THE
Operator Economy

OPERATOR BLUEPRINT №003

The Boring-Automation Agency Blueprint

N8N	MAKE	CLAUDE	CLIENT'S	AIRTABLE	OUT
$0 SELF-HOSTED / ~$20–50 CLOUD	FREE / CORE $9 / PRO $16	USAGE-BASED, CENTS PER RUN	$0 TO YOU	$0–20/MO	$2K

THE STACK · ≤ $100/MO

BLUEPRINT №003	REV A	DATE 2026-07-27
SOURCES 01	DIFFICULTY Med	SECTIONS 06

01 The idea

Small companies run on tools that were never built to talk to each other: a CRM, an invoicing tool, a web form, a spreadsheet, a Slack channel. You build the workflows that move data between them, using n8n or Make, with an AI node in the middle to handle anything messy (an email, a free-text form) that used to need a human to interpret. You price it as a build fee plus a monthly retainer to keep it running.

This is not a coding project and not a SaaS. It is a service business with recurring revenue, and the barrier to entry is low because the tools became drag-and-drop. The barrier that stays high is that most people find this work too dull to bother with. That's the moat.

It's for operators who understand a specific industry's manual busywork: ex-ops people, ex-agency people, anyone who has watched a team lose hours a week to copy-pasting data between systems. You don't need to be an engineer. You need to know one workflow in one industry well enough to automate it and explain the before/after in plain terms.

02

The evidence

$5B → $2K

The same boring job at two scales: Zapier's valuation, and a solo operator's first build.

CLAIM	NUMBER	SOURCE	CONFIDENCE
Zapier scale on tiny capital	~$310M ARR, ~$5B valuation, on ~$1.4M raised	getLatka / Sacra (market aggregators)	REPORTED aggregator data
n8n venture traction	$180M Series C at $2.5B valuation (2025); ~$40M ARR; 10x usage YoY; 3,000+ enterprise customers (Vodafone, Microsoft)	Ventureburn, TechCrunch, Sacra	● HIGH
Make Integromat	500,000+ users; Core from $9/mo; acquired by Celonis 2020	Zapier blog, G2	REPORTED
iPaaS market size	~$14–23B in 2026, 20%+ CAGR	Precedence, Fortune Business Insights	MEDIUM analyst estimate, wide spread
Solo agency setup fees	$1,500–5,000 simple / $6,000–15,000 complex	Agency how-to guides (LearnForge, Arsum, n8nitro)	LOW vendor-adjacent, unaudited
Solo agency retainers	$500–5,000/mo per client	Same guides	LOW reported, unaudited
Two-client combined income	~$7,000–12,000/mo	Arsum, taskip, Digital Identity Architects	LOW reported, unaudited
Verified solo case study at scale	—	Research honesty note	STATED explicitly as a gap

03 The stack

≤ $100/MO TOTAL

TOOL	ROLE	MONTHLY COST
n8n	Automation engine you own; self-host or cloud; the agency standard because you own your workflows outright	`$0 self-hosted / ~$20–50 cloud`
Make (Integromat)	Visual automation, no server required; friendlier if you never want to touch infrastructure	`Free / Core $9 / Pro $16`
Claude or GPT (workflow node)	The AI step: reads messy input (an email, a form field) and outputs clean structured data	`Usage-based, cents per run`
Client's existing apps (CRM, forms, invoicing, Slack)	The systems you're wiring together; the client already owns and pays for these	`$0 to you`
Airtable / Google Sheets	Staging and logging layer between systems	`$0–20/mo`

SOURCE: PUBLIC VENDOR LIST PRICING · JUL 2026

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04 The playbook

05 The honest math

$2,000–$6,000/month

OUR ESTIMATE

RANGE + RISKS

×1 **Platform risk** You're building on someone else's tool. n8n or Make can change pricing, usage limits, or terms; an app you connect to can break its integration overnight. Mitigate by owning your workflows where possible and never letting a client's entire system hang on one fragile link.

×2 **Commoditization** The simplest automations are getting easy enough that clients will eventually build them without you. The durable work is the messy, judgment-heavy integrations (payroll, reconciliation, order-to-fulfillment), not the two-step ones. Nobody wants to build those alone, and that's exactly why they stay durable.

×3 **Distribution** The tools got easy; finding clients did not. Your pipeline still runs on trust and word of mouth, and no workflow automates that. This is the real bottleneck, not the build. **Open question:** does this stay a bespoke solo retainer practice, or do the best operators productize the same five workflows and sell them a hundred times? Both are viable. They are different businesses.

06 # Sources

[01] - Zapier ARR/valuation/capital efficiency — getLatka, Sacra (reported) - n8n Series C, ARR, customer count — Ventureburn, TechCrunch, Sacra (verified/reported) - Make/Integromat acquisition, users, pricing — Zapier blog, G2 (reported) - iPaaS market size — Precedence Research, Fortune Business Insights, Business Research Insights (analyst estimates) - Solo agency pricing bands — LearnForge, Arsum, n8nitro, taskip, Digital Identity Architects (reported, vendor-adjacent, unaudited)

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