

THE FIELD GUIDE

The Solo Founder's AI Stack 2026

50 tools, 8 functions, 6 ready-to-run stacks for the new generation of one-person companies.

50

TOOLS REVIEWED

8

FUNCTIONS COVERED

6

READY STACKS

Why this exists

You don't have a team. You have a laptop, a domain name, and an idea you can't stop thinking about.

For most of the last twenty years, that wasn't enough to build a real company. You needed engineers, designers, marketers, support, ops, finance, legal — fifteen people minimum just to keep the lights on. The math didn't work for one human.

That math broke in 2024. By 2026 it's barely recognizable.

A working solo founder in 2026 ships product faster than a 50-person startup did in 2018. The unlock isn't AI as a feature inside one tool — it's the assembly of forty or fifty tools, each of which has absorbed the job of someone you used to have to hire. The pricing follows: a stack that would have cost \$40k/month in 2018 SaaS subscriptions runs you \$300–\$2,000 in 2026.

This guide is the assembly manual.

We've cataloged 50 tools across the 8 functions every company has to handle — Build, Design, Marketing, Sales, Operations, Finance, Customer Success, Legal & Admin. For each one, we tell you what it actually does, what it costs, and whether you should use it. At the end, we've assembled 6 ready-to-run stacks for different kinds of solo founder — pick the one closest to you and steal it whole.

A note before you start: this isn't a list of every AI tool. There are thousands and most of them are noise. These are the ones that survived contact with real solo founders shipping real products in 2026.

Hassan

Editor, Founderr Pulse

HOW TO READ THIS

Each tool gets the same four-part breakdown:

What it is. One sentence.

Pricing. Real 2026 prices, not the marketing-site headline.

Use it for. The specific job it replaces.

Honest take. Where it wins, where it loses, what most people get wrong about it.

If you only have 20 minutes, skip to the stack recipes at the end. Pick one, install everything in it, ship something this week.

Build

The engineering hire used to be the most expensive person in any startup. In 2026, AI coding tools have made the marginal cost of shipping software collapse. The question is no longer "can I afford to build this?" but "which tool fits my workflow?"

Seven tools dominate this category. The right choice depends on whether you write code, whether you want to, and how much of the heavy lifting you want the AI to do.

No. 01

Cursor

An AI-native code editor built on VS Code, with deep model integration for autocomplete, refactoring, and full codebase navigation.

PRICING: \$20/MO PRO · \$40/MO BUSINESS

USE IT FOR

Writing real code with AI as a constant pair programmer. Best for founders who can read code, even if they can't write it from scratch.

HONEST TAKE

Cursor is the default in 2026 — most working engineers use it, and most solo founders who can code use it. The Composer feature (multi-file edits) is what separates it from copy-pasting into ChatGPT. If you're choosing between Cursor and Windsurf, pick based on which feels faster on your machine — they're functionally equivalent.

No. 02

Claude Code

Anthropic's terminal-based coding agent — runs in your shell, edits files, executes commands, reasons about your full codebase.

PRICING: BUNDLED IN CLAUDE PRO (\$20/MO) OR MAX (\$100–200/MO); ALSO VIA API

USE IT FOR

Bigger, more autonomous coding tasks. Refactors, bug fixes that span multiple files, building features end-to-end while you do something else.

HONEST TAKE

Cursor is for keyboard-on-keyboard pair programming. Claude Code is for delegation — "go figure out why this test is failing and fix it" while you grab coffee. The two complement rather than compete. Most serious builders in 2026 run both.

No. 03

Lovable

A full-stack app builder — type what you want, get a working web app with database, auth, and deployment.

PRICING: \$25/MO STARTER · \$100/MO PRO

USE IT FOR

Going from zero to working prototype in a single evening. Especially powerful for founders who don't code at all.

HONEST TAKE

Lovable is the most genuinely impressive of the "vibe coding" platforms — apps look reasonable out of the box and the database/auth/deployment is handled. The catch: production-grade scalability is still limited compared to building on Next.js + Supabase directly. Use Lovable to validate, then port if you find traction.

No. 04

Bolt.new

StackBlitz's AI app builder — runs entirely in-browser, generates and deploys full-stack apps from prompts.

PRICING: FREE TIER · \$20/MO PRO · \$50/MO TEAMS

USE IT FOR

Quick prototypes, especially anything that needs to be functional in the same session you describe it. The in-browser execution is genuinely fast.

HONEST TAKE

Bolt is faster than Lovable for tiny prototypes; Lovable is better for things you want to keep. If you're building five throwaway demos to test ideas this weekend, use Bolt. If one of them works and you want to grow it, you'll likely rebuild in something else anyway.

No. 05

v0

Vercel's AI UI generator — produces production-ready React components from text descriptions or images.

PRICING: FREE WITH LIMITS · \$20/MO PREMIUM · \$50/MO TEAM

USE IT FOR

Generating polished UI components without writing JSX. Pairs especially well with Cursor — generate in v0, paste into your Cursor project, refine from there.

HONEST TAKE

v0's component output is genuinely better than what most solo founders would write by hand, and the Tailwind output is clean enough to ship. It's not a full app builder — it's a component factory. Use it for that and you'll love it.

No. 06

Replit Agent

Replit's cloud-based AI coding agent — describe what you want, watch it build in a browser-based dev environment.

PRICING: \$20/MO CORE · \$40/MO TEAMS

USE IT FOR

Building entirely from a Chromebook, iPad, or any device without a real dev environment. Or for collaborative AI coding where you want others to watch.

HONEST TAKE

Replit lost some ground to Lovable and Bolt in 2025–2026 because their AI iteration lagged. The cloud-first workflow is still genuinely useful if your machine isn't a real dev machine. Otherwise, Cursor + Claude Code wins on every dimension.

No. 07

Windsurf

Codeium's AI-native IDE — direct competitor to Cursor, with comparable features and a slightly different agent design.

PRICING: FREE TIER · \$15/MO PRO · \$30/MO TEAMS

USE IT FOR

Same use case as Cursor — you're choosing between two equivalent products.

HONEST TAKE

Windsurf's "Cascade" agent is a touch more autonomous than Cursor's Composer. Cursor has a larger community, more integrations, more tutorials. If you're indifferent, save \$5/mo and try Windsurf first.

Design

Design used to be a \$5k contractor every time you needed something new. In 2026, between AI generation and great no-code tools, the marginal cost of "make this look good" approaches zero. The trap is that bad AI design is everywhere — these tools demand taste, not just inputs.

Six tools cover this category for a solo founder.

No. 08

Figma

The industry-standard design tool, now with Figma AI features bolted on (auto-layouts, content generation, design-to-code).

PRICING: FREE FOR INDIVIDUALS · \$15/MO PROFESSIONAL · \$45/MO ORGANIZATION

USE IT FOR

Mockups, design systems, anything you need to share with a developer or collaborator. Even solo founders benefit from working in Figma first, then building.

HONEST TAKE

Figma is still the default, and the AI features in 2025–2026 are good enough that you don't need a separate AI design tool. The free tier covers everything a solo founder actually needs. Don't pay until you have a team.

No. 09

Framer

A no-code website builder with design-tool-grade visual control. Output ships as a fast, SEO-friendly site.

PRICING: FREE · \$10/MO MINI · \$20/MO BASIC · \$40/MO PRO

USE IT FOR

Marketing sites, landing pages, anything where you'd otherwise use Webflow but want better animations and design control.

HONEST TAKE

Framer beat Webflow on design quality and animation. Webflow still wins on complex CMS and large sites. For 95% of solo founder needs — landing page, marketing site, maybe a blog — Framer is the right choice. Especially if you came from a design background.

No. 10

Magic Patterns

AI UI generator focused on producing high-fidelity component designs from prompts or screenshots.

PRICING: FREE TIER · \$20/MO PRO · \$50/MO TEAM

USE IT FOR

Generating multiple design variations quickly, or matching a competitor's UI style from a screenshot.

HONEST TAKE

Magic Patterns hits a sweet spot v0 doesn't — it generates designs, not just code. Use it for ideation; then either implement by hand or pass to v0 for code output. Worth the \$20 if design isn't your strength.

No. 11

Galileo AI

AI design tool that generates editable Figma-quality mockups from text descriptions.

PRICING: FREE TIER · \$19/MO PRO

USE IT FOR

Going from "I need a settings screen" to a designed Figma file in 60 seconds, then refining by hand.

HONEST TAKE

Galileo is the rare AI design tool that produces output you'd actually ship. The catch is that without design taste, you'll generate ten variations and pick the worst one. Pair this with a real Figma library or design system to constrain the output.

No. 12

Once UI

Open-source design system built specifically for solo founders and small teams — drop-in React components and a clear design philosophy.

PRICING: FREE

USE IT FOR

Skipping the "what should my buttons look like?" decision entirely. Especially valuable if you're shipping with Lovable, v0, or building in Next.js.

HONEST TAKE

Solo founders waste enormous time on design decisions that don't matter. Adopt a design system someone else thought hard about, ship faster. Once UI, shadcn/ui, and Untitled UI are the three good choices in 2026. Pick one and don't look back.

No. 13

Ideogram

AI image generator with the strongest text rendering of any current model — useful when your images need readable words in them.

PRICING: FREE TIER · \$8/MO BASIC · \$20/MO PLUS

USE IT FOR

Marketing graphics, OG images, blog post hero images, anything where "the typography needs to actually say the right thing."

HONEST TAKE

Midjourney is more artistic; Ideogram handles text. For a solo founder making marketing assets, text reliability matters more. Stick with one image tool — bouncing between three different ones is how you waste a Saturday.

Marketing

Marketing is where solo founders die. Not because the tools are missing — they're not — but because attention is fragmented and the tools require sustained use. The right move is to commit to one or two channels, then automate the rest.

Seven tools cover the category.

No. 14

Beehiiv

A newsletter platform built for growth — referrals, recommendations, ad network, paid subscriptions all native.

PRICING: FREE UP TO 2,500 SUBS · \$49+/MO SCALE · \$99+/MO MAX

USE IT FOR

Running a newsletter that's part of your product strategy, not just a side activity. The growth features (Boosts, Recommendations) compound in a way no other platform offers.

HONEST TAKE

If you're starting a newsletter in 2026, Beehiiv is the answer. Substack only wins if you're a writer who wants to monetize subscriptions directly and benefit from their discovery network. For founders building content as a distribution channel for their product, Beehiiv's stack is purpose-built. (Yes, Founderr Pulse runs on this — and yes, we'd say so anyway.)

No. 15

Typefully

Scheduling and analytics tool for X (Twitter) and LinkedIn, optimized for threaded content.

PRICING: FREE TIER · \$13/MO STANDARD · \$25/MO PREMIUM

USE IT FOR

Maintaining a posting cadence on X and LinkedIn without staring at the apps every day. Especially powerful if you're building in public.

HONEST TAKE

The good X tools all do roughly the same thing — Typefully wins on a clean editor and reasonable analytics. The thing that actually matters is posting consistently, which no tool can solve for you. Pick this, set a schedule, stick to it for 90 days.

No. 16

Plausible

Privacy-friendly, lightweight web analytics — Google Analytics replacement.

PRICING: \$9/MO STARTER (10K PAGEVIEWS) · \$19/MO GROWTH · \$59/MO BUSINESS

USE IT FOR

Knowing what's actually happening on your site without GA4's complexity or its impact on page load speed.

HONEST TAKE

Plausible vs. Fathom is a coin flip — both are excellent. Plausible is open source and slightly cheaper at scale. Don't use GA4 in 2026 as a solo founder; you'll spend two days configuring something Plausible does out of the box.

No. 17

Tally

Free, beautiful forms — Typeform without the per-response pricing.

PRICING: FREE FOR UNLIMITED RESPONSES · \$29/MO PRO

USE IT FOR

Waitlists, customer feedback, lead capture, surveys, anything Typeform would do.

HONEST TAKE

Tally killed Typeform's pricing model and most founders moved. The free tier is unusually generous. If you need quizzes or advanced logic, Pro is fine. For 90% of solo founder use, free is enough.

No. 18

Bento

All-in-one email/SMS marketing automation — the indie founder alternative to Klaviyo or Customer.io.

PRICING: PAY-AS-YOU-GO FROM \$20/MO · SCALES WITH SENDS

USE IT FOR

Triggered email flows beyond what a newsletter platform handles — abandoned cart, onboarding sequences, win-back campaigns.

HONEST TAKE

If your product has user actions that should trigger emails (signed up, didn't return, hit a usage limit), you need marketing automation. Bento is built for founders and priced like it. Use it from day one if you have any kind of activation flow.

No. 19

Postiz

Open-source social media scheduler — self-hosted or cloud, supports 10+ platforms.

PRICING: FREE SELF-HOSTED · \$29/MO CLOUD

USE IT FOR

Cross-posting to multiple social platforms (X, LinkedIn, Threads, Instagram, YouTube Shorts, TikTok) from one dashboard.

HONEST TAKE

Buffer used to be the answer here. Postiz is younger, leaner, and open source — and the cloud pricing is good. If you're posting to more than two platforms, this saves real time. If you're only on X and LinkedIn, Typefully alone is enough.

No. 20

SparkLoop

Newsletter cross-promotion network — pay to acquire subscribers from other newsletters; get paid to recommend them.

PRICING: FREE UPSCRIBE WIDGET · \$99+/MO PARTNER NETWORK

USE IT FOR

Growing a newsletter past the first 1,000 subs without spending months on organic. Pay per qualified subscriber.

HONEST TAKE

SparkLoop is the single best paid acquisition channel for newsletters in 2026 — better than Meta ads at the smaller end, better than influencer deals on quality. The CPA averages \$2–4 for US tech audiences. If you're building a newsletter, budget \$300–1,000/month for SparkLoop from month 3 onward.

Sales

For a solo founder running a SaaS product, sales is whatever drives signups. That's some mix of paid ads, cold outreach, and conversion infrastructure.

Six tools cover this.

No. 21

Smartlead

Cold outreach automation — multi-inbox rotation, sequencing, warmup network, deliverability tooling.

PRICING: \$39/MO BASIC · \$94/MO PRO (30K LEADS / 150K EMAILS) · \$174/MO CUSTOM

USE IT FOR

Sending cold email at any meaningful scale without destroying your sender reputation. Mandatory if your GTM includes outbound.

HONEST TAKE

Smartlead, Instantly, and Lemlist all do similar things. Smartlead wins on price-to-feature ratio at the Pro tier — unlimited mailboxes, generous lead caps, the warmup network is real. (Yes, Founderr Pulse uses Smartlead for our investor outreach — and we'd recommend it regardless.)

No. 22

Apollo

B2B contact database (270M+ contacts) plus built-in sequencing — Crunchbase + Outreach in one tool.

PRICING: FREE TIER · \$49/MO BASIC · \$79/MO PROFESSIONAL

USE IT FOR

Finding email addresses for cold outreach targets, plus basic enrichment (LinkedIn URL, title, company stage).

HONEST TAKE

Apollo's data quality is solid for US contacts, weaker internationally. The free tier (60 credits/month) is enough to test the workflow. For active outreach, Basic at \$49/mo is the right tier. Don't pay for Apollo's sequencing — it's worse than Smartlead.

No. 23

Attio

Modern CRM — flexible like Notion, fast like Linear, built for sales workflows.

PRICING: FREE FOR UP TO 3 USERS · \$34/MO PER USER PLUS · \$69/MO PRO

USE IT FOR

Tracking deals, contacts, and pipelines when you've outgrown spreadsheets but find Salesforce/HubSpot overkill.

HONEST TAKE

Attio is the CRM of choice for tech-forward solo founders and small teams in 2026. The flexibility is genuine, not marketing copy. If you're hiring a salesperson someday, they'll appreciate it. If you never will, HubSpot's free tier works too.

No. 24

HubSpot Free Tier

HubSpot's free CRM — unlimited contacts, basic deal tracking, email sequences (limited).

PRICING: FREE FOREVER FOR CORE CRM FEATURES

USE IT FOR

A first CRM when you're not ready to pay for anything. Bring your contacts, log calls, track pipeline.

HONEST TAKE

HubSpot's free tier is genuinely useful and remarkably under-utilized by solo founders. If Attio feels like overkill, this is the alternative. Avoid the paid tiers — they get expensive fast and the value drops at higher tiers.

No. 25

Granola

AI meeting note-taker — joins your calls, transcribes, summarizes, extracts action items.

PRICING: FREE UP TO 25 MEETINGS/MO · \$14/MO PERSONAL · \$18/MO BUSINESS

USE IT FOR

Recording and summarizing every sales call, customer interview, and partner meeting without having to take notes yourself.

HONEST TAKE

Granola beat Fireflies and Otter on UX. The transcripts go directly to a markdown file you can paste into Notion or your CRM. Critical for solo founders running customer development — you can't remember 50 conversations without help.

No. 26

Clay

Lead enrichment and workflow automation — aggregates 100+ data providers into a spreadsheet-like interface.

PRICING: FREE (100 CREDITS) · \$185/MO LAUNCH · \$495/MO GROWTH

USE IT FOR

Building enriched outbound lists when your basic data sources fall short — adding LinkedIn URLs, recent activity, firmographics, AI-generated personalization variables.

HONEST TAKE

Clay is amazing and expensive. For a solo founder under 5,000 enriched contacts/month, Apollo + manual research is more cost-effective. If you're running serious outbound at scale (10,000+ leads/quarter), Clay pays for itself. Otherwise, defer this until traction justifies it.

Operations

This is the category where the wrong stack will quietly kill your productivity. Project management, knowledge management, automation, async communication — the boring stuff that compounds over months.

Seven tools cover the category.

No. 27

Linear

Issue tracking and project management built for speed — keyboard-driven, opinionated, beautiful.

PRICING: FREE UP TO 250 ISSUES · \$8/MO PER USER STANDARD · \$14/MO PER USER PLUS

USE IT FOR

Tracking everything you're working on. Tasks, bugs, features, ideas — Linear handles them with less friction than any alternative.

HONEST TAKE

Linear is the rare productivity tool that actually makes you more productive. Don't use Jira. Don't use Asana. Don't use Trello. Use Linear. The free tier is enough for solo founders for a long time.

No. 28

Notion

Workspace combining docs, databases, project management, and knowledge management.

PRICING: FREE FOR INDIVIDUALS · \$10/MO PLUS · \$15/MO BUSINESS

USE IT FOR

Your second brain. Notes, drafts, customer research, planning docs, internal wiki, customer-facing help center — all of it.

HONEST TAKE

Notion is the only tool in this list that almost every solo founder uses. It's not the fastest at any single thing, but it's good enough at everything. Free tier works indefinitely if you're alone.

No. 29

Zapier

Workflow automation between 6,000+ apps — when X happens in App A, do Y in App B.

PRICING: FREE (100 TASKS/MO) · \$20/MO STARTER · \$49/MO PROFESSIONAL

USE IT FOR

Connecting tools that don't natively talk to each other. Someone signs up → add to Beehiiv + Notion + Slack notification.

HONEST TAKE

Zapier is the duct tape of solo founder stacks. The free tier is meaningfully useful; the paid tiers add up fast if you build complex flows. If you're hitting Zapier's pricing wall, look at n8n.

No. 30

n8n

Open-source Zapier alternative — self-hostable, scriptable, more powerful for complex workflows.

PRICING: FREE SELF-HOSTED · \$20/MO CLOUD STARTER · \$50/MO CLOUD PRO

USE IT FOR

Automation that Zapier can't handle, or automation at a price point Zapier can't match.

HONEST TAKE

n8n's learning curve is steeper than Zapier's. Once you're past it, the flexibility is much higher and the cost is much lower. Use Zapier for the first year; switch to n8n when complexity demands it.

No. 31

1Password

Password manager with team sharing, secure notes, SSH key management.

PRICING: \$3/MO INDIVIDUAL · \$8/MO PER USER TEAMS · \$20/MO PER USER BUSINESS

USE IT FOR

Storing every password, API key, and credential. Sharing access with future contractors without giving them raw passwords.

HONEST TAKE

Not optional. Run a password manager from day one. 1Password, Bitwarden, or Dashlane all work — 1Password has the best UX, Bitwarden is the cheapest, Dashlane is fine. Just pick one and move all your passwords today.

No. 32

Loom

Async video messaging — record your screen + face, share a link instantly.

PRICING: FREE UP TO 25 VIDEOS · \$15/MO BUSINESS · \$24/MO BUSINESS+AI

USE IT FOR

Explaining things in 90 seconds instead of writing a 600-word email. Walkthroughs, demos, customer support, bug reports.

HONEST TAKE

A 90-second Loom replaces a 30-minute meeting half the time. Solo founders especially benefit — sales calls become async, customer support becomes a 2-minute video, complex explanations become watchable instead of readable. Use it more than you think you should.

No. 33

Cal.com

Open-source scheduling — Calendly replacement, self-hostable or cloud.

PRICING: FREE · \$15/MO TEAMS · \$37/MO ORGANIZATIONS

USE IT FOR

Letting people book time without the back-and-forth. Self-host if you want full control; use the cloud tier if you don't.

HONEST TAKE

Cal.com matched Calendly on features by 2024 and now exceeds it on flexibility. The cloud free tier is enough for most solo founders. Switch from Calendly if you're paying them anything.

Finance

The least glamorous category. Also the one where mistakes compound into months of tax pain.

Six tools cover it.

No. 34

Stripe

Payment processing for the internet — accept cards, subscriptions, invoices, international payments.

PRICING: 2.9% + \$0.30 PER TRANSACTION (US); INTERNATIONAL VARIES

USE IT FOR

Anything that involves charging money. There's not really an alternative for SaaS.

HONEST TAKE

Stripe is the default, and the API is genuinely excellent. The fees compound at scale but for solo founders under \$1M ARR, the alternatives (Paddle, LemonSqueezy) win only on specific use cases. Start with Stripe.

No. 35

Mercury

Banking built for startups — checking, savings, treasury, virtual cards, integrations with everything.

PRICING: FREE BANKING; TREASURY YIELD VARIES

USE IT FOR

Your business bank account if you're US-incorporated. Better online experience than every traditional bank.

HONEST TAKE

Mercury is the standard for US startups in 2026. The signup process screens international founders heavily — if you're outside the US, expect friction or rejection. Inside the US, no real alternative.

No. 36

Wise Business

Multi-currency business banking with low FX fees — receive USD, EUR, GBP into local-feeling accounts.

PRICING: FREE ACCOUNT; FX CONVERSION ~0.4%

USE IT FOR

International founders, or US founders dealing with international customers/contractors. Sending and receiving money across currencies.

HONEST TAKE

Wise is the answer for international solo founders who can't get Mercury or who need real multi-currency support. The FX is best-in-class. Limitations: no real "checking account" features for everything you'd want.

No. 37

LemonSqueezy / Paddle

Merchant of record — they handle payment processing, tax compliance, and remittance globally.

PRICING: LEMONSQUEEZY: 5% + \$0.50 · PADDLE: 5% + \$0.50 OR CUSTOM

USE IT FOR

Selling internationally without dealing with VAT/GST/sales tax in 40 countries yourself.

HONEST TAKE

For US-focused SaaS, Stripe is cheaper. For globally distributed customers, the merchant-of-record fee is worth it — they handle tax compliance you'd otherwise need to outsource or learn. Use this if 30%+ of revenue is international.

No. 38

Sequence

Financial automation for startups — connects your bank, Stripe, and accounting tools to automate finance ops.

PRICING: FREE TIER · \$99/MO STARTER · \$299/MO GROWTH

USE IT FOR

Automated invoice payments, expense categorization, financial reporting without manual bookkeeping.

HONEST TAKE

Sequence is genuinely useful once you're past \$10k MRR and have enough transaction volume to need automation. Below that, doing it manually in Mercury + a spreadsheet is fine.

No. 39

Pilot or Bench

Outsourced bookkeeping and tax filing — actual humans plus software.

PRICING: PILOT FROM \$349/MO · BENCH FROM \$299/MO

USE IT FOR

Outsourcing the parts of finance you shouldn't be doing yourself once you're past a certain scale.

HONEST TAKE

As a solo founder, you should not be doing your own books past month 3 of meaningful revenue. The hours you spend reconciling are hours you don't spend on product or growth. Both Pilot and Bench are fine — pick whichever has better integrations with your stack.

Customer Success

Customer support sounds optional until you have customers. It becomes a fire about a week after that.

Five tools cover the category for a solo founder.

No. 40

Plain

Modern, developer-friendly customer support platform — built for B2B SaaS with API and event integration.

PRICING: FREE · \$35/MO PER USER PLUS · CUSTOM ENTERPRISE

USE IT FOR

Handling support tickets when you're past email and want something that doesn't feel like Zendesk from 2008.

HONEST TAKE

Plain is the new standard for B2B SaaS support in 2026. The API-first design is genuinely useful for solo founders who automate. Start with the free tier; upgrade when you have actual ticket volume.

No. 41

Intercom

Live chat and help center, with AI-powered automated answers (Fin).

PRICING: \$39/MO+ STARTER (VARIES HEAVILY BY FEATURES) · FIN AI PER-RESOLUTION PRICING

USE IT FOR

In-product chat support, especially if Fin can answer most of your common questions automatically.

HONEST TAKE

Intercom is the bigger, more expensive option. Fin (their AI resolver) is genuinely good and can offset the cost if you have predictable support questions. Start with Plain unless you specifically need in-product chat.

No. 42

Pylon

Slack-based customer support — your customers reach you in Slack/Teams, you manage from a unified inbox.

PRICING: \$59/MO PER AGENT STARTER · \$99/MO PRO

USE IT FOR

B2B SaaS where customers expect Slack-based support. Especially common for technical products and developer tools.

HONEST TAKE

If your customers are technical, they probably want Slack support, not a ticket portal. Pylon makes that workflow sustainable. Skip if you're B2C.

No. 43

Slack or Discord Communities

Customer/user communities — Slack for B2B, Discord for B2C/creators/developers.

PRICING: FREE AT SMALL SCALE

USE IT FOR

Building a community around your product that handles support peer-to-peer.

HONEST TAKE

Communities are leverage. A solo founder with a 500-person Discord has 500 people answering each other's questions — most of which they'd otherwise route to you. Start one early; tend to it weekly.

No. 44

Notion (as a help center)

Use Notion's public pages feature as a customer-facing help center.

PRICING: FREE

USE IT FOR

Writing help docs without a separate help center tool. Stripe Atlas, Linear, and many other startups use Notion this way.

HONEST TAKE

A separate help center tool (Document360, GitBook) only makes sense past \$50k MRR. Before that, Notion public pages do the job. Your customers don't care what your help docs are hosted on, as long as they answer the question.

Legal & Admin

The most boring category. Get it wrong once and you'll spend three months unwinding it.

Five tools cover it.

No. 45

Stripe Atlas

Delaware C-Corp incorporation as a service — bank account, EIN, founder paperwork, all in one.

PRICING: \$500 ONE-TIME + STATE FEES

USE IT FOR

Incorporating in the US as a non-US founder, or as a US founder who wants the process handled.

HONEST TAKE

Stripe Atlas is the default in 2026 for international founders incorporating in the US. The \$500 is worth not figuring out Delaware paperwork yourself. Avoid if you're already comfortable with US business formation.

No. 46

Clerky

Legal document automation — incorporation, equity grants, SAFE notes, employment agreements.

PRICING: \$99 ONE-TIME FOR INCORPORATION; PAY-PER-DOCUMENT OTHERWISE

USE IT FOR

Founders who want more control over their legal docs than Atlas provides, or who need ongoing legal docs at startup-friendly prices.

HONEST TAKE

Atlas gets you started; Clerky handles everything after. If you're going to raise money, Clerky for the legal docs and Atlas for the formation is the cleanest split.

No. 47

Deel

Global hiring and payroll — hire contractors and employees in 150+ countries without setting up local entities.

PRICING: \$49/MO PER CONTRACTOR · ~\$599/MO PER EMPLOYEE (EOR) · VARIES BY COUNTRY

USE IT FOR

Hiring your first contractor or employee internationally without months of legal setup.

HONEST TAKE

Deel solved the "I want to hire someone in another country" problem completely. The contractor product is cheap and works. The EOR product is expensive but pays for itself in legal/compliance avoided. Alternative: Remote.com, similar pricing.

No. 48

DocuSign

Electronic signatures — for contracts, agreements, anything that needs signatures.

PRICING: \$15/MO PERSONAL · \$25/MO STANDARD · \$40/MO BUSINESS PRO

USE IT FOR

Any contract, employment offer, vendor agreement, or NDA you need to send.

HONEST TAKE

DocuSign is the default; PandaDoc and Dropbox Sign are equivalent at similar pricing. None of these are exciting — pick one, learn its templates, move on.

No. 49

SpotDraft or Ironclad

Contract lifecycle management — templates, automated review, version control, signature.

PRICING: SPOTDRAFT FROM \$799/MO · IRONCLAD ENTERPRISE PRICING

USE IT FOR

Once you're handling more than 5–10 contracts per month and templates in Google Docs aren't scaling.

HONEST TAKE

Solo founders don't need this until \$500k+ ARR. List it here so you know it exists for later — premature CLM is a top-10 way to waste money.

No. 50

Vanta

Compliance automation for SOC 2, ISO 27001, HIPAA, GDPR.

PRICING: FROM \$7,500/YEAR (TYPICALLY \$10–25K/YR)

USE IT FOR

Getting SOC 2 compliant in 3 months instead of 12, once you're selling to enterprises that require it.

HONEST TAKE

Vanta is enterprise-grade and priced accordingly. Solo founders don't need this until they're selling to companies that require SOC 2. When that day comes, Vanta or Drata cuts the timeline from a year to a quarter. Worth every dollar.

Six Ready-to-Run Stacks

You don't need all 50 tools. You need about 12. Here are six pre-assembled stacks for the most common types of solo founder. Pick the one closest to you, install everything in it, and ship.

Stack 1 — The \$200/mo Frugal Stack

For founders who can code, want maximum runway, and don't mind a slightly rougher edge.

Build	Cursor (\$20) + Claude Pro (\$20)
Design	Figma (free) + Once UI (free)
Marketing	Beehiiv (free) + Typefully (free tier)
Sales	HubSpot (free) + Apollo (free tier)
Operations	Linear (free) + Notion (free) + Cal.com (free)
Finance	Stripe + Mercury (free)
Support	Plain (free)
Legal	DocuSign (\$15) + Clerky (pay-per-use)

Monthly: ~\$75 · Plus annual: Stripe Atlas (\$500 one-time)

WHO THIS IS FOR

Bootstrapped founders, side-project builders, anyone who values runway over polish.

This stack runs a real company. You can ship product, take payments, talk to customers, post on social. What you give up: marketing automation, advanced analytics, and time saved on design.

Stack 2 — The \$500/mo Balanced Stack

For founders trading some cash for meaningful productivity gains.

Build	Cursor Pro (\$20) + Claude Max (\$100)
Design	Figma (free) + v0 (\$20) + Galileo (\$19)
Marketing	Beehiiv Scale (\$49) + Typefully (\$13) + Plausible (\$9)
Sales	Smartlead Pro (\$94) + Apollo Basic (\$49)
Ops	Linear + Notion + Zapier (\$20) + 1Password (\$3) + Loom (\$15)
Finance	Stripe + Mercury (free)
Support	Plain (free)
Legal	DocuSign (\$15)

Monthly: ~\$426

WHO THIS IS FOR

Founders past initial validation pushing for growth. Newsletter, content, cold outreach, in-product analytics, all turned on.

This is the stack we'd recommend to most solo founders past month 6. The marketing automation and cold outreach unlock revenue the frugal stack can't.

Stack 3 — The Vibe Coder's Sunday-to-Shipped Stack

For founders who don't write code from scratch but want to ship working products.

Build	Lovable Pro (\$100) + v0 Premium (\$20) + Bolt Pro (\$20)
Design	Figma (free) + Galileo (\$19)
Marketing	Beehiiv (free → Scale at 2,500 subs)
Sales	Tally (free) for waitlist
Operations	Linear (free) + Notion (free)
Finance	Stripe + LemonSqueezy (5%)
Support	Notion (help docs) + Cal.com (free)
Legal	Stripe Atlas (\$500 one-time)

Monthly: ~\$159

WHO THIS IS FOR

Founders who came from product, marketing, sales, or another non-technical background but want to build software.

This stack proves the "one founder, full company" thesis at its purest. You can build, ship, sell, and support without writing a line of code. The trade-off: harder to scale a Lovable app past a few thousand users — but by then you can hire help.

Stack 4 — The Newsletter-First Founder Stack

For founders whose product is the content (or whose product feeds off content).

Build	Framer (\$20) – all you need is a marketing site
Design	Figma (free) + Ideogram (\$20)
Marketing	Beehiiv Scale (\$49) + SparkLoop (\$99) + Typefully (\$13) + Postiz (\$29)
Sales	Stripe (for paid tier)
Operations	Linear (free) + Notion (free) + Cal.com (free)
Finance	Stripe + Mercury (free)
Support	Email + Notion (help docs)
Legal	Stripe Atlas (\$500 one-time)

Monthly: ~\$230

WHO THIS IS FOR

Newsletter operators, content creators monetizing audience, founders whose primary distribution is owned content.

SparkLoop is the highest-leverage line item here. Newsletter operators who don't run paid acquisition get stuck under 5k subs. This stack assumes you're running it correctly.

Stack 5 — The Bootstrapped B2B SaaS Stack

For founders building software for businesses, charging real money, growing methodically.

Build	Cursor Pro (\$20) + Claude Max (\$100)
Design	Figma (free) + Once UI (free)
Marketing	Beehiiv (\$49) + Plausible (\$9) + Bento (\$20)
Sales	Smartlead Pro (\$94) + Apollo (\$49) + Attio Plus (\$34) + Granola (\$14)
Ops	Linear (\$8) + Notion (\$10) + Zapier (\$20) + 1Password (\$3) + Loom (\$15)
Finance	Stripe + Mercury + Sequence (\$99)
Support	Plain (\$35) + Pylon (\$59)
Legal	Stripe Atlas (\$500 one-time) + DocuSign (\$25)

Monthly: ~\$663

WHO THIS IS FOR

Founders past \$10k MRR building B2B SaaS. Outbound sales, CRM, automation, real support infrastructure.

This stack costs real money but every line item pays back. The cold outreach + CRM + meeting notes triad alone often returns its cost in a single closed deal.

Stack 6 — The AI Agent Company Stack

For founders building products that are themselves AI agents — the most 2026-native company shape.

Build	Cursor Pro (\$20) + Claude Max (\$200) + Anthropic API (~\$200)
Design	Figma (free) + v0 (\$20)
Marketing	Beehiiv Scale (\$49) + Typefully (\$13)
Sales	Smartlead Pro (\$94) + Apollo (\$49) + Attio (free)
Operations	Linear + Notion + n8n self-hosted + 1Password (\$3)
Finance	Stripe + Mercury + LemonSqueezy
Support	Plain (free) + Discord community
Legal	Stripe Atlas (\$500 one-time)

Monthly: ~\$648 (plus AI usage)

WHO THIS IS FOR

Founders building products where the core IP is agent orchestration — coding agents, marketing agents, customer service agents, sales agents.

This is what Founderr Pulse covers daily. The AI API spend will dwarf everything else by month 3. Budget for it; pass it through to pricing.

PART 10 — FINALLY

How to actually use this

Three rules that matter more than any specific tool choice.

01

Pick a stack today, change it later.

The biggest mistake solo founders make is spending two weeks evaluating tools when any of the six stacks above would work. Pick the one closest to your situation, sign up for everything in it this afternoon, and start using it tomorrow. Switching costs are real but not catastrophic — most of these tools export your data.

02

Don't add tools you don't actively use.

Every tool in your stack is a tax — a notification you have to dismiss, a tab you have to manage, a subscription you have to remember. If you haven't opened a tool in three weeks, cancel it. The stack you actually use is always smaller than the stack you think you need.

03

The tools don't make the company.

A founder with the perfect stack and no customers is broke. A founder with a Notion doc, a Stripe account, and customers is a real company. The point of this guide isn't to make you a tool collector — it's to remove tool selection as a bottleneck so you can spend your time on the things that actually matter.

WHAT'S NEXT

The newsletter behind this guide

Founderr Pulse is a daily editorial for solo founders and AI builders. We cover the real economics, tools, and decisions of one-person companies — the things that actually moved someone's MRR last week, the stack changes that compounded, the tactics that worked or didn't.

If you found this guide useful, the newsletter will keep being useful — every day, in five minutes or less.

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Hassan

Editor, Founderr Pulse

This guide is updated quarterly. Pricing accurate as of Q2 2026; verify before committing.

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