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Ordinary WhatsApp, Business or the Cloud API: which suits your business

Choosing a WhatsApp Option

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Ordinary WhatsApp, Business or the Cloud API: which suits your business

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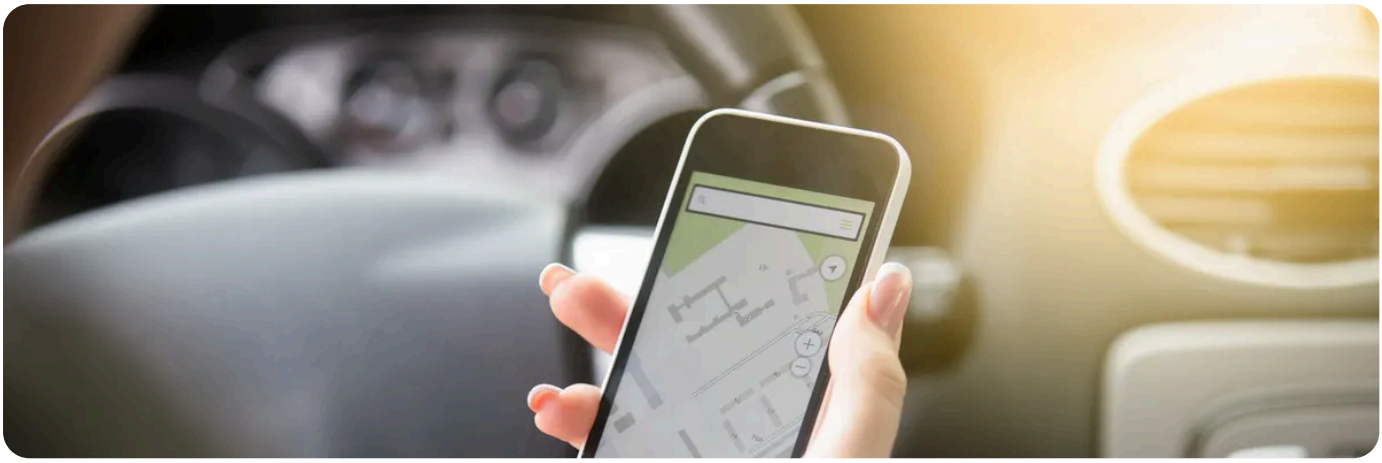

We call four different things «WhatsApp», and choosing the wrong one costs money or costs the number. One is free and is enough for most businesses; another charges per message and only pays off above a certain scale. This page puts all four side by side.

The four, in brief

Which	Who for
Ordinary WhatsApp	Personal use. It works for selling, but has no business profile, no automatic replies and no catalogue - and it mixes your life with the business.
WhatsApp Business (the app)	**The right choice for the overwhelming majority.** Free, installs like any app, and brings a profile, hours, catalogue, labels and automatic replies.
WhatsApp Business with the API (Cloud API)	For anyone with **several people answering**, needing to connect WhatsApp to a system, or sending at volume. It is not an app: it is a technical connection, and it charges per message.
WhatsApp Web / Desktop	Not a fourth account - it is the same account seen on a computer, linked by a **QR code**. See the QR section.

Ordinary or Business? The short answer is Business

The Business app is free, charges nothing per message and has no conversation limit. There is no reason for a business to stay on the ordinary version - it is all gain:

1. **A business profile** with address, hours, website and category, visible to anyone opening the conversation.

2. **Greeting and away messages.** It is the feature that pays most: it answers out of hours and avoids the impression of abandonment.

3. **Quick replies** for the eternal questions - price, address, hours. It saves hours a week.

4. **Labels** to organise conversations: new, awaiting payment, delivered.

5. **A catalogue** with photo and price inside the app.

You can switch without losing anything.
Installing Business on the same phone lets you migrate the account and its history. Do it with the phone charged and without hurry, and confirm the backup before starting.

QR codes: these are three different things

Which QR	What it is for
The WhatsApp Web one	Links a computer to your account. **Never scan it on a computer that is not yours** - whoever keeps the session open reads everything.
Your number's one (wa.me)	Generated from the `wa.me/258...` link and meant to be **printed**: shop window, card, invoice, vehicle. Anyone pointing a camera at it opens a conversation with you.
The catalogue or product one	In the Business app, each product has its own link, which also becomes a QR.

The most useful is the second, and almost nobody uses it. A QR of your link in the window or on the counter turns a passer-by into a conversation - and if the link carries a ready-written message, you know where the contact came from. How to build the link is in **putting WhatsApp on your site**.

When the API pays off - and what it costs

The API (today called the *Cloud API*) is not a better version of the app: it is a different thing. It has no screen: it connects to a system or to a support platform. You reach it directly through Meta or through a provider who wraps it with tooling.

It starts to pay off when	Why
Several people answer the same number	The app was never built for that; the API was.

It starts to pay off when	Why
You want to connect it to your system	Order confirmations, delivery status, receipts - sent by themselves.
You send at volume	With templates approved by Meta. It is not for messaging people who did not ask - see **risks and good practice**

The pricing model changed, and changes again in October.
Since **July 2025** Meta charges **per message** - not per conversation as before - at a different price per category and per country: *marketing*, *utility*, *authentication* and *service*. Service messages (replies to people who wrote to you) are still free, but **from 1 October 2026 they start being charged** at the same rate as utility. If you are budgeting a project, budget with that cost already in.

Two details that change the budget.
Marketing messages get no volume discount, however many you send - utility and authentication have tiers that drop. And Meta only charges for messages that are **delivered**, which means a bad list costs less than it looks, but also returns less.

How to choose, in three questions

1. **Do you answer alone or as a team?** Alone: the Business app. As a team: the API.
2. **Do you need your system to send messages with nobody clicking?** If yes, the API. If not, the app.
3. **How many messages a month, and of which type?** With the API, multiply by category and by country before deciding - it is the sum that usually changes the answer.

For selling, WhatsApp works best backed by a website: the site is what Google reads and what lasts - see **being found on Google** and, if you sell properly, **an online shop with local payment methods**.

NEED A HAND?

Not sure whether you need the API or the app is enough?

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