator reach; aim to retain the customer who already knows you. Start capturing first-party data: name, frequency, ticket, history. That data is the asset the aggregator will never hand you.

3 Days 61-90 — Smart migration of the repeat customer

Insert a migration incentive in the aggregator packaging (a code or perk for ordering direct next time). Don't cannibalize the aggregator on acquisition; migrate only the re-order of the already-won customer. Set a realistic target: 25-40% of volume to the first-party channel over 12 months. Measure the portfolio's average effective commission weekly; it should fall month over month.

4 Ongoing governance — Per-order decision rule

Institutionalize the rule: each order goes through the channel with the better unit economics. New customer or far zone → aggregator (you pay for discovery). Repeat customer in a near radius → first-party (you keep margin and data). Review the matrix each quarter against input-inflation scenarios. The Masterrestaurant Cash tool automates contribution-margin tracking by channel.

FAQ

Frequently asked questions

Should I leave the aggregators to reclaim margin?

No. Aggregators are unbeatable for acquiring new customers and capturing off-premise, heading to 35% of sales in 2026 (NRA 2025). The margin play isn't to leave, it's to migrate the RE-ORDER of the already-won customer to your first-party channel, where you don't pay the 30-45% effective commission.

How much can the hybrid lower my effective commission?

It depends on your mix, but migrating 25-40% of the repeat customer's volume to the first-party channel typically lowers the portfolio's average effective commission from a 30-45% range (NRN) to around 20-25%. The lever is the re-order: retaining costs a fraction of what it costs to have the aggregator charge you for discovery again.

Why does customer data matter so much?

Because on the aggregator the customer belongs to the platform: you see an anonymous order, not a name. First-party data —frequency, ticket, history— is the asset that feeds your CRM, your menu engineering and AI recommendation shortlists. Toast (2025) reports 86% of operators already use AI comfortably; without your own data, that AI works for the platform, not for you.

Is it worth building own logistics given the CapEx?

Only in the dense, near radius (<3 km) of the repeat customer, where the own cost to serve (8-15%) is lower than the aggregator's effective commission. Outside that radius, the aggregator commission is usually cheaper than your fleet. The hybrid architecture doesn't build logistics for everything: it builds it where the unit economics justify it.

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
Expansión de la IA FreshAI de Wendy's	Despliegue en 500-600 locales de EE. UU. para fines de 2025	CNBC 2024
Mercado de cocinas fantasma en España 2023	USD 928,22 millones en 2023, con CAGR 4,5% hasta 2032	Expert Market Research (Informes de Expertos) 2024
Proyección del mercado de cocinas fantasma en España 2032	USD 1.379 millones esperados para 2032	Expert Market Research (Informes de Expertos) 2024
Inversión agrifoodtech en América Latina 2024	USD 249 millones en 2024, una caída de 24% frente al año previo	AgFunder 2025
Concentración de la inversión agrifoodtech en Brasil	Brasil representó cerca del 55% de toda la inversión agrifoodtech de LatAm y el Caribe en 2024	AgFunder 2025

Metric	Benchmark 2026	Source
Mercado de cloud kitchens en México 2024	USD 1.100 millones en 2024, con CAGR 10,74% hacia 2033	IMARC Group 2024

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