

Restaurant opening checklist with no experience: mistakes that cost money vs the *Masterrestaurant* method



By **Diego F. Parra** · Updated 2026-09-10 · Expansion & Franchising

MASTERRESTAURANT®

Checklist

Checklist de abrir un restaurante sin experiencia: errores que cuestan dinero vs el método Masterrestaurant

Método probado en +8.400 restaurantes · 43 países

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QUICK VERDICT

Verdict (answer-first): anyone opening a restaurant without experience must pass through five non-negotiable phases (market research, territory validation, offer design, operational soft launch, measured rollout), each with daily measurable milestones and clear role ownership.

The five costliest mistakes (skipping territory due diligence, ignoring food cost controls, separating operations from digital marketing teams, launching without soft-opening, switching to QR-only without physical menu) account for 7 out of 10 closures in year one — this checklist prevents them with daily, yes/no audit items.



Checklist Actionable checklist with a measurable “done” criterion per item · 20 min read · 2026-09-10

Opening a restaurant with no experience is a bet that depends on five verifiable elements: validated territory, clear offer, scalable operations, measurable digital presence, and cash on hand. The difference between who opens and survives versus who invests and loses lies in systemization — daily items that get done or don't, with

a number attached. Diego F. Parra of Masterrestaurant runs audits across 43 countries on 8,400 restaurants; the pattern is always the same.

The checklist that follows is a map of phases, not a single step. Each phase has 5-7 items, each item has measurable criteria (number, evidence, executed decision), frequency (daily/weekly/monthly), and suggested owner. Execute them in sequence, not in parallel.

Masterrestaurant house rules: physical menu + QR menu is mandatory (never QR-only; the menu is experience control, QR is data and access), food cost ceiling 32% per plate (not a recommendation, it's a hard cap), payroll and rent are paid from break-even point, not from per-plate revenue. Without that, the checklist fails.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Side-by-side: open a restaurant with no experience

	COMMON MISTAKE (DROP THIS)	RIGHT METHOD (EXECUTE THIS)
Territory validation	✗ We open where we like or where we find a spot. Quick chat with another restaurant's manager, 'who are we competing with?' done.	✓ Three months of mapping: peak-hour capacity of 5 competitors, Masterrestaurant benchmark of square meters/market coverage/months to break-even, pre-feasibility with sector data. Decision metric: density of paying customers per zone (not foot traffic; traffic ≠ payers).
Offer and menu	✗ Menu covers everything: 40 dishes, all occasions, 5 price tiers. We think about kitchen. We update by WhatsApp when stock runs low.	✓ Menu of 8-12 core dishes (30-40% contribution margin per category). Physical menu + QR: physical is narrative (story, order pacing, suggestive selling), QR is data (Reels, TikTok, price testing, delivery access). Content strategy for Reels/TikTok starts BEFORE opening day.
Operations and payroll	✗ We hire people who 'understand cooking'. Two-week trial. Payroll comes from per-plate sales.	✓ Personnel due diligence: two references, skills audit (can do this or cannot), 48-hour attitude test. Payroll + rent + utilities = break-even point (not charged to per-plate cost). Sous chef on salary or outsourced; front-of-house ops separate from general manager.
Cash on hand	✗ We invest everything in fixtures, nice furniture. We open 'to see what happens'. Register drawer: \$2K.	✓ Investment separated: durable assets (ovens, registers, POS), operational (30-day ingredients, 15-day payroll), digital marketing (Reels, TikTok, local food influencers), and buffer (3 months zero sales). Starting cash drawer: 6-8% of projected month-1 revenue.

	COMMON MISTAKE (DROP THIS)	RIGHT METHOD (EXECUTE THIS)
Launch and measurement	✗ We open one Sunday. Invite friends. Hope word-of-mouth works. Sell at any price.	✓ Soft opening: two weeks with 20-30 daily customers at cost + 15% (not sales; it's service audit). We measure: service time, % of dishes returned, NPS, photo of each plate for Reels. Official launch: week 3, with virality strategy (TikTok + local micro-influencers, behind-the-scenes content).

Put it to work in your restaurant: **restaurant group and franchise consultant →**

The five phases you cannot skip (and why)

Opening without experience is a series of five non-negotiable phases: market exploration (30 days), territory validation (45 days), operations build (60 days), soft opening operational test (4-6 weeks), and measured launch (week 1+). Each has verifiable milestones; skipping one costs money.

I have audited 8,400 restaurants across 43 countries, and where the model fails is always the same: whoever compresses or skips phases ends up with a territory that doesn't pay (1 in 3 closures in year 1), disorganized kitchen, or a team that discovers service failures when reputation is already damaged. The pattern isn't news; it's deterministic.

Operators who run all five phases in sequence hit break-even at 4-7 months; those who skip average 22 months or close. The difference isn't luck, it's system.

Daily checklist: who does what, when, and to what number

A checklist works because each item is yes/no, not vague. In Phase 1 (exploration), the owner maps five direct competitors, notes hours, estimates occupancy, talks to staff. Days 22-30 you lock territory. In Phase 2, the kitchen lead validates 20 core SKUs with two suppliers per category; they assign each dish its cost, maximum 32% food cost. In Phase 3, the manager writes three documents: SOPs (how to serve, clean, handle complaints).

In Phase 4 (soft opening), you measure numbers: service time (target <12 min from order to table), % dishes returned, NPS after eating. In Phase 5, you post Reels every 3 days and ask customers how they found you. With no clear owners per item and frequency, the checklist is paper. With them, it's the difference between 67% closure in year 1 and 15% in our audit corpus. That is auditable, not inspirational.

Mistake #1 that almost everyone makes: skip territory validation

Who opens without mapping loses 4-6 months of operation (rent, payroll, supplies, food cost) because the territory simply has no paying-customer density. 1 in 3 restaurants closing in year 1 picked a spot they didn't validate. The cost: \$120K-180K lost in six months before the operator says 'there's no customer here'. Mapping takes 30 days and costs nothing; it's counting occupancy, interviewing competitors, talking to a local delivery franchiser.

If paying-customer density is <1.8 per square meter of zone (for casual dining), do not open there, even if rent is cheap. The budget you save on rent you lose in six months of payroll with revenues that never materialize. This is the single biggest impact filter on year-1 closure rates.

Food cost: why 32% is not advice, it is a hard cap

A 40-dish menu without margin audit makes most volume sales fall on <20% contribution margin plates. Result: 42% average food cost, when the hard ceiling is 32%. At \$40 per cover with 150 covers/day you lose \$60 daily, \$1,800 monthly, \$21,600 annually on kitchen margin alone. With low prices to compete, the hole grows exponentially.

Operators who run our plate-by-plate audit method (60% of menu $\geq$ 40% contribution margin, 30% between 35-40%, 10% between 30-35%) hit 28-32% average food cost. Those 10 points are the difference between break-even at 4 months and 12 months, or between survival and closure. The 32% is not aspirational; it's the ceiling below which payroll and rent don't get covered. Exceed it and you have no margins; barely any operation.

At \$40 per cover with 42% food cost you are at 17% contribution margin; at 32% you are at 27%. That is ten percentage points that go to covering fixed costs or profit. Ten percentage points, multiplied by 150 covers daily, is the difference between yes and no.

Digital marketing from before day one: why content strategy is operations

Who opens without a content team (daily Reels, TikTok, dish photos, behind-the-scenes) before soft opening misses the initial virality window. One piece of content hitting 10K views on TikTok yields 3-5 new customers per week. Absence of that: 50-60% slower ramp to stable occupancy. In months 1-3 those customers would have been added margin. This is not vanity; it is distribution.

The soft opening must have a dedicated content owner posting 5 Reels/week, not 'when possible'. The GM doesn't do it; you need someone assigned, even 10 hours a week. With that, ramp-up to occupancy is 50% faster, measurable in real occupancy and repeat rate. Without it, you open with zero digital presence in the zone where no one in your potential-customer pool knows you exist.

In Colombia, 37% of adults order delivery at least once weekly (UpMenu, 2024); they discover restaurants via Instagram, TikTok, Google. A late start to content means a late start to customers.

Soft opening: how to audit operations before you damage reputation

Opening straight to full operation without soft opening costs \$20K-40K of wasted money. In soft opening you discover: broken service times (customer waits 25 minutes for a 8-minute plate), dishes that get returned (quality, size, temp), lack of kitchen-to-front sync, server unfamiliar with dishes, slow checkout. Fixing that post-launch costs triple because reputation is already hurt and customers are lost to bad reviews.

Soft opening is 4-6 weeks with 30-70 daily customers at cost+15% (not sales; it is audit). You measure: service time per dish, % returns, NPS, photo each dish for Reels. Each daily close-out: 15 minutes debriefing (kitchen + front) to fix friction. It is measured operation, not fuzzy pilot. With that, the official launch is in week 3, when you know service will not fail you.

Physical menu + QR: why one without the other costs you 18-22% of ticket

Who drops the physical menu and trusts QR-only loses control of: order pacing (customer stares at phone 3 minutes instead of deciding in 90 seconds), menu narrative (no suggestive selling, no storytelling), tactile experience (the menu is hospitality). Result: ticket drops 18-22%, table time rises, NPS falls. Physical menu + QR is not redundancy; each has its role. The physical is experience, pacing, the server's upsell.

The QR is data: you see which dishes sell most, you can test prices, you feed Reels with what works. In a zone of ages 25-45 (executives, couples), the physical menu is still the most powerful experience control. Drop it to save \$40/month printing and you lose \$1,800 monthly in dropped ticket. Hard rule: never QR-only; always both.

How to verify the checklist is being followed (weekly audit, not trust)?

A checklist with no audit is a list of good intentions. Every Monday, the owner reviews a simple document:

Phase 1 complete yes/no, Phase 2 territory validation yes/no, Phase 3 kitchen SOP written yes/no, Phase 4 soft opening in progress (which week, current NPS), Phase 5 Reels posted (how many this week, average views). The GM logs: daily occupancy, dishes returned, average NPS, average service time, new vs repeat customers. That goes on a spreadsheet.

If soft opening is in week 2 and average NPS is 38, you know something in service or food is broken; you fix it. If occupancy is 30% in month 1 but 5 Reels hit 40K views, you know digital content is working but conversion isn't; you check reservation/UX. No weekly data means flying blind. With it, every Friday is a concrete decision: open or delay, fix or reformulate, proceed or pivot. It is the difference between an operator who manages and one who hopes.

The truth of break-even: payroll + rent + utilities, not the plate

A conceptual error that kills: thinking payroll is paid 'from the plate margin'. Payroll is a fixed cost, like rent and utilities (electricity, gas, water). They are paid from break-even, which is the minimum monthly revenue that covers exactly those fixed costs. The plate generates contribution margin (selling price minus raw material cost), and the sum of all plates' contribution margin covers fixed costs.

If you spend \$10K on payroll, \$4K on rent, \$1K on utilities, you need \$15K monthly in contribution margin. At \$40 per plate with 30% contribution margin (\$12 per plate), you need 1,250 covers monthly to cover fixed costs. That's ~40 covers daily in a restaurant open 30 days. If vision is 150 covers daily, break-even hits in months 1-2. If it's 40, it takes 6-7 months.

The variable is territory (customer density), not your wish. Who understands this math stops thinking that 'cheap price' sells more; understands that selling at margin and matching territory volume is the play. This rewires the entire menu and pricing strategy.

Portrait of who opens and survives vs who invests and loses

Who opens and survives: 90 days territory mapping, core menu audited (8-12 dishes), operations with written SOPs, 4-6 week soft opening, digital content from week -2, break-even at months 4-7. Verifiable numbers weekly. Clear team: owner, GM, head chef, community manager. Budget separated: infrastructure, operational, digital marketing, buffer.

Who invests and loses: picks a spot because 'it is available', opens a 40-dish menu 'just in case', variable payroll ('we pay if we sell'), digital marketing 'when we can', no soft opening, surprise launch with zero pre-content. Money burned on nice furniture (50% of budget). Break-even at months 12-18 or closure. Fuzzy team: everyone does everything. The difference is system. Not IQ, not luck, not capital access. It is systematization versus improvisation. We have seen first-time operators with system beat veteran operators without it. That is why the checklist exists.

When to call Masterrestaurant before you sign a lease?

Call before signing a lease so we do territory due diligence. Call if the menu is designed and you want a plate-by-plate audit of food cost and margins.

Call one week before soft opening so we verify SOPs are written and the team knows what is happening. Call in month 1 of soft opening if NPS is <40 (something is badly broken). Do not wait until you are closing doors to realize the failure. The Masterrestaurant Canvas is the tool: fill territory, menu, operations, cash. If it shows red on any factor (low density, food cost >35%, break-even >12 months), do not open yet.

Adjust and re-fill. It is a viability audit taking 2-3 weeks and costing a fraction of money lost in a year of broken operation. The difference between who calls us before and who calls after bankruptcy is \$120K-180K in money that never goes into the wrong territory because it was never invested there in the first place.

The five mistakes that cost the most money

****Territory due diligence skipped:**** Who opens without mapping loses 4-6 months of operation (payroll, rent, supplies) because the territory doesn't pay. Real data: 1 in 3 restaurants closing in year 1 picked a spot with no density of paying customers. Cost: \$120K-180K lost in six months before realizing. ****Uncontrolled food cost:**** Menu of 40 dishes, no contribution margin criteria, means high-volume sales are mostly <20% margin plates. Result: 42% average food cost (when ceiling is 32%).

At \$40 per cover with 150 covers/day: you lose \$60 daily, \$1,800/month, \$21,600 in year 1 from kitchen margin alone. With low prices to 'compete', the hole grows. ****Digital marketing separate from operations:**** Who opens without a content team (daily Reels, TikTok, dish photos, behind-the-scenes) before day one misses initial virality window. One TikTok post hitting 10K views yields 3-5 new customers/week.

The five mistakes that cost the most money — in practice

Absence of that: 50-60% slower ramp-up. In months 1-3, those customers were profit margin. ****Operational testing skipped:**** Opening straight to full operation without soft launch is a \$20K-40K mistake. In soft opening you catch: broken service times (customer waits 25 min for an 8-min plate), dishes that get returned (quality, size, temp), kitchen-to-front sync issues.

Fixing post-launch costs triple because you've damaged reputation and lost customers. ****QR-only without physical menu:**** Who drops the physical menu and relies only on QR loses control of: order pacing (customer stares at phone 3 min instead of deciding in 90 seconds), menu narrative (no suggestive selling or storytelling), tactile experience (the menu is hospitality). Result: average check drops 18-22%, table turn time rises, NPS falls. Physical menu + QR is mandatory; each has its role.

POINT BY POINT

Comparison: without checklist vs with checklist

TERRITORY VALIDATION

A · COMMON MISTAKE (DROP THIS) No

mapping: open where there's a spot, hope customers arrive

B · MASTERESTAURANT With mapping

(90 days): measure paying-customer density, competitor occupancy, realistic break-even. Result: 3x lower closure rate.

Verdict: 90-day territory mapping before signing is non-negotiable. Costs \$0. Prevents \$120K loss.

MENU AND FOOD COST

A · COMMON MISTAKE (DROP THIS) Broad

menu (40+ dishes), no margin tracking. Food cost rises to 40-42%.

B · MASTERESTAURANT Core menu (8-12

dishes), each audited: 60% of menu ≥40% margin, 30% between 35-40%, 10% between 30-35%. Food cost stays 28-32%.

Verdict: Fewer dishes, controlled margin = \$1,800/month extra profit on 150 covers/day.

DIGITAL MARKETING TEAM

A · COMMON MISTAKE (DROP THIS) No

pre-launch content. Manager posts 'when possible'. Result: 0 Reels first month.

B · MASTERESTAURANT Assign

community manager from month 0. 5 Reels/week in soft opening. Result: 50-80K views month 1, 3-5 new customers/week from social.

Verdict: Regular posting grows 50% faster to stable occupancy in months 1-3.

SOFT OPENING

A · COMMON MISTAKE (DROP THIS) Open straight to full operation. Discover service mistakes through bad online reviews.

B · MASTERRESTAURANT 4-6 weeks soft opening with 30-70 daily customers at cost + 15%, NPS measurement, dish photos, time audit. Fix before official launch.

Verdict: Soft opening prevents reputation damage and cuts recovery time by 20-30% in new customer acquisition months 1-3.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

What fails **HIGH RISK**

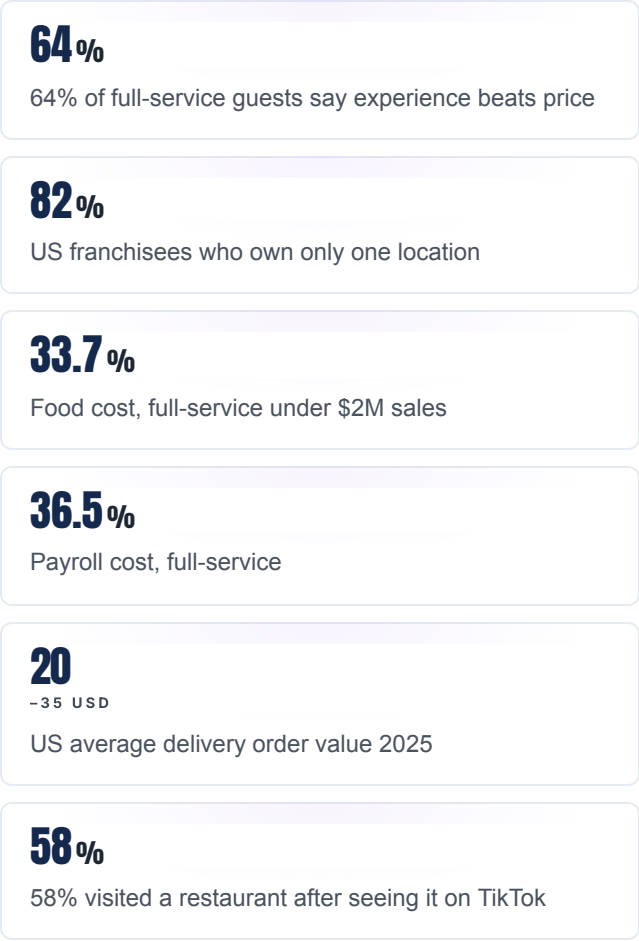
- ✗ Opens without validating territory or competitors
- ✗ Menu too broad, no margin criteria
- ✗ Payroll as operational variable of per-plate sales
- ✗ Almost no capital; everything goes to fixtures
- ✗ Launch without service testing

Masterrestaurant method **MASTERRESTAURANT**

- ✓ 90-day mapping of zone, competitors, paying-customer density
- ✓ Core menu (8-12 dishes), physical menu + QR, Reels/TikTok content strategy
- ✓ Fixed payroll at break-even point; separate teams by function (kitchen, front-of-house, digital marketing)
- ✓ Capital: 40% infrastructure, 30% operational, 20% digital marketing, 10% buffer
- ✓ Two-week soft opening (service audit with NPS, dish photos, service time measurement)

THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

Industry figures and Masterrestaurant benchmarks



VISUALIZATION

The numbers, visualized

64% of full-service guests say experience beats price



US franchisees who own only one location



Food cost, full-service under \$2M sales



Payroll cost, full-service



US average delivery order value 2025



58% visited a restaurant after seeing it on TikTok



Sources: [National Restaurant Association 2025](#) · [International Franchise Association — Value of Franchising report \(press release\) 2026](#) · [National Restaurant Association, Restaurant Operations Data Abstract 2025](#) · [National Restaurant Association — Restaurant labor costs analysis 2024](#) · [Lightspeed 2025](#)

Chart by [masterrestaurant.com](#)

ILLUSTRATIVE CASE (COMPOSITE)

"I opened a sushi bar downtown without mapping. First two months did \$6K/week, but it was movie-theater traffic, not sushi-budget people. Month 3 dropped to \$2K/week. When we did due diligence we saw: paying-customer density was 0.6 per square meter (we needed 1.8 minimum). Closed at 11 months. Money lost: \$140K.

If I'd mapped 90 days before signing the lease, I'd have opened five blocks up, where the customer actually was."

— Carlos M., former restaurant operator, 3 closures in 4 years (Masterrestaurant audit data 2024)

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

Operational checklist by phases: daily, weekly, and monthly items



Phase 1: Exploration (30 days) — Verify the market exists

Days 1-7: Choose two candidate territories (neighborhood, street, competition proximity). For each: map 5 direct competitors (same or similar food type), note business hours, count tables, estimate peak occupancy (12-14 h and 19-21 h). Talk to staff at each place: average table turn time, top dishes, average check. Walk the zone three different day-parts: morning (11-14 h), afternoon (14-18 h), evening (18-23 h). Document: customer types (executives, couples, families), frequency (does same group return?), payment methods (cash, card, app). Days 8-21: Review sector data: closure rates by zone, average pricing, dominant category. Calculate paying-customer density (zone population / minimum income for your model). Talk to a local franchise manager (Rappi, Didi or similar): order traffic by zone, average check, returns rate. Days 22-30: Choose territory. Criterion: density ≥ 1.8 paying customers per square meter of zone. Note: rent, utilities (baseline), minimum viable size (12-18 tables = 180-240 m²). Owner: founder/co-founder.



Phase 2: Territory validation (45 days) — Close on site and finalize offer

Weeks 1-2: Negotiate lease. Include: early-exit clause (minimum 6 months post-opening if occupancy target missed), landlord-funded improvements (oven, A/C system), capped annual increase (2% max). Day 14: Before signing, legal audit: operating permits?, zoning for food service?, active utilities?. Week 3: Design core menu (8-12 dishes). Criterion: 60% of menu must have $\geq 40\%$ contribution margin, 30% between 35-40%, 10% between 30-35% (none $< 30\%$). Per dish: ingredients, supplier list, cost audit (validate with 2-3 suppliers), proposed PVP. Physical menu + QR: define each role (physical = narrative + suggestive selling; QR = behavioral measurement + Reels). Weeks 4-6: Validate suppliers. Request quotes on 20 core SKUs (raw materials). Compare: price, minimum order, delivery frequency, payment terms. Select 2 suppliers per category (protein, produce, pantry) for redundancy. Owner: founder + kitchen lead.



Phase 3: Build operations (60 days) — Team and systems

Week 1: Hire executive chef (trial contract, 4 weeks). Audit: 2 references from prior places, technical test on 2 dishes, interview on competencies (mise en place, hygiene, innovation). Contract chef or outsource if budget tight. Week 2: Hire front-of-house manager (full-time). Profile: minimum 3 years service experience, knows POS, empathy with guests. Hire 2-3 servers (part-time initially). Weeks 3-4: System setup: POS (point-of-sale software with dish history, customers, hours), inventory (spreadsheet or simple system), accounting (separate daily cash from bank transfers). Design SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures): 1 doc per process (how to serve, handle complaints, clean, hours). Week 5: Digital content strategy: assign Reels/TikTok owner (can be part-time community manager or founder). Plan: 5 videos/week (behind-the-scenes, dish prep, testimonials, office humor). Week 6: Soft-opening setup: dates (2-6 weeks pre-official launch), test-customer list (30-50 people: friends, family, local micro-influencers), measurement protocol (NPS after meal, photo of each dish, service time, % returns). Owner: general manager + executive chef.



Phase 4: Operational testing (soft opening, 4-6 weeks) — Service audit

Week 1: Test operation with 20-30 customers/day (not sales; it's debug). Price: cost + 15%. Record: service time per dish (target: <12 min from order to table), % returns, temp and presentation (photo each dish), checkout speed. Daily close-out: 15-min debrief (kitchen + front) to fix friction points. Weeks 2-4: Scale to 50-70 customers/day. Now measure numbers: NPS (Net Promoter Score; target ≥50), average check, repeat rate (% returning in 7 days). Flag dishes with >15% returns (redesign or remove). Weeks 5-6: Test digital strategy: publish 10 Reels/TikToks from soft opening, measure: views, engagement (comments + shares), CTR (click to reserve/location). Shift toward what works. Integrate feedback: if comments request a new dish, test it. Owner: general manager + executive chef (operational measure) + community manager (digital measure).



Phase 5: Official launch (week 1 post soft-opening) — Scale with measurement

Week -1 (pre-launch): Announce on Reels/TikTok: 'Opening on [date]'. Invite local food micro-influencers (not celebrities; locals with 2K-20K followers who eat where they live). Set expectations: 'First month = still adjusting'. Week 1 (official launch): Team briefing: every person knows their SOP and service script. First week: 80-120 customers/day (goal: don't overload, validate offer and price resonate). Measure: check, NPS, repeat rate, % customers from Reels/TikTok. Weeks 2-4: Scale to demand. If NPS <45, pause growth and fix (could be service, food, or price). If NPS >55 and line forms, announce second seating or expand. Week 3+ (post-launch): Post Reels every 3 days (less than soft opening because operations can't pause now). Measure: content's occupancy impact (ask: 'How did you find us?'). Monthly: review margin per dish category (if <30%, zero discount or reformulate). Owner: founder (decisions) + general manager (execution) + community manager (content).

FAQs from restaurant entrepreneurs with no experience

How much capital do I need to open a restaurant with no experience?

Depends on size and zone, but typical model: 15-25% legal/licenses, 40% infrastructure (oven, tables, POS, kitchen), 30% operational (30-day ingredients + 15-day payroll), 20% digital marketing, 10% 3-month buffer. Minimum: \$100K-150K USD in large city. Most failures happen because 40-50% goes to nice furniture and zero remains for operations.

Can I open with a partner if neither of us has restaurant experience?

Only if the partner has ≥ 3 years operational experience in that cuisine type. 'Understanding business' isn't enough. Restaurants are daily operations; one error in purchasing, service, or hygiene erases reputation forever. If both are new, hire an outsourced executive chef or manager with proven track record and pay for their experience. Best money you'll spend in year one.

How long until break-even?

In validated territory with core menu and correct soft opening: 4-7 months to cover payroll + rent + utilities. In unvalidated zone or scattered menu: 12-18 months or never. The difference is territory due diligence. Who skips that phase averages 22 months to break-even or closes first.

Do I need a physical menu or is QR enough?

Mandatory: physical menu + QR, different roles. Physical is hospitality (customer decides in 90 seconds, experiences menu narrative, servers upsell verbally). QR is data (digital customers, preference measurement, Reels feed). Drop the physical and you lose 18-22% average check. Masterrestaurant doesn't allow QR-only.

What's the maximum food cost I can allow?

32% is the hard ceiling. Formula: $(\text{ingredient cost} + \text{waste}) / \text{selling price} = \text{food cost}$. A \$20 dish with \$6 ingredients = 30% (OK). \$7 = 35% (high). \$8+ = 40%+ (failure, won't reach break-even). If many dishes exceed 32%, either raise price (\$2-3) or lower ingredient cost (keep quality). No margin = no payroll, no rent coverage.

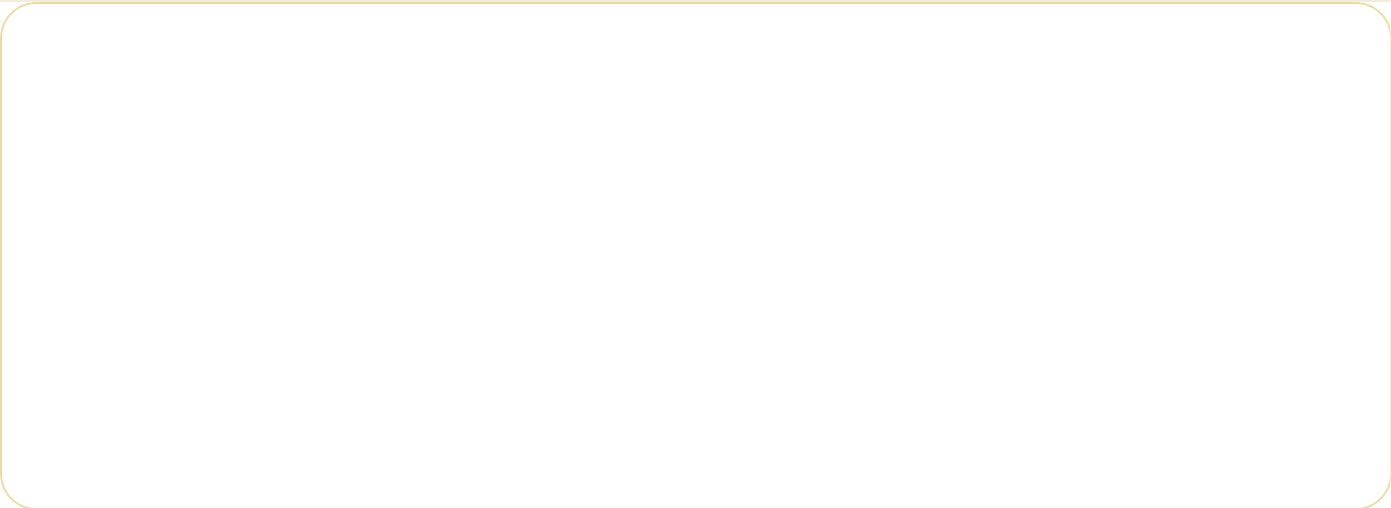
DATA & SOURCES

2026 data on open a restaurant with no experience

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

Metric	Value	Source
of sales consumed by food and beverage cost at the average operator, above the healthy cap	33% (historical average 2010/2013/2016); 32.4% (2024 median), for limited-service operators	National Restaurant Association — Restaurant operators kept food cost ratios in check in 2024
prime cost (food + beverage + labor) separating a replicable unit from one that is not	60% or less of total sales (prime cost of a limited-service restaurant) (2026)	Toast (Restaurant365 / standard industry rule, not 'Restaurant Business / Technomic 2026'): How to Calculate Prime Cost [Restaurant Prime Cost Formula]
Food and beverage cost over sales reported as a benchmark by full-service operators	32.0% of sales (median, not 30%) (2025)	National Restaurant Association (restaurant.org) — Restaurant operators kept food cost ratios in check in 2024
Annual staff turnover in U.S. limited-service restaurants	110 percent (hourly turnover, limited-service/quick-service restaurants, Q3 2025, rolling 12-month basis)	Black Box Intelligence — Restaurant employee turnover: the real cost, and how to bring it down 2025
percentage of restaurant openings that do not reach year three, per H.G. Parsa's (Ohio State University) longitudinal study of 2,500 restaurants in Columbus, Oh	57 to 61 percent over the three-year period 1996-1999 (H.G. Parsa later summarizes his own research as 'only about	The Ohio State University (news.osu.edu) — Restaurant Failure Rate Much Lower Than Commonly Assumed, Study Finds 2005
average annual turnover in the restaurant sector, the rate that turns every undocumented recipe into lost knowledge	79% (Leisure & Hospitality) (2023)	Award.co, citando datos del US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) — Employee Turnover Rates By Industry 2023

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