Executive Briefs

Repeat-visit program: before vs after with the *Masterestaurant* method

By **Diego F. Parra** · Updated 2026-09-16 · Marketing & Growth

QUICK VERDICT

Verdict: a repeat-visit program is not a marketing campaign, it is a service structure. The second visit gets decided at the table, somewhere between the greeting and the check, and only afterwards does WhatsApp or email confirm it. That is why an owner who buys traffic before building repeat visits pays twice: acquiring a new customer costs 5 to 25 times more than keeping an existing one, per Bain & Company, and cost per lead in Google Ads for the restaurants and food category already sits at US$30.27, per WordStream (2025). What changed in 2026 is that the repeat-visit script can be trained: simulators, automated preshift and gamification move server behavior, the only lever that touches the guest before they walk out.

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An owner running 180 seats and more than 5 million USD a year showed me his marketing dashboard: 14 thousand dollars a month in paid media, three agencies, a flat average ticket for nine straight months. Nobody on his team could say how many of Friday's guests had eaten there before. That blind spot is the one no media report ever closes.

The arithmetic is blunt, so let us put it first: with new-customer acquisition running between 30 and 80 dollars in restaurants, per ChowNow, and cost per lead in the category at US$30.27, per WordStream (2025), every guest who never returns is purchased inventory thrown away. The contribution margin on that same guest's second entrée carries no acquisition cost at all, and that single fact rewrites the unit economics of the whole table.

Diego F. Parra keeps pressing an order of operations that almost nobody respects: first the service structure that produces the repeat visit, then the channel that reminds the guest, and only at the end the media budget. Masterestaurant builds the repeat-visit program from the dining room because the server holds the last contact before the decision, and because a discount mailed to somebody who was badly served only speeds up the loss.

The counterfactual deserves to be walked all the way through. Suppose you double paid media and leave service untouched: more people arrive, the room saturates, table turns jam, the average review slides half a point. According to Michael Luca's work at Harvard Business School (2016), one Yelp star moves 5% to 9% of revenue at independent restaurants, so half a star lost eats the traffic gain, and you end up billing roughly the same on twice the commercial spend with an exhausted crew.

There is a genuine trade-off buried here, and goodwill does not resolve it. The server wants to close the table fast to turn more covers and earn more tips; the repeat-visit program asks for thirty extra seconds of conversation at the check. Both positions are legitimate. The bridge is per-server measurement: once repeat rate shows up in the preshift next to tips and table turns, the crew stops reading it as an imposed chore and starts reading it as their own scoreboard.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Side-by-side comparison

	INDUSTRY BASELINE (NO PROGRAM)	WITH THE MASTERESTAURANT METHOD
Cost of acquiring vs. retaining a guest	✕ Acquiring costs 5 to 25 times more than retaining (Bain & Company)	✓ 70% of monthly growth planned on the retained base, not on fresh paid media
Customer acquisition cost (CAC)	✕ US$30 to US$80 per new restaurant customer (ChowNow)	✓ Blended CAC target under US$20 once 40% of commercial spend shifts to retention
Paid cost per lead	✕ US$30.27 per lead in Google Ads, restaurants and food (WordStream 2025)	✓ Second visit from the same guest at the marginal cost of one message, no new lead

	INDUSTRY BASELINE (NO PROGRAM)	WITH THE MASTERESTAURANT METHOD
Online reputation and its revenue effect	✕ One Yelp star moves 5% to 9% of revenue (Harvard Business School, Luca 2016)	✓ Scripted review request at table close, measured per server every week
Discovery and sales-funnel entry point	✕ 62% of consumers find restaurants through Google (Restroworks 2024)	✓ Listing and review replies treated as a repeat-visit asset, not a storefront
Social proof that sustains the second visit	✕ UGC posts convert more than 10x versus posts without UGC (Emplifi 2025)	✓ Guest-content capture built into the service script, with 41% of diners already researching on social (TouchBistro 2025)
Delivery conversion and channel margin	✕ Third-party delivery reaches 30%-40% of order value with fees (Restaurant Business 2024)	✓ Printed insert plus repeat-visit QR in every order to migrate volume to the owned channel
Labor cost carrying the program	✕ Labor cost at 25% to 35% of revenue (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)	✓ Zero new hires: the script lives in the preshift and in the Interactive Training Kit

1. The blind spot no ad report will ever fix

No marketing dashboard tells you how many of Friday's guests had eaten there before, and that gap is what keeps commercial spending inflated. An owner with 180 seats and revenue above 5 million a year showed me 14 thousand dollars a month in paid media, three agencies, and an average check that had been flat for nine months. Acquiring a new customer costs between 30 and 80 dollars in restaurants, according to ChowNow, and the cost per lead for Google Ads in the category sits at US$30.27, according to WordStream (2025), so every guest who never returns is inventory bought and thrown away. That same person's second visit carries no acquisition cost on top, which is why it moves the unit economics of the whole table more than any bid optimization someone will sell you this quarter. The second visit gets decided at the table, between the greeting and the check, and only afterwards does WhatsApp or email confirm it.

2. Repeat business is an output of service, not of marketing

Changing who owns the metric changes the correction cycle: when the floor manager answers for it instead of the agency, you correct within a week because preshift happens daily, while the ad report lands once the month has already closed. Diego F. Parra insists on an order almost nobody respects —first the service structure that produces the return, then the channel that reminds people of it, and only last the media budget—, and Masterestaurant builds the program from the dining room because the server holds the final contact before the decision. A discount sent to somebody who was badly served recovers nothing: it speeds up the loss and teaches that guest your brand is worth less. Doubling paid media without touching service hands you the same revenue at twice the commercial cost. Walk the whole scenario: more people arrive, the room saturates, table turns jam, wait times stretch, and the average review drops half a point.

3. What happens if you double the media spend and leave service alone

According to Michael Luca's Harvard Business School study (2016), one Yelp star moves between 5% and 9% of an independent restaurant's revenue, so that lost half star eats the entire traffic increase. And you still carry labor cost, which runs between 25% and 35% of revenue according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, now spread across an exhausted team. Purchased traffic amplifies whatever your operation already is; it never corrects it. Your server wants to close fast to turn more tables and earn more tips, while the repeat program asks for thirty extra seconds at the close: both positions are legitimate, and pretending otherwise wrecks the rollout. Individual measurement is the bridge. Once the repeat rate per server shows up in preshift alongside tips and turn times, it stops being an imposed chore and becomes each person's own scoreboard. That is the economic argument the floor actually understands: retaining costs 5 to 7 times less than acquiring, according to Invesp, and Bain & Company puts the gap between 5 and 25 times depending on category.

4. The tension with the server is real, and measurement resolves it

If one four-top with a 120-dollar check comes back just once more per quarter, that server produced 480 dollars of annual sales with zero CAC. Tips pay that back. Below 500 thousand dollars a year you do not need a loyalty platform: you need a notebook of regulars and a table-closing script. Concrete threshold: identify your 50 highest-frequency guests, assign each one to a server, and measure whether they return within 45 days. With a CAC of US$30 to US$80 per ChowNow, bringing 20 of those 50 back equals between 600 and 1,600 dollars of acquisition you never paid. Between 500 thousand and 1 million the threshold shifts: there is finally volume for a real database, and the decision is hiring the cheapest CRM that captures name, phone, and date of last visit, nothing else. The trap in this band is buying 400-dollar-a-month software for 900 contacts.

5. Under 500 thousand and 500 thousand to 1 million: the small band stays

Fill the database with 30% of the room first; automation comes later. Past a million in annual revenue, the decision threshold is the 60-day repeat rate: if it sits below 25%, do not open another acquisition channel until you fix it. At this size it pays to attribute the second visit by server and by daypart, because the problem is almost never the whole restaurant but two specific shifts. Above 5 million —or with more than one location— the program needs its own budget and a named owner on the org chart, and the financial contrast gets hard to ignore: 14 thousand dollars of monthly media buys between 175 and 466 new customers at ChowNow's cost, while lifting repeat rate three points on a base of 40 thousand annual visits returns 1,200 visits with no acquisition cost attached. With 62% of consumers discovering restaurants through Google, per Restroworks (2024), traffic will keep arriving; the return trip is what never arrives by itself.

6. Above 10 million and the high-end profile: governance, not campaigns

In a group or chain above 10 million you govern repeat business rather than running campaigns on it: one single table-closing standard, one guest data point captured in the same format at every location, and cross-comparison of the 60-day rate between branches to locate where the loss happens. The operating threshold I use is three points of spread between the best and worst location: above that, the problem belongs to floor management, not to the neighborhood. The high-end case deserves its own paragraph. A large-format themed restaurant, or a media chef's project billing over 5 million, lives off a first visit pushed by notoriety, and repeat business routinely collapses there. Their metric is not the review score —usually high— but visit number two. Without it the curve falls the moment novelty runs out, and novelty always runs out. The first difference is architectural: in the old model repeat business is a byproduct of marketing, and in the new one it is an output of the service process.

7. Three differences a CEO must grasp before approving budget

That changes who answers for it. When the owner of the metric is the floor manager instead of the agency, the correction cycle drops from a quarter to a week, because the preshift happens daily while the media report arrives after the month has already closed. The second is financial and shows up in unit economics. A guest brought by paid media carries US$30 to US$80 of acquisition cost, per ChowNow, while that guest's second visit carries only the cost of the message that prompted it. At the same contribution margin per plate, the repeat visit is structurally more profitable, and that gap funds the entire program without new capital and without moving break-even. The third is risk mitigation, and almost nobody prices it. A restaurant growing only through acquisition depends on platforms that set prices without asking: Google Ads cost per lead already stands at US$30.27, per WordStream (2025), and third-party delivery absorbs 30% to 40% of order value, per Restaurant Business (2024).

8. Three differences a CEO must grasp before approving budget — in practice

An owned base of returning guests is the one asset that cannot raise your commission tomorrow, and in an operational due diligence it counts for more than three good months of revenue.

POINT BY POINT

Decision matrix: what wins on each criterion

OWNER OF THE REPEAT-RATE METRIC

A · INDUSTRY BASELINE (NO PROGRAM) The marketing agency, reporting monthly

B · MASTERESTAURANT The floor manager, reading it daily in the preshift

Verdict: The dining room wins: the correction cycle drops from a quarter to a week.

PRIMARY LEVER FOR THE SECOND VISIT

A · INDUSTRY BASELINE (NO PROGRAM) A discount blasted to the whole base equally

B · MASTERESTAURANT A simulator-trained table-close script with 72-hour follow-up

Verdict: The script wins: blanket discounts get consumed by guests already returning.

UNIT ECONOMICS OF THE VISIT

A · INDUSTRY BASELINE (NO PROGRAM)

US$30 to US$80 acquisition cost per new guest (ChowNow)

B · MASTERESTAURANT Marginal cost of one message to an already-acquired guest

Verdict: Retention wins, and that gap funds the program without new capital.

USE OF ONLINE REPUTATION

A · INDUSTRY BASELINE (NO PROGRAM)

Reviews as a storefront, requested whenever a server remembers

B · MASTERESTAURANT Scripted request at close, measured per server every week

Verdict: The script wins: one Yelp star moves 5%-9% of revenue (HBS, Luca 2016).

DELIVERY CONVERSION AND CHANNEL RISK

A · INDUSTRY BASELINE (NO PROGRAM)

Volume on third-party apps at 30%-40% of order value (Restaurant Business 2024)

B · MASTERESTAURANT Printed insert with QR that migrates the order and keeps the contact in house

Verdict: The owned channel wins: nobody there can raise your commission tomorrow.

SCALABILITY TO A SECOND LOCATION

A · INDUSTRY BASELINE (NO PROGRAM)

Depends on whichever manager happens to be on shift

B · MASTERESTAURANT Script, simulator and preshift replicated from the Interactive Training Kit

Verdict: The system wins: when the second location repeats the number, it stopped being an anecdote.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Before: marketing that buys traffic and leaks guests

SYSTEMIC ENTROPY

- ✕ Commercial budget measured in reach and impressions, never in second visits per guest.
- ✕ Nobody in the dining room knows how many of the shift's guests had come before.
- ✕ The review request depends on the server's mood, so online reputation moves by chance.
- ✕ Third-party delivery accepted at 30%-40% of order value (Restaurant Business 2024) with no mechanism to migrate to the owned channel.
- ✕ Discounts fired at everyone equally, and the heaviest user is the guest who was coming back anyway.
- ✕ A contact base exists, scattered across three spreadsheets, two phones and a reservation notebook.

After: repeat visits as an operating variable of the dining room MASTERESTAURANT

- ✓ 60-day repeat rate posted in the preshift, next to tips and table turns.
- ✓ A thirty-second table-close script, trained in a simulator before it touches a live guest.
- ✓ Review request with defined moment, wording and channel, measured per server rather than per location.
- ✓ Printed insert with QR in every delivery order, redeemable only in the owned channel.
- ✓ Minimum segmentation by frequency: first visit, two to three visits, regular. Three different messages, not one.
- ✓ Commercial budget split by an explicit rule between acquisition and retention, reviewed monthly.

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THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

The numbers behind the decision

25 x

Upper bound on how much more it costs to acquire a new customer versus retain one

30.27 USD

Google Ads cost per lead, restaurants and food category

80 USD

Ceiling on customer acquisition cost per new restaurant guest

9 %

Revenue lift from one additional Yelp star at independent restaurants

40 %

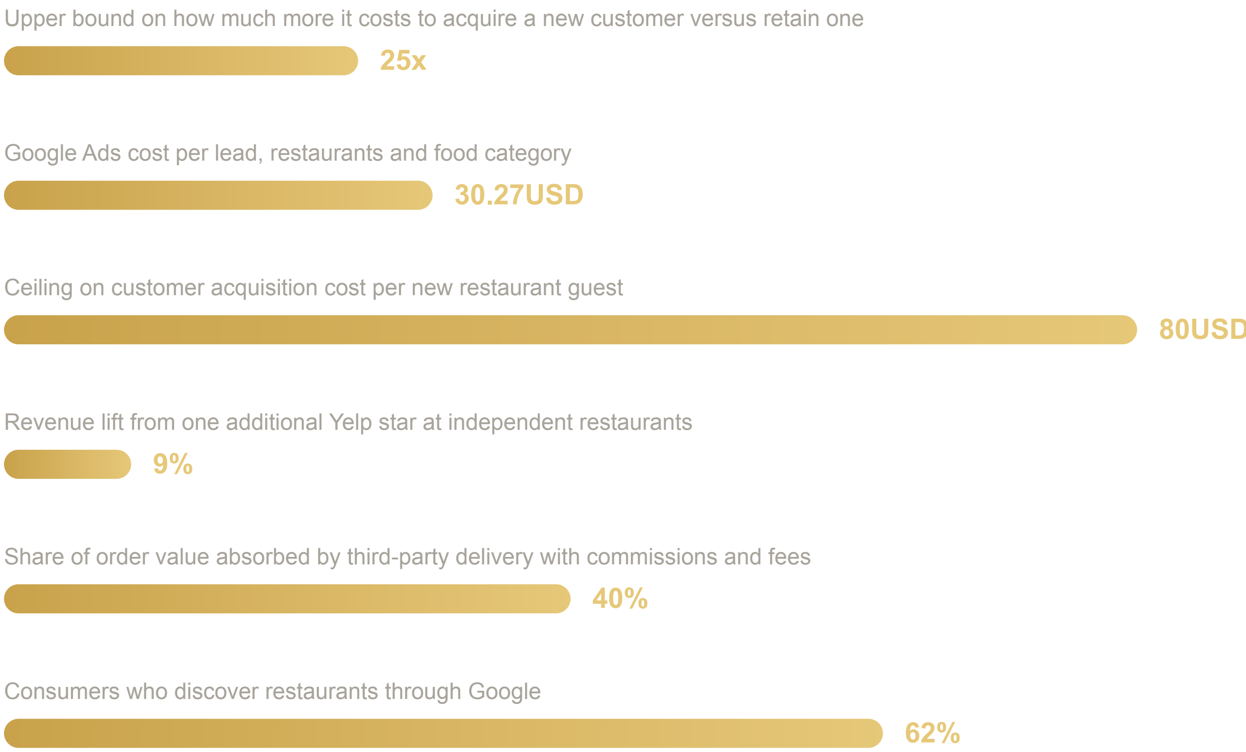
Share of order value absorbed by third-party delivery with commissions and fees

62 %

Consumers who discover restaurants through Google

VISUALIZATION

The numbers, visualized



Sources: Bain & Company · WordStream 2025 · ChowNow · Harvard Business School (Michael Luca) 2016 · Restaurant Business 2024

Chart by masterestaurant.com

REAL CASE

“We were spending 14 thousand dollars a month on paid media and the average ticket would not budge. Diego made us cut half that spend and build the table-close script with a simulator: within 90 days, 31% of weekend guests were returning guests against 12% at the start, and commercial cost per sale fell from 38 to 21 dollars without opening a single new location.”

— Operations director, large-format themed restaurant, 180 seats, above 5 million USD annual revenue band

HOW TO APPLY IT IN YOUR RESTAURANT

Strategic roadmap in three phases

1. **Phase 1 · Weeks 1 to 3 — Operational due diligence on repeat visits**
Deliverable: a one-page dashboard with 60-day repeat rate per shift and per server, commercial cost per sale, and third-party delivery share of total revenue. It gets built by crossing the POS with the reservation base and the scattered contacts that already exist, buying no new software. Success metric: 100% of shifts with a measured repeat rate and a numeric baseline signed off by the floor manager. This is where the figure that startles most owners appears, because the location average hides servers at 30% repeat and servers at 6%, and that variance is the real opportunity.

2. **Phase 2 · Weeks 4 to 8 — Service script and simulator training**
Deliverable: the thirty-second table-close script, the review-request script and the 72-hour follow-up message, all three trained inside the meseros.ai Interactive Training Kit with simulators and gamification, then loaded into the automated preshift. Success metric: 90% of floor staff pass the simulator at 8 out of 10 or better, and in-table contact capture reaches 35% of served tables. None of this gets delegated to the agency: the consultant writes the script, the dining room runs it.

3. **Phase 3 · Weeks 9 to 16 — Budget reallocation and owned channel**
Deliverable: a written rule splitting commercial budget between acquisition and retention, plus the printed insert with repeat-visit QR in every delivery order to migrate volume to the owned channel, where you do not surrender 30% to 40% of order value, per Restaurant Business (2024). Success metric: 40% of commercial spend working on retention, 60-day repeat rate above 25%, and commercial cost per sale 35% below the Phase 1 baseline. Scalability gets proven right here: if the second location reproduces the result on the same script, the program is a system and not an anecdote.

FAQ

Questions the board asks

What does it cost NOT to build a repeat-visit program?

It costs full acquisition every time you fill a table. With new customers at US$30 to US$80 per ChowNow, and cost per lead at US$30.27 in Google Ads per WordStream (2025), a venue that does not retain buys traffic forever and never accumulates an owned guest asset.

What exactly is a repeat-visit program in a restaurant?

It is a service structure with three measured pieces: contact capture at the table, a closing script that invites the second visit, and a 72-hour follow-up through an owned channel. It is not a points app or a blanket discount; an unscripted discount gets claimed by the guest who was already returning.

Should we replace the physical menu with a QR menu to feed the base?

No. Masterestaurant ALWAYS recommends keeping both: the physical menu controls service pace, menu narrative and suggestive selling, while the QR handles delivery, accessibility, price changes and analytics. With more than 89 million scans in 2025 per QR Code, the QR complements and never replaces.

What is the measurable 12-month benefit and how does it show in EBITDA?

The effect arrives two ways: contribution margin carrying no acquisition cost on every repeat visit, and less dependence on third-party delivery, which absorbs 30% to 40% of order value per Restaurant Business (2024). With labor cost steady at 25%-35% per the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, that difference drops straight to EBITDA.

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
Retorno del influencer marketing por cada dólar invertido	**US$5,78 por US$1**	Socially Powerful — Influencer Marketing Statistics 2025
Tamaño global proyectado del influencer marketing (2025)	**más de US$33.000 millones**	Socially Powerful — Influencer Marketing Statistics 2025
Gasto de marcas de EE.UU. en influencer marketing (2025)	**US$10.520 millones (+23,7%)**	Socially Powerful — Influencer Marketing Statistics 2025
Aumento de reservas la semana posterior a la publicación de un creador	**30%**	Marketing LTB — Influencer Marketing Statistics 2025
Campañas de influencer cuyo objetivo principal es generar UGC	**56%**	Socially Powerful — Influencer Marketing Statistics 2025
Crecimiento interanual del número de creadores de UGC	**93%**	Socially Powerful — Influencer Marketing Statistics 2025

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