

UNVARNISHED REVIEWS

Intercom vs. Help Scout vs. Front: The Seat Cliff Problem

Market Position: Big Picture

Intercom, Help Scout, and Front are the three most-compared platforms for smaller, relationship-driven support teams, the segment underserved by enterprise-grade ticketing systems like Zendesk or Salesforce Service Cloud. All three are credible, well-reviewed products serving distinctly different philosophies: Intercom is a premium, AI-first messenger platform; Help Scout is an email-first shared inbox built around simplicity; Front is a collaborative, omnichannel inbox for operations-heavy teams.

This report intentionally covers different ground than other CX platform comparisons on this site: it is not primarily about AI agent billing economics (Intercom's Fin, HubSpot Breeze, and Salesforce Agentforce pricing models are covered in a separate report), and it does not cover contact-center or enterprise ticketing platforms (covered in the Zendesk vs. Salesforce Service Cloud vs. Freshdesk and NICE vs. Genesys vs. Five9 reports). This report is specifically about core seat-based inbox pricing for smaller teams, and the structural traps in how each platform handles a team that's simply growing.

The finding that should change how any of these three gets budgeted: seat-count cliffs are not a minor footnote, they're a real, quantifiable, and in Front's case severe cost discontinuity that a team can trigger by hiring a single additional support agent.

Platform Ratings at a Glance

Platform	G2 Rating	Reviews (G2)	Note
Front	4.7 / 5	~2,440	Highest-rated of the three
Intercom	4.5 / 5	~3,855	Largest review base by a wide margin
Help Scout	4.4 / 5	~435	Smallest review base of the three

All three cluster within 0.3 points of each other on rating, meaning satisfaction alone doesn't strongly differentiate them; pricing structure and team fit do more of the real decision-making work in this comparison.

Intercom: Premium Positioning, With Real Acquisition Uncertainty Ahead

Intercom prices per seat across three tiers: Essential at \$29/seat/month (annual billing, \$39 monthly); Advanced at \$85/seat/month, adding workflows, multiple team inboxes, and richer reporting; and Expert at \$132/seat/month for the most advanced collaboration and security features. There is no free plan. As of 2026, exact seat prices are reported as no longer published on Intercom's own pricing page for all tiers, requiring a sales quote, though the figures above remain widely and consistently cited as reference points across independent sources.

Fin, Intercom's AI agent, is billed separately at \$0.99 per resolved outcome (escalations that don't resolve aren't charged), with a 50-outcome monthly minimum. Users consistently describe the combined seat-plus-Fin cost as adding up quickly at scale, the same structural risk documented in more depth in this site's dedicated AI customer-service-agent report. Salesforce signed a definitive agreement in June 2026 to acquire Intercom (operating under the Fin brand) for approximately \$3.6 billion; any organization signing or renewing with Intercom now is making a bet on Salesforce's integration roadmap, not just Intercom's standalone product.

Help Scout: Simplicity, With a Real Pricing-Model History Worth Knowing

Help Scout's current published pricing for new signups: Free (up to 5 users, 1 inbox, 100 contacts/month, no credit card required); Standard at \$25/user/month (annual, \$30 monthly); Plus at \$45/user/month (\$54 monthly); and Pro at \$75/user/month (\$90 monthly). AI Answers, Help Scout's AI deflection add-on, costs \$0.75 per resolution, with a 3-month free trial included for new accounts.

A structural history worth understanding before signing: Help Scout charged per seat for roughly fourteen years, then in late 2024 switched to billing by number of unique contacts helped per month rather than by headcount. That change drew enough customer pushback that by 2026 the public pricing page reverted to showing per-user pricing for new signups. The practical result: existing customers who joined during the contact-based era may still be on that legacy model, which charges a flat rate based on contact volume with unlimited internal users, while anyone signing up today is quoted per user. Help Scout does not publish contact-based tier pricing for volumes above the base tier, so an organization on the legacy model has limited ability to forecast costs at higher contact volumes. Any team evaluating Help Scout, whether a prospective or existing customer, should confirm in-app which billing model actually applies to their account rather than assuming either one.

Front: The Widest Tier Spread, and Two Real Seat Cliffs

Front simplified its pricing structure in 2026 from an older four-tier model (Starter \$19, Growth \$59, Scale \$99, Premier \$229 per seat/month) to a current three-tier model: Starter at \$25/seat/month, Professional at \$65/seat/month, and Enterprise at \$105/seat/month, all billed annually. The older tier names and prices still circulate in outdated comparison content; confirm any Front pricing reference reflects the current three-tier structure, not the discontinued one.

Front's tiers carry hard seat caps that function as pricing cliffs, not gradual scaling. Starter is capped at 10 seats; hiring an 11th support agent forces an immediate, mandatory upgrade to Professional. Professional is capped at 50 seats, with the same dynamic at the boundary. AI features (Copilot and Smart QA) are separate add-ons at roughly \$20/seat each on lower tiers, effectively adding up to \$40/seat before Autopilot's separate per-resolution fee is even considered; Enterprise includes most AI features by default.

Pricing (July 2026)

Platform	Entry Tier	Mid Tier	Top Tier	AI Add-On
Front	\$25/seat/mo (10-seat cap)	\$65/seat/mo (50-seat cap)	\$105/seat/mo	Copilot + Smart QA ~\$20/seat each; Autopilot ~\$0.89/resolution
Intercom	\$29/seat/mo	\$85/seat/mo	\$132/seat/mo	Fin: \$0.99/outcome, 50/mo minimum
Help Scout	Free (5 users, 100 contacts/mo) or \$25/user/mo Standard	\$45/user/mo Plus	\$75/user/mo Pro	AI Answers: \$0.75/resolution

TCO Comparison: 12-Person Support Team, 1 Year

This scenario is deliberately sized at 12 seats, just above Front's 10-seat Starter cap, to make the cliff mechanic concrete rather than abstract.

Platform	Tier Required	Basis	Annual Total
Help Scout	Standard	\$25/user/month × 12	\$3,600

Platform	Tier Required	Basis	Annual Total
Intercom	Essential	\$29/seat/month × 12	\$4,176
Front	Professional (forced; exceeds 10-seat Starter cap)	\$65/seat/month × 12	\$9,360

Front's real cost for this team is more than double what its advertised \$25/seat entry price would suggest, not because the team needs Professional's features, but because Starter's 10-seat ceiling forces the upgrade regardless. A team that budgets off Front's headline price without checking its own headcount against the 10-seat cap will be wrong by \$6,000+ per year on a 12-person team. None of these totals include AI add-on costs, which layer on top of every platform in this comparison.

Costs the Pricing Table Misses

- **Front's 10-seat and 50-seat cliffs.** Crossing either threshold by even one seat forces a mandatory tier upgrade; model your 12-month headcount growth against these caps before signing, not just your current team size.
- **Help Scout's 26-agent cliff.** Standard supports up to 25 agents; the 26th forces an upgrade to Plus, an 80% per-seat price increase.
- **Confirm which Help Scout billing model applies to your account.** Existing customers on the legacy contact-based plan and new per-user signups can face structurally different economics for the same product; this is not a hypothetical, verify it in-app.
- **Intercom's Fin resolution costs compound with seat costs, not instead of them.** A quoted seat price is never the full bill once Fin usage is added; model expected monthly resolution volume before comparing Intercom's sticker price to Help Scout or Front.
- **Front's AI add-ons can add up to 62% to the effective per-seat rate.** Copilot and Smart QA at roughly \$20/seat each, on top of a \$65 Professional seat, bring the effective AI-enabled rate to \$105/seat, the same as Enterprise, without Enterprise's other included features.

The Decision Framework

Choose Front if: Your team is highly collaborative and operations-heavy (logistics, finance, B2B services) where internal comments and shared drafts on live threads matter more than a dedicated ticketing workflow, and you can confidently plan your headcount to stay clear of the 10- and 50-seat cliffs, or accept the jump if you can't.

Choose Intercom if: In-app messaging, proactive outbound campaigns, and Fin's AI resolution depth are core to how you do support, not just a nice-to-have, and your budget has real headroom for AI usage costs that scale independently of seat count. Confirm current pricing with Intercom given both the unpublished-seat-price pattern and the pending Salesforce acquisition.

Choose Help Scout if: You want the simplest, most email-like support experience with the lowest entry cost of the three, and your team is comfortably under 25 agents. Confirm in-app which billing model, legacy contact-based or current per-user, actually applies to your account before budgeting.

Everyone: Model your realistic 12-month headcount growth against each platform's tier seat caps before signing. The gap between an advertised entry price and the price a growing team actually pays is the most consistent, best-documented risk across all three platforms in this comparison.

The Bottom Line

Intercom, Help Scout, and Front are all credible, well-reviewed platforms for smaller support teams, each built around a distinctly different philosophy: Intercom for AI-first messaging depth, Help Scout for email-like simplicity, and Front for

collaborative, omnichannel operations. The real differentiator this comparison surfaces isn't feature depth, it's that seat-count cliffs, not gradual per-user scaling, govern real cost at all three, most severely at Front. A team that models its actual 12-month headcount trajectory against each platform's tier boundaries before signing will make a materially better decision than one that compares only the advertised entry price.