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Zapier, Make or n8n: which kind of automation tool suits a small business

Ideas & Everyday Automations

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Zapier, Make or n8n: which kind of automation tool suits a small business

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All three do the same job: **when something happens in one application, they do something in another**, without you writing code each time. What decides between them is **where they run and who looks after them**. Zapier and Make are services you use from the vendors' own sites. n8n can be used that way, on a service run by the project, or installed by you on a server of your own. Interweb sells none of the three.

The difference that matters

	A service hosted by the vendor	n8n on your VPS
Who looks after it	The vendor.	You do.
To get started	Create an account and connect the applications.	You need the server and must install the program.
Where your data passes	Through the vendor's infrastructure, on their terms.	Through your server, which you choose.
If it stops	It is the vendor's business.	It is yours: updates, memory, backups.
Costs and usage limits	On the vendor's page, and they change: check there.	The server is your cost, and the program has its licence: check the project's site.

How to decide

1. **How many connections will you have?** If it is one or two, used now and then, a hosted service is the quickest to get working.

2 **What data passes through?** If it is customer data, read the vendor's terms on where and how they keep it, and see whether that fits what you promised in your own terms. See **personal data protection on your website**.

3 **Who will look after it?** An n8n on your VPS needs someone to update it, take backups and understand servers. If you have no such person, the hosted service saves you work.

4 **Is the task really complex?** For something simple at a fixed time (a backup, a report), a cron job does it with no tool at all. See **n8n Schedule Trigger or a cron job**.

What does not change from one tool to another is the essential part: a trigger, one or more actions, credentials, testing and error handling. Whoever learns to design a workflow in one learns it in all. Before choosing, also ask what happens if the vendor changes its terms, and whether you can export your workflows to take them with you.

No tool replaces knowing the process.
Before you choose, write down in three lines what happens, what should happen and who is told if it fails. Automating a muddled process gives you the same muddle, faster. See **which tasks are worth automating first**.

Try a harmless workflow first
, one that only reads and notifies, before giving it the power to message customers or delete data. You can change tool later: what stays is the design of the process.

RECOMMENDED

Want to run n8n on a server of your own? See the VPS plans and pick the system when you order.

See the VPS servers →

SEE ALSO

- **What n8n is, and what you can automate with it** →
- **Do you need a VPS for n8n? What shared hosting cannot do** →
- **Adding a human approval step to an automation** →
- **VPS servers** →

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