TECH & PAYMENTS

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THE RESTAURANT BLUEPRINT

Plan it. Price it. Prove it.

A first-time owner's guide to opening a restaurant with real numbers — the research, the math, the checklists, and the technology that holds it all together.

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BEFORE WE START

A LETTER FROM YOUR LOCAL TECH PARTNER

Most restaurants don't fail in the kitchen. They fail on paper — before the first plate is ever served.

They fail because the rent was signed at 14% of sales instead of 8%. Because the menu was priced by copying the place down the street instead of costing the plate. Because sales tax money quietly became payroll money. Because bad news arrived at month-end, four weeks too late to fix.

None of that is a cooking problem. All of it is a numbers problem — and numbers problems are preventable.

We wrote this guide because we sit on the technology side of hundreds of restaurant conversations here in Southern Arizona, and we see the same pattern every time: the owners who make it treat the restaurant like a business that happens to serve great food. The ones who struggle treat it like great food that happens to be a business.

This guide walks you through the whole journey: how to validate your concept before you commit a dollar, the handful of formulas that decide whether you survive, what a real month looks like in numbers, and the technology stack that does the boring parts automatically so you can be in the dining room instead of a spreadsheet.

Use it with our compliments. And when you're ready to run *your* numbers instead of our examples, the last page tells you how to get a free Blueprint session — your concept, your market, your break-even, on the house.

— The Tech & Payments team

Tucson, Arizona

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01

THE JOURNEY, A TO Z

Opening a restaurant is six phases. Software can carry some of them. Some will always be yours.

PHASE	WHAT HAPPENS	WHO CARRIES IT
A · Dream & validate	The concept, the market research, the competition scan, the gut check	Software researches; **you** decide
B · Plan & fund	Business plan, financial model, break-even, raising money	Software writes & computes; **you** earn trust
C · Site & build	Site shortlist, walking the block, lease, permits, buildout	Data helps; **you** negotiate & build
D · Product & people	Menu creation, recipe costing, vendors, hiring, culture	Software costs & drafts; **you** taste & hire
E · Launch	Pre-opening buzz, staffing, soft open, opening night	Tools schedule; **you** host
F · Grow & exit	Weekly numbers, loyalty, second location, eventual sale	Software watches; **you** steer

The pattern: software owns the paper and the numbers. Humans own taste, relationships, and judgment. Every hour a tool saves you on paperwork is an hour you can spend on the parts no tool can do.

What no software will ever do for you

The concept and the gut check. Research can tell you a market is under-served. Only you can decide the food is worth serving.

Walking the block. A corridor can look perfect in the data and feel wrong at 7pm on a Tuesday. Go stand on the sidewalk. Count foot traffic. Watch who parks where.

The lease. The single most dangerous document you will sign. Negotiate tenant improvements, percentage caps, and exit clauses — with a lawyer, not a template.

Hiring and culture. Job posts can be generated. Judgment about people cannot. Culture is set by what you tolerate on a busy Friday.

Hospitality. Regulars come back for how you made them feel. That's built table by table, night after night.

Letting go. Someday you'll sell, hand it down, or close it well. That decision is yours alone — the numbers just make it honest.

Where the technology earns its keep

Everything else — the research packet, the written plan, the P&L math, the books, the sales tax, the payroll, the schedules, the ordering, the loyalty — can be carried by software that costs less per month than one slow Tuesday. Chapters 2–5 show you exactly how.

> **Rule of thumb:** if a task is repetitive, mathematical, or clerical, a tool should be doing it. If a task involves taste, trust, or judgment, you should be doing it — with better information.

02

VALIDATE BEFORE YOU COMMIT

A weekend of honest research beats a year of hard lessons. Three questions decide whether your concept has a lane.

1 – Who is your ideal customer, exactly?

"Everyone who likes good food" is not an answer. Write a specific person: age range, income, the occasion (lunch rush? date night? family Sunday?), how often they'd realistically visit, and what they'd spend. Then ask the hard question: **does the area around your target location actually contain thousands of that person?**

Who	How often	Spend
age · income · occasion	weekly? monthly? special events?	realistic check, not hopeful check

2 – Read the competitive field like a pro

Open Google Maps and search your concept near your target area. You're reading four things:

- **Density** – how many direct competitors already exist? Zero can mean open field *or* no demand. Crowded means you need a sharp edge.
- **The quality bar** – read ratings and review counts. A field of tired 3.8★ operators is an invitation. A beloved 4.7★ institution with 5,000 reviews is a wall.
- **Geographic gaps** – plot the addresses. Which corridors are covered? Which neighborhoods drive 15 minutes for this food?
- **The gap you can own** – the specific position nobody holds: faster, later hours, more authentic, better patio, the only one near the hospital.

3 – Demand drivers: what pulls traffic to a corridor

Restaurants live on anchors. Before you love a location, list what feeds it:

- Universities and schools (daytime + late night)
- Hospitals and clinics (24-hour daytime population)
- Office clusters (lunch, happy hour)
- Nightlife districts (late covers, higher checks)
- Tourism and events (seasonal spikes)
- Complementary businesses (gyms, theaters, breweries)

The walking-the-block checklist

- ☐ Stand at the site at your peak hour on two different days. Count people walking past in 15 minutes.
- ☐ Where do they park? How far is it, honestly?
- ☐ Is the site visible from the main road, or explained-to-find?
- ☐ Who are the neighbors at night? Who's open, who's dark?
- ☐ Talk to two nearby owners: how was last summer, honestly?
- ☐ Check the corridor at its worst hour, not just its best.

The verdict habit: after the research, force a one-paragraph verdict – *strong opportunity, promising, crowded, or weak* – with the two reasons that drive it. If you can't write the paragraph, you haven't finished the research. (Our Restaurant Blueprint tool writes this verdict for you from live Google Maps data – see the last page.)

03

THE NUMBERS THAT DECIDE EVERYTHING

You don't need an accounting degree. You need about a dozen formulas — and the discipline to check three of them every week.

The big three (check these weekly)

METRIC	FORMULA	HEALTHY TARGET
Food cost %	`cost of food sold ÷ food sales`	28–32%
Labor cost %	`total labor ÷ sales`	25–32%
Prime cost %	`(food + labor) ÷ sales`	**under 60%**

Prime cost is the health number. Food and labor are the only two costs you can steer week to week. Keep their sum under 60% of sales and the business can breathe. Let it drift to 70% and no amount of busy nights will save you.

Why weekly beats monthly

If food cost creeps from 30% to 34% today, a monthly P&L tells you in four weeks — after the damage. A weekly check catches it Friday, and Saturday you're fixing portioning, pricing, or a supplier. **The habit is the moat:** the owners who check weekly are the ones still open in year five.

Plate math: price from cost, not from the competition

Every dish gets a cost card. Here's a real one:

CARNE ASADA PLATE	QTY	UNIT COST	EXTENDED
Carne asada	5 oz	$0.55/oz	$2.75
Tortillas (handmade)	3	$0.12	$0.36
Salsa, toppings, limes	—	—	$0.45
Rice & beans	—	—	$0.60
Packaging / to-go	—	—	$0.30
Plate cost			**$4.46**

Now price it to your target food cost:

```
menu price = plate cost ÷ target food-cost %
```

$4.46 ÷ 0.30 = $14.87 → price it $14.95 (actual food cost: 29.8%)

> **Two traps.** First: percentages don't pay rent — *dollars do*. A $9 burrito at 25% food cost contributes $6.75; a $24 plate at 35% contributes $15.60. Watch contribution dollars on your stars. Second: **yield**. A $3.99/lb cut that loses 30% in trim really costs $5.70/lb. Cost the usable ounce, not the invoice pound.

Actual vs. theoretical: the honesty gap

```
actual food cost = (beginning inventory + purchases − ending inventory) ÷ food sales
```

Your recipes say food *should* cost 30%. The inventory math says what it *did* cost. The gap between the two is waste, over-portioning, or theft — usually 2–4 points of pure profit hiding in plain sight.

Break-even: the number that lets you sleep

Break-even answers one question: **how many covers a day keep the lights on?** Three steps:

1. **Add your fixed costs** — labor + rent + everything that doesn't change with volume.
   Example: $24,000 labor + $15,000 operating = **$39,000/month**
2. **Find your contribution per cover** — what each guest leaves after variable (food) cost.
   $28 average check × (1 − 36.6% food&bev) = **$17.75 per cover**
3. **Divide.** `$39,000 ÷ $17.75 = 2,197 covers/mo ÷ 26 days ≈ 85 covers/day`

85

covers/day = break even

90

covers/day = the plan (barely profitable)

117

covers/day = a very good month

Notice how close 90 is to 85. That's a **thin cushion** — one slow week from red. When your own numbers look like this, you fix it *before* opening: trim the buildout, renegotiate rent, raise the check, or tighten the menu. That's the whole point of doing this math on paper first.

The rest of the toolbox

METRIC	FORMULA	RULE OF THUMB
Average check	`sales ÷ covers`	track by daypart
Sales per labor hour	`sales ÷ labor hours`	schedule to a target, not a guess
Inventory turnover	`COGS ÷ avg inventory`	4–8× monthly · 4–7 days on hand
Occupancy %	`(rent + CAM + tax) ÷ sales`	under 8–10% or the lease eats you
Cash runway	`cash ÷ monthly burn`	open with 3–6 months of fixed costs
Business value	`SDE × multiple`	typically 1.8–2.8× for independents

04

A MONTH ON PAPER

Here's a full month for a 90-cover, $28-check neighborhood restaurant — the same model our Blueprint tool builds live.

MONTHLY P&L	$	% OF SALES
Revenue (90 × $28 × 26 days)	**65,520**	100%
Food & beverage (COGS)	24,000	36.6%
Labor (wages, taxes, mgmt)	24,000	36.6%
Rent / occupancy	6,000	9.2%
Utilities, insurance, supplies	4,900	7.5%
Marketing	1,500	2.3%
Card fees, repairs, other	2,600	4.0%
Net profit	**2,520**	**3.8%**

Read it like an operator:

- Prime cost is **73%** — way over the 60% line. This model survives only on volume.
- Rent at 9.2% is at the edge of safe.
- A 3.8% margin means one bad month erases the quarter.

This is a *fixable* plan — but only before you sign anything.

The same month, three ways

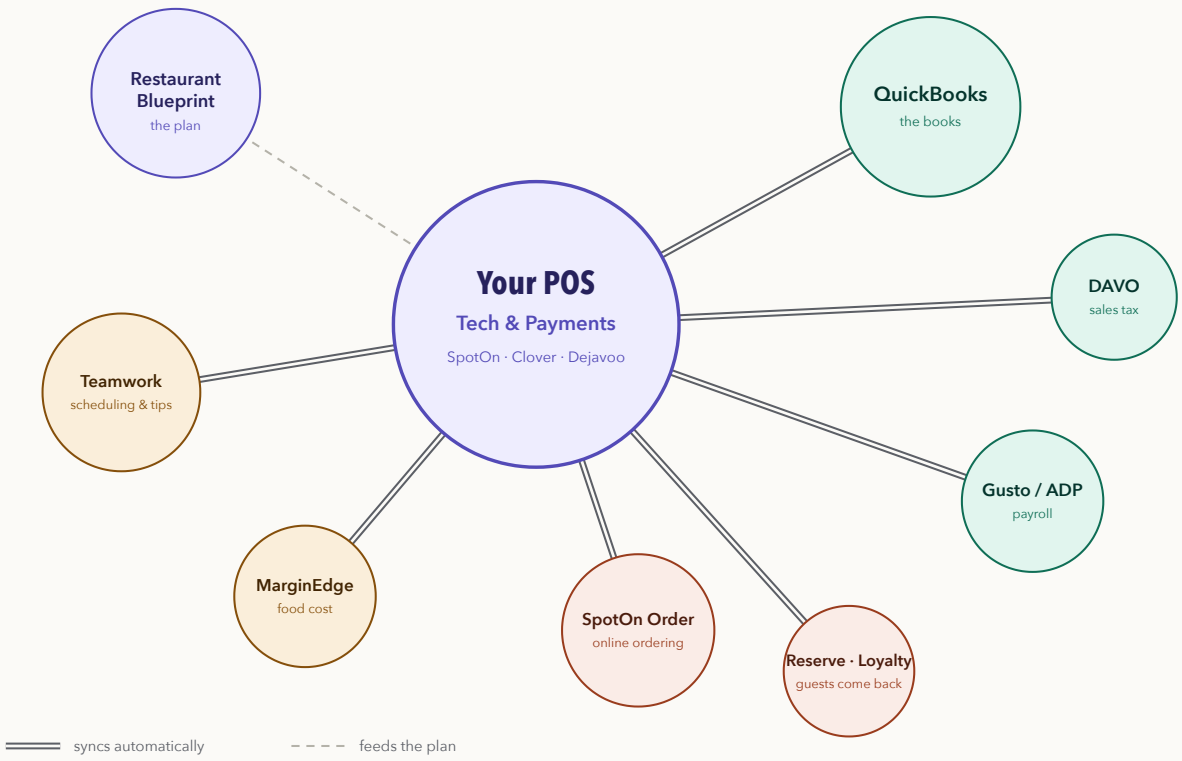
SCENARIO	COVERS/DAY	REVENUE	NET / MONTH
Worst case (−25%)	68	$49,500	**−$7,600**
Break-even	85	$61,880	$0
The plan	90	$65,520	+$2,520
Best case (+30%)	117	$85,180	**+$15,000**

Now play what-if. Drop labor five points (better scheduling, cross-training): net jumps from $2,520 to **$5,800/month — about $39,000 a year** — with zero new customers. The biggest raises you'll ever get are hiding inside your own percentages.

05

THE TECH STACK THAT RUNS ITSELF

A modern restaurant runs on about ten tools. Set up right, they share one nervous system – the point of sale – and the data moves itself.



What each piece costs, and what it does

TOOL	JOB	TYPICAL COST
POS (SpotOn / Clover / Dejavoo)	Every order, payment, and shift – the hub	from ~$99/mo
QuickBooks Online	The books – sales sync in nightly	$35–90/mo
DAVO	Sets aside & files sales tax daily, automatically	~$55/mo
Gusto or ADP	Payroll – hours & tips flow from the time clock	~$40 + $6/person
SpotOn Teamwork	Scheduling, tip pooling, labor % live	bundled
MarginEdge	Snap invoices → live food cost (direct POS integration)	~$330/mo
SpotOn Order	Your own online ordering – no 30% marketplace fees	bundled
Reserve + Loyalty + SMS	Bookings, waitlist, repeat-visit marketing	bundled
Google Business Profile	Reviews & discovery – where guests find you	free

The three connections most owners never make

POS → QuickBooks. Sales sync nightly. Month-end stops being a shoebox of receipts, and your accountant stops billing you to sort it.

POS → DAVO. Every day's sales tax is set aside before you can spend it, and filed with the state on time. The #1 first-year killer, neutralized.

POS → payroll. Hours and tips flow straight from the time clock. Payday becomes a ten-minute review instead of a Friday-night spreadsheet.

Because most of the stack is one platform, the pieces sync without connectors to babysit. The rest, a good local partner wires up on install day.

06

OPEN STRONG

Two checklists: what must be true before opening day, and the fifteen-minute ritual that keeps you alive after it.

Before you open

- ☐ Entity formed (LLC), EIN, business bank account
- ☐ Lease reviewed by a lawyer — occupancy under 10% of projected sales
- ☐ Health permit, food handler cards, liquor license in motion
- ☐ Insurance: general liability, workers' comp, property
- ☐ 3–6 months of fixed costs in the bank
- ☐ Every menu item has a cost card and a priced margin
- ☐ Break-even covers/day computed — and honestly achievable
- ☐ POS installed, menu built, staff trained on it
- ☐ Books, sales tax, and payroll connected to the POS
- ☐ Google Business Profile claimed, photos up, hours right
- ☐ Soft-opening plan: two nights, friends & family, feedback loop

Every week, forever (15 minutes)

- ☐ Food cost % this week vs. target
- ☐ Labor % this week vs. target
- ☐ Prime cost under 60%?
- ☐ Covers/day vs. break-even
- ☐ Any invoice that jumped? Call the vendor
- ☐ Next week's schedule vs. forecast — trim or add
- ☐ Read every new Google review; answer all of them

The ritual is the business. Fifteen minutes, same day every week, numbers in front of you. Every failed restaurant we've met skipped this. Every thriving one does it religiously.

YOUR NEXT STEP

RUN YOUR NUMBERS, NOT OUR EXAMPLES.

Everything in this guide — the market research, the competitor scan, the break-even math, the scenarios, the written business plan — our **Restaurant Blueprint** tool builds for *your* concept in about an hour. We'll do it with you, free.

1 · Blueprint session

Free. Your concept, your market, your break-even — yours to keep either way.

2 · Stack plan

One page: the exact tools, monthly cost, and what syncs to what.

3 · Install & go live

We install, connect the money layer, train your team, and stay on call.

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