When Costs Move Faster Than Prices:

Why Hospitality Pricing Systems Built For Stability Are Failing Modern Operators

Produced By Tech On Toast
In Collaboration With Openr

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Introduction.

Hospitality operators are not failing to price intelligently.

They are failing to execute pricing fast enough.

Across the UK, costs now move continuously. Ingredients fluctuate with global supply. Labour costs ratchet upwards. Utilities spike without warning. Volatility is no longer an exception or a recovery phase, it is the operating environment. Yet the way pricing is deployed inside most hospitality businesses still assumes stability.

Pricing decisions are being made faster than ever, but pricing execution remains slow, manual and fragmented. In many multi-site businesses, a single approved price change can still take weeks to reach tills, menus, websites and delivery platforms. By the time it does, the commercial context that triggered the decision has already moved on.

This delay creates what we define in this research as the Pricing Execution Gap: the widening distance between when a pricing decision is made and when that decision is consistently live across the business.

Most discussions of pricing focus on this gap as a reactive problem, the inability to respond quickly enough when costs rise. That is real, and it matters. When prices lag behind costs, margin is quietly absorbed by the business. But the deeper impact of the Pricing Execution Gap is not only reactive. It is also profoundly proactive.

When pricing execution is slow, fragile or risky, teams are not able to experiment. Operators avoid testing price sensitivity. They hesitate to trial local variations. Event-based pricing, seasonal adjustments and menu optimisation become theoretical rather than practical. Even when ideas exist, the effort, risk and coordination required to execute them outweigh the perceived upside. Pricing becomes something to protect, not something to improve. Over time, this suppresses learning.

Businesses lose the ability to understand what works, where, and why. Pricing decisions become infrequent, estate-wide and conservative, not because nuance lacks value, but because execution cannot support it. The organisation optimises for safety rather than insight.

The result is that pricing drifts away from being a dynamic commercial capability and becomes a static operational task. Margin erodes not only through delay, but through missed opportunity. Growth is constrained not by lack of data or ideas, but by the inability to act, observe and adapt at speed.

This research is not about how hospitality businesses should price.

It is about why, in a volatile and competitive market, the Pricing Execution Gap has become both a defensive risk and an offensive limitation, and why closing the gap between decision, deployment and learning is now a strategic necessity, not an operational nice-to-have.

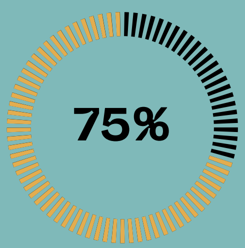
This Research Explores:

- How Pricing Reviews Lag Behind Cost Change
- Where Execution Slows After Decisions Are Made
- The Operational Friction Hidden In Pricing Workflows
- Why Multi-Site Pricing Is Harder Than It Looks
- How Manual Processes Affect Margin Over Time
- Where Pricing Consistency Breaks Down
- The Real Workload Behind Menu And Price Updates
- How Teams Manage Risk During Change
- What Effective Pricing Execution Looks Like Today
- How Openr Helps Remove Friction From Pricing Execution

Research Overview.

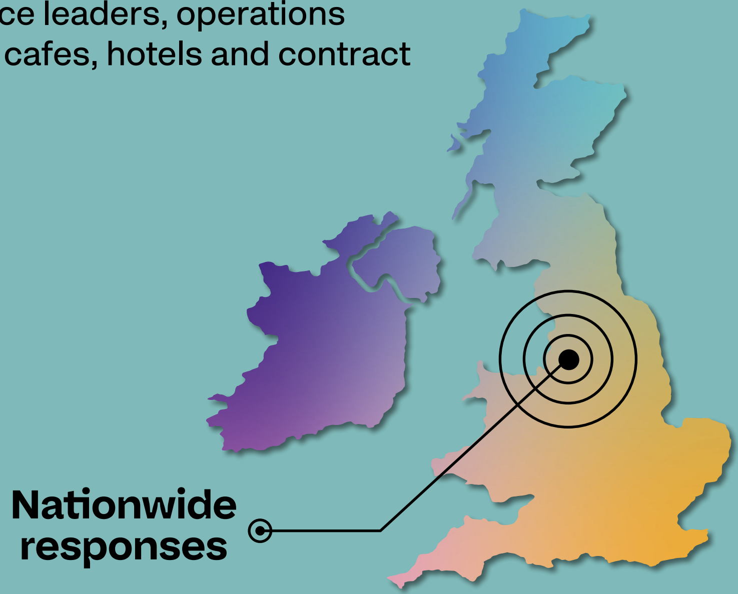
Understanding How Pricing Decisions Actually Get Deployed

This paper is based on responses from hospitality operators across the UK, representing independent venues, regional groups and national estates. Respondents included general managers, finance leaders, operations directors and owners across restaurants, pubs, cafes, hotels and contract catering businesses.



More than
70% of respondents
operate multiple sites

50+
Venues
ranging from small regional groups to estates



The Research Addresses:

- **Why pricing execution has become a bottleneck in volatile markets like the UK.**
- **Where operational friction undermines commercial intent.**
- **How margin quietly erodes through delay and inconsistency.**
- **Why pricing confidence breaks down at scale.**
- **What modern pricing execution needs to look like in practice.**

What emerged consistently was not a lack of strategic thinking but a lack of operational agility.

SECTION 01

The Core Problem

The Core Problem:

Ultimately, pricing decisions are happening faster than pricing execution. In a stable environment, pricing can be reviewed periodically and adjusted in batches. In a volatile environment, pricing becomes an ongoing commercial discipline.

This gap between decision and deployment is clearly highlighted in the data and the headline statistic for this research is clear.

More than

>60%

of operators take one to two weeks or longer to deploy a price change across all sites and channels.

Rollout, in some multi-site estates:

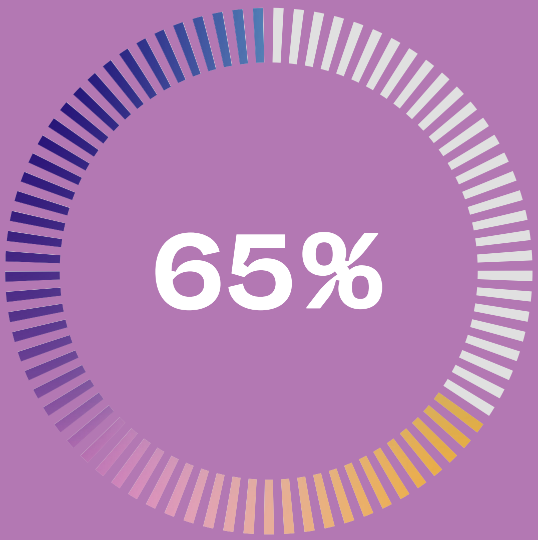
+6 WEEKS

The real insight sits beneath this statistic, as the issue isn't around indecision but about friction.

Nearly 3/4 of operators review pricing only **one to three times per year** despite ongoing cost volatility. Even when decisions are made, execution is slow.

More than half of respondents reported that deploying a price change requires coordination across **three or more teams or systems**, including procurement, finance, marketing, operations, external printers and point of sale platforms.

Manual Rekeying Remains Widespread.



65% still rely on spreadsheets as part of the pricing process, often duplicating data across multiple tools.

By the time changes go live, the original cost increase has already been partially or fully absorbed by the business.

This issue isn't a strategy; it is simply execution.

Pricing Has Outgrown Its Operating Model.

Pricing is still treated as a back-office task supported by workarounds. In reality, pricing now sits at the intersection of:

The research shows that fewer than half of operators are fully confident that prices are consistent across tills, websites, delivery platforms and printed menus at any given time. The inconsistencies create friction everywhere. Guests notice discrepancies, teams lose confidence in what is live and central functions lose visibility.

Over time, pricing becomes something to manage carefully rather than being used proactively as part of a strategy.

SECTION 02

The Commercial Impact

Why Slow Pricing Is More Expensive Than It Looks...

The financial impact of slow pricing is rarely dramatic in isolation. It is cumulative.

More than half of operators estimate annual margin loss between 2- 5% purely due to pricing delays. Some report losses of 6% or more during periods of heightened volatility, such as seasonal menu launches, energy price spikes or supplier shortages.

Lost margin is only part of the story. There are quieter costs:

- **Pricing decisions become deliberately conservative to avoid rework**
- **Estate-wide changes are favoured over nuanced adjustments**
- **Seasonal and event-based opportunities are underused**
- **Teams spend significant time administering the pricing rather than improving it.**

Nearly 40% of respondents estimate that teams spend more than 20 hours per month on menu collation, price updates and re-entering data. In larger estates, that figure regularly **exceeds 100 hours** per month.

Manual processes introduce risk. Around **one-third of operators reported manual pricing errors occurring at least occasionally, with some experiencing errors regularly**. These issues often lead to guest complaints, internal confusion and loss of confidence in data accuracy.

> **“Operators know the pain: changing the price of just one menu item can take weeks while supplier costs keep moving. By the time the update lands, the business has already absorbed the unnecessary costs.**
>
> **Openr solves this problem.**

openr Founder Joel Robinson

For multi-site businesses, the challenge compounds. Inconsistent rollout timing leads to different prices across sites. Local teams apply workarounds, brand consistency erodes and central teams lose visibility over what is live where.

Over time, pricing shifts from a commercial lever to an operational burden.

SECTION 03

The Human Cost

Beyond Margin And Time There Is A Human Cost To Slow Pricing.

Resource constraints were cited as the most common barrier to faster pricing by over 45% of respondents, closely followed by internal approvals and fragmented technology stacks.

>50%

of operators already use some form of seasonal or event-based pricing

<33%

feel fully confident managing those changes today

The confidence gap matters because when pricing feels risky, teams slow down. When the execution feels fragile, decisions become conservative and estate-wide changes replace nuanced ones.

Opportunities are missed to avoid complexity. The fear of customer backlash is real. However, the research shows that inconsistency, confusion and outdated pricing cause more friction than well-communicated change.

SECTION 04

What Operators Want Instead

Across Venue Types And Sizes, There Was Remarkable Alignment On What An Ideal Pricing Process Looks Like.

Over 70%

of operators want a single source of truth for menus and pricing.

> “You need one place where everyone knows what the price is meant to be. A single source of truth.

HALL & WOODHOUSE IT Project Manager **Alice McCombie**

They want to:

- Input data once and see it reflected everywhere
- Plan pricing changes in advance
- Compare new pricing against previous prices and costs
- Roll out updates confidently and consistently
- Maintain visibility across the estate without slowing local nuance

This is not about simply changing prices more often, but about removing the friction so that pricing decisions can be made and executed intentionally and in line with a bigger strategy.

SECTION 05

The Opportunity

What Modern Pricing Execution Needs To Look Like In Practice.

Pricing agility must be seen as a strategic capability. Cost volatility is not a temporary challenge - it is the new operating environment.

The opportunity is not simply to change prices faster, but it is to redesign how pricing works inside hospitality businesses. Modern pricing execution requires a shift away from disconnected workflows and manual handovers towards a single, connected pricing foundation. One where pricing decisions are no longer constrained inside spreadsheets, approval chains or individual systems. It needs to be one that moves pricing cleanly from intent to execution.

In practice, this means creating a single source of truth for menu and pricing data that sits above the existing systems. Pricing, menu structure and rules are defined once, governed centrally and then shared consistently across tills, websites, delivery platforms and printed outputs. When pricing data is connected in this way, execution changes fundamentally.

Operators can plan pricing changes in advance rather than reacting under pressure. They can model the impact of cost movements before publishing and can roll out changes consistently across estates without relying on rekeying or workarounds. Most importantly, they can act with confidence knowing what is approved is what goes live.

Why Openr Acts As The Connective Layer Between Pricing Intent And Operational.

Shifting pricing from a fragile approach to a dependable capability is the role **Openr** plays. This approach does not require replacing core systems or introducing disruption.

Modern pricing execution sits alongside existing point of sale, finance and channel partners, connecting them through shared, standardised data rather than adding another layer of complexity.

This gives hospitality businesses the ability to not just deliver faster pricing, but better pricing.

Pricing that reflects local conditions, protects margin deliberately and pricing that can respond to events, seasons and demand without breaking operational flow.

In a volatile environment for hospitality, this foundation becomes a source of commercial resilience.

SECTION 06

Conclusion

When Costs Move Faster Than Price. Execution Becomes The Risk.

This research shows that what breaks first is not intent or intelligence but execution.

Hospitality businesses are full of experienced commercial leaders making thoughtful decisions. What they lack is the operational infrastructure to act at speed.

Closing the gap between decision and deployment is one of the most immediate and controllable ways to improve profitability, resilience and confidence in a volatile market.

Your Pricing Isn't Broken. Execution Is.

→ Your teams already know what they want to do with pricing.
→ The challenge is getting changes live quickly, consistently and with confidence.
→ This research shows the gap clearly.
→ Openr helps you close it.

What You Told Us...

→ Price changes take too long to go live.
→ Manual processes create risk and inconsistency.
→ Margin is lost quietly through delay
→ Teams slow down because execution feels fragile.
→ This isn't a strategy problem.
→ It's an execution problem.

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popworld
BE AT ONE COCKTAIL BAR
WALKABOUT
COCO DI MAMA
ASK ITALIAN
S&L

Ready To Fix Pricing Execution? Get In Touch To Find Out More.

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openr

Leading Hospitality Analytics Tool For Smarter Menus And Pricing