UNVARNISHED REVIEWS

n8n vs. Make vs. Pipedream: The Self-Hosting Escape Hatch

Market Position: Big Picture

n8n, Make, and Pipedream sit one tier more technical than Zapier and Make's mainstream competitor set, all three appeal to developers and technically comfortable teams who want more control, more complex logic, or lower cost per execution than simpler no-code tools provide. This report covers different ground than this site's Zapier vs. Make vs. Workato report; Make appears in both because it competes in both markets, mainstream no-code automation and technical, developer-oriented automation, depending on which competitor it's measured against.

The finding that should change how a technical team budgets this category: n8n is the only platform of the three offering a free, unlimited-execution self-hosted option, and that option structurally breaks the per-execution billing model that governs every other platform here, including n8n's own Cloud tier. Pipedream, by contrast, offers no self-hosting at any price point; every dollar of usage runs through its metered cloud billing with no escape hatch.

Platform Ratings at a Glance

Platform	G2 Rating	Reviews (G2)	Note
n8n	4.8 / 5	~219	Highest-rated of the three; reviewers specifically cite flexibility and self-hosting control
Make	4.6 / 5	~270	Skews small-business (76.2% of reviews)
Pipedream	4.6 / 5	~16	Smallest review base of the three by a wide margin

n8n rates highest of the three, with reviewers consistently citing its open architecture and self-hosting flexibility as the deciding factor over more managed alternatives.

n8n: Free to Self-Host, Metered If You Don't

n8n's Community Edition is free and open source (fair-code license) with unlimited workflow executions, all 400+ integrations, and no license fee, the only real cost is server infrastructure, commonly cited at $10-20/month for a capable managed VPS. n8n Cloud, the managed alternative, prices differently: Starter at $24/month for 2,500 executions/month, Pro at $60/month for 10,000 executions/month, and a Business tier introduced in 2026 at $800/month for 40,000 executions/month with self-hosting available as an add-on option; Enterprise is custom. A 2026 pricing change removed workflow and user caps from every Cloud plan, only execution volume now affects the bill.

n8n also introduced tiered pricing for self-hosted Enterprise features (SSO, LDAP, audit logs) in 2026, a change independent sources describe as having "sparked a heated community discussion" among users who had expected the self-hosted path to remain fully free regardless of feature depth. The core Community Edition itself remains free and unlimited; it's specifically the enterprise governance layer on top of self-hosting that now carries a cost.

Make: The Same Verified Economics, a Different Competitive Set

Make's pricing is unchanged from this site's prior coverage: Free includes 1,000 operations/month across up to 2 scenarios; Core starts around $9-12/month for 10,000 operations; Pro and Teams scale further. Make offers no self-hosting option at any tier, its cost advantage in this comparison isn't a self-hosted escape hatch, it's Make's own operation-based billing (charging only for executed modules, not filtered branches), which remains meaningfully cheaper than simple per-execution counting at comparable volume. Reviewers rate Make behind n8n specifically on flexibility and infrastructure control, the two dimensions where n8n's self-hosting option gives it a structural advantage this comparison is built around.

Pipedream: Code-First and Cloud-Only, Now Owned by Workday

Pipedream prices on credits, a unit combining execution time and memory rather than a simple per-run count: Free includes roughly 300 credits/month across 3 workflows; Basic runs around $29/month for approximately 2,000-10,000 credits/month depending on plan specifics; Advanced runs $49-79/month with unlimited workflows; Business is custom-quoted with dedicated infrastructure. Pipedream offers no self-hosting option at any published tier, cloud-only is a structural feature of the product, not a temporary limitation.

The development every buyer evaluating Pipedream should know: Workday announced a definitive agreement to acquire Pipedream on November 19, 2025, with the deal expected to close by the end of January 2026, well before this report's publication. Workday's stated rationale is extending its enterprise AI agent platform with Pipedream's 3,000+ connectors, following Workday's same-period acquisitions of Sana and Flowise. This is a real, structural change for any organization evaluating or already running on Pipedream; independent reviewers have specifically flagged "Workday acquisition and recent pricing changes" as the platform's primary near-term risk factors, distinct from any technical limitation.

Pricing (July 2026)

Platform	Self-Hosting	Billing Unit	Representative Tier
n8n	Yes, free, unlimited (Community Edition)	Execution (Cloud only)	Cloud Pro: $60/mo, 10,000 executions
Make	No	Operation (executed modules only)	Core: ~$9-12/mo, 10,000 operations
Pipedream	No	Credit (execution time × memory)	Basic: ~$29/mo

TCO Comparison: Sustained Automation Workload, 1 Year

Because these three platforms meter usage on fundamentally different units, execution count, operation count, and time-weighted credits, this comparison uses each platform's own documented tier boundaries rather than forcing an artificial single-volume match across incompatible billing models.

Platform	Path	What It Costs	Annual
n8n	Self-hosted Community Edition, any volume	~$10-20/month VPS only	~$120-$240
n8n	Cloud Business, 40,000 executions/mo	$800/month	$9,600
Make	Core tier, 10,000 operations/mo	~$9-12/month	~$108-$144
Pipedream	Basic tier	~$29/month	~$348

The gap between n8n's two rows is the entire point of this comparison: identical software, identical execution capability, a 40x-80x cost difference depending purely on whether an organization is willing and able to manage its own server. That capability requirement is real, self-hosting means an organization owns uptime, security patching, and scaling, costs Cloud and Pipedream both absorb into their price. For a team with even modest DevOps capacity, self-hosted n8n is very likely the least expensive path in this entire category at any real production volume.

Costs the Pricing Table Misses

- **Self-hosting n8n shifts cost from subscription to internal labor.** Server maintenance, security patching, and uptime monitoring are real, ongoing costs even though they don't appear on an invoice; budget engineering time, not just the VPS bill.
- **n8n's new self-hosted Enterprise tier is a real, separate cost most self-hosting buyers won't expect.** SSO, LDAP, and audit logging on a self-hosted deployment now carry licensing fees layered on top of the otherwise-free Community Edition.
- **Pipedream's credit system charges for execution time, not just execution count.** A workflow with a long-running step (an API call that takes 30 seconds instead of 300 milliseconds) consumes meaningfully more credits for the same single execution; model actual step duration, not just run count.
- **Confirm Pipedream's roadmap and terms with the vendor given the Workday acquisition.** Pricing, product direction, and support commitments made before a close date are not guaranteed to hold after; this is a real, current risk factor independent reviewers have already flagged, not a hypothetical one.
- **n8n Cloud's 2026 removal of workflow and user caps is a real, recent improvement worth confirming against any older comparison.** Pre-2026 research describing per-plan workflow limits reflects a pricing structure that no longer applies.

The Decision Framework

Choose n8n if: Your team has real DevOps capacity and wants the lowest possible cost at any production volume via self-hosting, or wants a managed cloud option with the flexibility to migrate to self-hosted later without switching platforms entirely.

Choose Make if: You want strong operation-based economics without managing any infrastructure yourself, and your workflows are well-served by Make's visual, no-self-hosting-required model.

Choose Pipedream if: Code-first, event-driven workflows with full programming language access are a real requirement, and you're comfortable evaluating the platform with the Workday acquisition's roadmap uncertainty priced in, not ignored.

Everyone: If your organization has any DevOps capability at all, model self-hosted n8n explicitly before assuming a managed cloud platform is the default choice. The cost gap between self-hosting and any of the metered cloud options in this comparison is large enough to change the decision entirely, not just shave a percentage off the bill.

The Bottom Line

n8n, Make, and Pipedream are all credible, well-reviewed platforms for technically-oriented automation, each with a distinctly different cost structure: n8n uniquely offers a real, free, unlimited-execution self-hosted path that the other two don't have at any price; Make offers strong managed-cloud economics without that option; Pipedream offers the deepest code-first flexibility, cloud-only, now under new ownership following Workday's acquisition. The real finding this comparison surfaces isn't which platform is cheapest per execution, it's that self-hosting capability, where available, is worth more than any per-unit pricing difference this category has to offer.