

Restaurant Online Ordering Systems: The Complete Guide

An online ordering system is a chain: visibility, menu, checkout, payment, delivery, and regular guests. This guide shows where each link wins or loses margin.

Nuh Kayran · May 2, 2026

When restaurant owners talk about an “online ordering system,” they often mean only the basket button. The real system is the **chain in between**: a guest finds you, sees your menu, adds an item, pays, receives their food, and comes back. Every link either brings margin in or lets it leak away.

Marketplaces sell you one link — visibility — and take control of the rest. This guide covers the complete chain, explains every stage, and links to the in-depth article at each point. Treat it as a map: get the overview here, then go deeper in the individual articles.

INSIGHT

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for you if you:

- are **building** an online ordering system and want to know what matters,
- already use **Lieferando** but want more **direct orders**,
- run **several locations** and need a repeatable structure,
- run a **café, pizzeria, burger restaurant, or delivery business** and want practical steps — not theory.

The 30-second version

If you remember only three things:

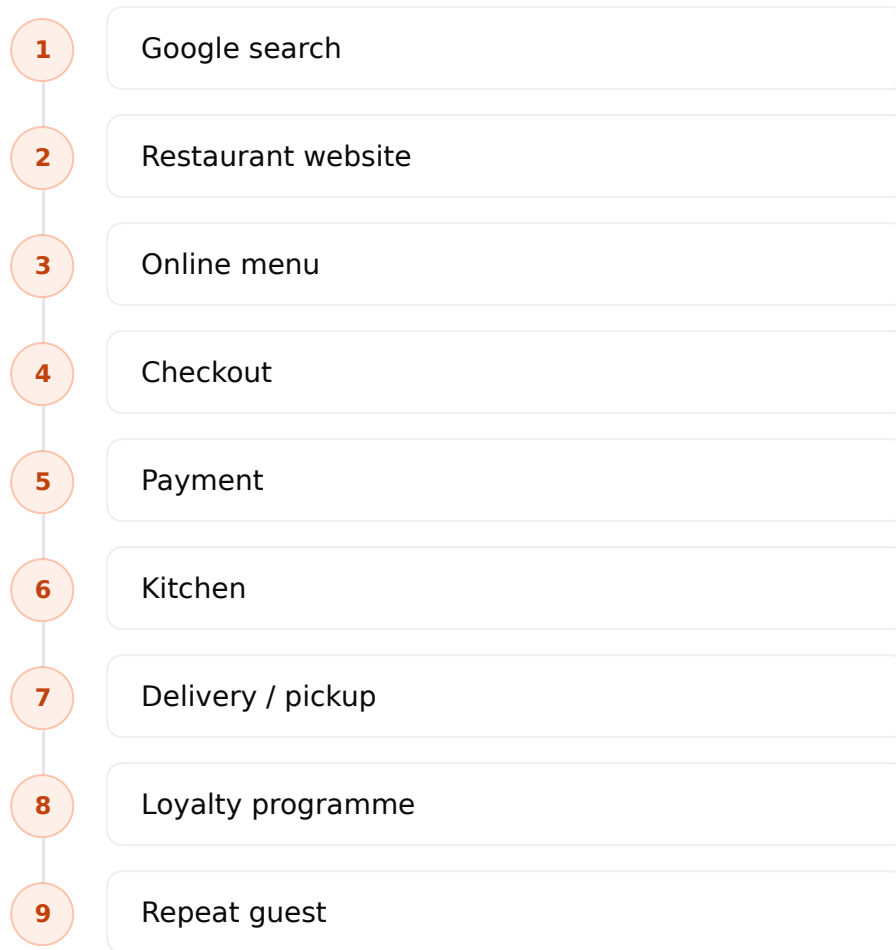
- 1 **Own the guest.** Not the platform.
- 2 **Own the checkout.** That is where revenue is decided.
- 3 **Own the relationship.** The second order is pure profit.

Everything else in this guide shows you how.

How the whole system works

Before we go through the stages, here is the mental model. An order always travels through the same chain — and at every link, you decide whether you or a platform owns it:

THE JOURNEY OF AN ORDER



Every stage in this diagram matches a chapter below. The thread running through it: the more of these links run through your own channel, the more margin and guest relationship you keep.

Marketplace vs. direct ordering at a glance

A table says more than 500 words. The difference is not the technology but **ownership**:

MARKETPLACE VS. ORDERING ON YOUR OWN SITE

FACTOR	MARKETPLACE	DIRECT ORDERING
Who owns the guest?	✗ The platform	✓ You
Commission	✗ 25–45% effective	✓ Payment fee only (~2.5%)
Brand presence	✗ Limited, platform layout	✓ Fully your brand
Guest data	✗ Anonymous, owned by the platform	✓ Complete guest profile
Checkout	✗ Generic, controlled by someone else	✓ Your checkout, your rules
Loyalty programme	✗ Hardly possible	✓ Built in directly

1 What is an online ordering system?

What happens? An online ordering system is the uninterrupted digital route from first visibility to a repeat order — on a channel you control. At minimum, it includes a current digital menu, mobile checkout, payment, fulfilment logic (pickup, delivery, pre-order), and a way to win the guest back afterwards.

Why does it matter? The decisive difference is not technical but about ownership. On a marketplace, you own none of these links — not the guest, data, or margin. On your own channel, you own the whole chain.

Common mistake: Reducing the “system” to the order button and leaving everything before and after to chance — or the platform.

Key point: Think in chains, not features. Every link you own supports margin and loyalty.

2 Direct ordering vs. Lieferando: the economics

What happens? The advertised commission is only the deposit. Mandatory discounts, paid placement, refunds, and lost guest data often push effective costs above 40%.

Why does it matter? This is the most consequential line in your profit-and-loss account — and the one calculated wrongly most often. Once you know the real cost, you make every later decision in this guide differently.

Common mistake: Seeing only the percentage on the invoice and ignoring hidden items such as advertising, discounts, and refunds.

Key point: Start here — it is the strongest case for everything else.

→ Go deeper: [The commission trap: what a 30% marketplace fee really costs](#)

3 Checkout speed as a ranking factor

What happens? Slow checkout costs twice: once in the abandoned order and once in visibility. Load time and usability are measurable signals for guests and search engines.

Why does it matter? Every extra second of loading measurably lowers conversion. Google assesses the same signals that make guests lose patience.

Common mistake: Overloading checkout with scripts, pop-ups, and tracking until the page crawls.

Best practice: Treat speed as a feature — lean pages, few scripts, fields ready to tap straight away.

Key point: Frictionless commerce is not a UX luxury; it is a ranking signal.

→ Go deeper: [Zero-friction commerce: checkout speed as an SEO signal](#)

4 Checkout architecture

What happens? Checkout is the most valuable area in your digital presence: it decides whether interest becomes revenue. First-party architecture means you decide the fields, order, payment methods, and upsell moments.

Why does it matter? On someone else's flow, you follow someone else's rules. On your own, you can optimise every step for conversion and margin.

Common mistake: Too many required fields, forced account creation, and hidden costs at the end.

Best practice: Guest checkout first, payment methods visible early, no surprises.

Key point: Own the checkout and you own the revenue.

→ **Go deeper:** [Prime checkout real estate: own your checkout](#)

5 Mobile conversion

What happens? Most orders come from smartphones. A conversion-first mobile checkout — large tap targets, few fields, visible progress — makes the difference between a full and abandoned basket.

Why does it matter? A layout that works on desktop can fail on a phone. And your revenue happens on the phone.

Common mistake: Squeezing desktop forms unchanged onto small screens.

Best practice: Design mobile-first, test with a thumb, not a mouse.

Key point: Optimise for the thumb, not the cursor.

→ **Go deeper:** [Conversion first: the mobile checkout that works](#)

6 Average order value & upsells

What happens? More revenue does not have to mean more guests. Often, a larger basket per order is enough. Data-led pairings suggest the side or drink the guest would have taken anyway.

Why does it matter? Every extra euro per order scales across all orders without extra acquisition costs.

Common mistake: Random upsells that overload the basket and overwhelm the kitchen.

Best practice: Relevant, high-margin suggestions that fit the order and the kitchen can fulfil.

Key point: The easiest revenue is a larger basket, not a new guest.

→ **Go deeper:** [Smart pairings: lift the basket with relevant add-ons](#)

7 Pre-orders & peak times

What happens? Friday evening decides the week — and your reputation. Pre-orders and capacity guardrails turn a “surprise rush” into an orderly queue.

Why does it matter? An overloaded pass creates slow tickets, cold dishes, and poor reviews. Smoothed demand protects quality and the team.

Common mistake: No pre-order or scheduling option, then drowning at peak time.

Best practice: Spread demand across the evening and cap capacity by time slot.

Key point: Manage demand before demand manages you.

→ **Go deeper:** Peak-demand mastery: manage revenue, protect the pass

8 Delivery & the last mile

What happens? Guests do not experience your logistics; they experience the estimated arrival time and whether the bag delivers on its promise. Sensibly cut delivery zones and honest forecasts make your own delivery predictable.

Why does it matter? The last mile is when your brand arrives — or fails to.

Common mistake: Oversized or vague delivery zones that create cold food and unprofitable trips.

Best practice: Zones by drive time rather than straight-line distance, honest ETAs rather than wishful times.

Key point: The last mile is a brand moment, not merely a logistics issue.

→ **Go deeper:** The last mile: manage delivery zones by drive time

9 Regular guests & loyalty

What happens? The first order is the most expensive; every one after it is almost pure profit. A loyalty programme on your own channel turns a one-off marketplace transaction into a recurring direct relationship.

Why does it matter? Without guest data, there is no way to win guests back. With it, every first-time guest can become a potential regular whose value you can measure.

Common mistake: No loyalty programme, so every first-time guest is lost again.

Best practice: Build loyalty directly into checkout so the second order is easier than the first.

Key point: The first order costs; every later one pays back.

→ **Go deeper:** Loyalty ROI: calculate the value of a regular guest

The roadmap: your own system in three phases

You do not need to rebuild everything at once. Restaurant operators get furthest with a clear sequence:

IMPLEMENTATION IN THREE PHASES

1

Phase 1 — Own your menu

Put a current, fast digital menu on your own domain. It is the basis for visibility, ordering, and data.

2

Phase 2 — Own your checkout

Move order completion to your own mobile-optimised checkout. This is where you recover the margin marketplaces skim.

3

Phase 3 — Own your regulars

Activate loyalty and win-back activity so first orders become repeat direct orders.



The 7 most common mistakes

These patterns appear again and again, and each costs margin:

1

Relying only on marketplaces and building no owned channel.

2

Slow checkout that costs orders and rankings.

3

No local visibility — no Google ordering and no maintained website.

4

No loyalty programme, so every first-time guest is lost again.

5

Poor mobile UX, despite most orders coming from phones.

6

Oversized or vague delivery zones that create cold food and losses.

7

No pre-order or scheduling option, so peak times overwhelm the restaurant.

Short glossary

The key terms behind this guide, each clearly explained in the restaurant lexicon:

- **The commission trap** — the real cost of marketplaces
- **Contribution margin** — what is truly left from each dish
- **Average order value** — the lever for more revenue per order
- **Frictionless checkout** — speed as a conversion and SEO signal
- **Margin recovery** — win back lost margin step by step

The complete **restaurant lexicon** explains every term on its own.

Frequently asked questions about online ordering systems

Do I need my own system if I already use Lieferando? ×

Marketplaces are a channel for visibility, not a replacement for your own system. The difference is ownership: guest, data, and margin remain yours only on your own channel. Most restaurants run both in parallel and move repeat orders to direct step by step.

What does a marketplace order really cost me? +

Where should I start if I can change only one thing? +

Do I lose reach when I focus on direct ordering? +

How long does switching to my own system take? +

How to use this guide

Read the nine stages as one chain, not separate parts. The biggest lever is almost always at the start: understand the economics first, then optimise checkout, then build conversion, upsells, and loyalty on top. Every linked article goes deeper; this is your map.

THE FIRST STEP



ARTICLE

The commission trap

Start with the strongest case: marketplaces' real costs.



CALCULATOR

Commission calculator

Calculate with your own numbers.



LEXICON

Restaurant lexicon

The terms behind direct business, clearly explained.

Build your own ordering system.

Menu, checkout, guest data, and loyalty in one system — on your domain, without platform costs tied to commission. Menuella brings the whole chain in this guide under one roof.

Explore direct ordering →