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The Canvas After Code Got Cheap

n8n, low-code workflow automation, and where the value moves when an AI writes the integration in an afternoon

David Soden

Independent analyst and practitioner, enterprise automation and applied AI

davidsoden.com/market-assessment

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About this report

Every substantive claim in this report carries an evidence classification and, where applicable, a numbered source. Facts are separated from vendor claims, third-party estimates, the author's assessments, and untested hypotheses. Forward-looking sections use scenarios with observable tripwires rather than point forecasts. Stated assumptions are listed before the analysis begins.

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Scope and evidentiary standard

This assessment covers visual workflow automation platforms, with n8n as the reference vendor, and the specific question of whether that product shape still holds value now that a general-purpose coding agent can write, test and deploy an integration in a single sitting. Zapier, Make, Microsoft Copilot Studio, OpenAI's Agent Builder and the serverless runtimes from Cloudflare and AWS appear where they bound the argument. Robotic process automation, iPaaS in the Boomi and MuleSoft sense, and internal-tool builders such as Retool are adjacent and are not assessed.

Published numbers in this category need discounting for three specific reasons. Private company revenue is self-reported when it is reported at all, and n8n has not disclosed ARR; every revenue figure below that is not a published price comes from a data broker reconstructing it. Market sizing forecasts for low-code and for agentic AI are quoted interchangeably in vendor decks despite measuring different things over different periods. And practitioner sentiment in this category is gathered from self-selected forums, which over-represent people with a strong opinion and under-represent the majority who quietly keep paying.

One access limitation shapes the practitioner evidence and is stated up front rather than buried. Reddit was requested as a sentiment source and was not reachable by the research tooling used here; its crawler is blocked at the domain. Practitioner signal below therefore comes from Hacker News discussions, n8n's own community forum, and vendor-published review aggregates. All three are self-selected and are labeled as such. Anyone reading this who can pull r/n8n and r/automation directly should do so, and should treat any conclusion here that rests on practitioner sentiment as provisional until they have.

Prices are quoted in the currency the vendor publishes them in. n8n lists in euros and Cloudflare in dollars. No conversion is applied, because the gaps discussed are three orders of magnitude wide and no plausible exchange rate changes the reading.

Label	Definition	How to treat it
FACT	Verifiable in the cited primary source: a filing, press release, official documentation, or standards body announcement.	Reliable as stated. Check the source if the exact wording matters.
VENDOR CLAIM	Reported by a vendor about its own business or product. Self-measured and not audited by any third party.	The vendor said it. Directionally useful, not a measurement. Definitions of the metric are usually undisclosed.
THIRD-PARTY ESTIMATE	A research firm forecast or survey result. Methodology is proprietary and generally not reproducible.	Use for direction and order of magnitude only. Do not build a model on it.
ASSESSMENT	The author’s reasoned judgment from the cited evidence. Falsifiable, and the reasoning is shown so it can be argued with.	This is analysis, not reporting. Disagree with it where your evidence differs.
HYPOTHESIS	A proposition offered for testing. Not currently supported by sufficient evidence to assert.	Treat as a research question, not a conclusion. Each one names what would confirm or refute it.
SCENARIO	A structured future state with a stated subjective probability. The probability is the author’s judgment, not a calculated figure.	Use the leading indicators attached to each, not the probability. The indicators are observable; the probability is not.

Assumptions this analysis rests on

Four premises are assumed rather than demonstrated. Each is stated with what fails if it turns out wrong.

First, that coding agent capability at the level shipped in the first half of 2026 persists and does not regress. If model providers raise prices sharply or capability plateaus below the level needed to write a working integration unsupervised, the pressure on the authoring step eases and most of the argument about value moving to the runtime weakens.

Second, that n8n's revenue is concentrated in Cloud and Enterprise subscriptions rather than in services, marketplace, or the SAP arrangement. If the SAP commercial agreement is a large fixed licensing stream rather than usage-linked, the pricing exposure described here is materially smaller and the recommendations about repricing become less urgent.

Third, that execution volume and willingness to pay per execution move in opposite directions as agents generate more workflows. This is the load-bearing assumption behind the pricing argument. If buyers accept per-run pricing at agent-generated volumes, n8n's current model scales with the market instead of against it and the recommendation to reprice is wrong.

Fourth, that the buyers who matter commercially are organisations with compliance obligations, not individual builders. If the growth is actually in solo operators and small agencies, the governance features that justify the upper tiers are worth less than assumed and the competitive threat comes from below rather than from coding agents.

The call

ASSESSMENT n8n is not being disrupted out of existence. It is being disrupted out of the build step. Drawing the workflow was the product, and an external coding agent now does that faster, better and for free. What survives is the runtime: credentials, retries, scheduling, replay, audit, and the operational burden nobody wants to own. That is a real business and a durable one, but it is smaller and more price-exposed than a 5.2 billion dollar mark implies, and it is currently priced per execution, which is exactly backwards for a world where an agent generates the executions. I would abandon this position if n8n's paid seat growth outran its execution growth for two consecutive quarters.

My judgment on the evidence assembled here, nothing more. There is data I can't see and data I may have missed. New evidence can move me, including to the opposite position, and I reserve the right to move.

Executive summary

The question put to this analysis was whether visual workflow automation still earns its rent in 2026, when a Lambda function, a Cloudflare Worker or an Azure Function written by an AI is fast to build, cheap to run and no harder to maintain. The answer is that the rent is real but it is being collected on the wrong meter, and the vendor most exposed to that mismatch is the one growing fastest.

FINDING 1 **The authoring advantage is gone and n8n's own documentation says so.**

> **FACT** n8n ships an instance-level MCP server that lets Claude, ChatGPT, Claude Code, Codex, Cursor, Windsurf, Gemini CLI and others build, edit and run workflows inside a customer's n8n instance from outside it. The company's documentation frames this as describing the workflow you want in your favourite AI tool. That is an explicit concession that the canvas is no longer where the work happens. [5]

FINDING 2 **The strategic move behind MCP is defensible, not cynical.**

> **ASSESSMENT** The obvious reading is that low-code vendors bolt on MCP so an external AI has to route through their platform, preserving a subscription that no longer earns itself. That reading is right about the motive and wrong about the outcome. Exposing the runtime to any agent is the correct response to losing the authoring step, because it converts the platform from a place you work into a place your agent deploys to. The problem is not the move. The problem is the meter attached to it.

FINDING 3 n8n's per-execution price rises as you move up market, which inverts normal volume economics.

FACT At published list prices, Starter costs roughly 0.80 euro cents per workflow run, Pro roughly 0.50, and Business roughly 1.67. The higher tier is more than three times the price per run of the tier below it. That is not a throughput ladder, it is a governance ladder wearing a throughput ladder's clothes. [1]

FINDING 4 Against serverless, the list price gap is not a premium, it is a different category of number.

FACT Ten thousand workflow runs cost 50 euros on n8n Pro. Ten thousand ten-step workflows on Cloudflare Workflows fall inside the 500,000 steps included in a 5 dollar per month Workers Paid plan, with marginal steps beyond that priced at 0.80 dollars per hundred thousand. n8n is selling the catalogue, the credential store and the operations, not the compute, and that is a fair thing to sell. It is not a fair thing to price by the run. [1] [7]

FINDING 5 Code got cheaper to write and measurably harder to keep.

FACT GitClear's analysis of 623 million changes from 2023 to 2026 found code block duplication up 81 percent, within-commit copy and paste up 41 percent, error-masking constructs up 47 percent, and refactoring line moves down 70 percent. Long-term maintenance of code older than a year fell 74 percent. The write step got cheap. The keep step did not, and it is now being skipped. [8]

FINDING 6 The strongest practitioner evidence against low-code is a single well-upvoted anecdote, and it should be treated as such.

ASSESSMENT The most cited data point in the developer argument is a Hacker News comment reporting that a 120,000 dollar per year low-code platform was replaced by AI-assisted coding and that it works well. It drew 304 points. It is one unverified account from an anonymous engineer at an unnamed company about an unnamed platform. It is directionally consistent with everything else here, and it establishes nothing on its own. Reports that cite it as evidence of a trend are doing something this one will not. [10]

FINDING 7 Visual agent builders are being retired by the companies best placed to fund them.

FACT OpenAI notified developers on 4 June 2026 that Agent Builder, the visual canvas launched at DevDay in late 2025, will be unavailable from 30 November 2026, directing users to the Agents SDK for code and to Workspace Agents for prompting. A visual canvas backed by the largest balance sheet in the category lasted about thirteen months. [12]

FINDING 8 n8n's own public position concedes the developer segment rather than contesting it.

VENDOR CLAIM An April 2026 post on the n8n blog argues that coding agents are for coders and that no responsible non-developer knowledge worker in an organisation will write custom applications. That is a coherent segmentation. It is also a bet that the boundary between developer and non-developer holds, and n8n's own community forum contains non-developers describing how they use ChatGPT to build their n8n workflows for them. [3] [16]

FINDING 9 **The SAP arrangement is distribution, and distribution is not a moat.**

> **ASSESSMENT** SAP's investment at a 5.2 billion dollar valuation, and the plan to embed n8n's canvas inside Joule Studio, gives n8n reach into accounts it could not have reached alone. It also makes n8n a component inside another vendor's agent story, in a product SAP controls the pricing and packaging of. Component suppliers capture less of the value they create than platforms do, and they are easier to replace than the valuation implies. [2]

FINDING 10 **The community edition is the churn signal that will not appear in any dashboard.**

> **ASSESSMENT** Self-hosted community users generate no telemetry n8n monetises and no cancellation event when they stop building. A heavy community user who still runs every workflow they built, and has quietly stopped building new ones, looks identical in n8n's data to a healthy one. If the authoring step is where the loss is happening, that is precisely where it will hide. [6]

What the category actually is now

Treating workflow automation as one market is what makes the disruption argument sound either obviously right or obviously wrong depending on who is making it. It is three markets that share a canvas.

ASSESSMENT The first is glue for people who will never write code, and it is a genuine market that coding agents have not taken. A revenue operations analyst who needs a Slack alert when a deal stage changes is not going to open a terminal, and the fact that an agent could write that integration in ninety seconds does not help her, because she cannot review it, deploy it or fix it at 2am. Zapier has owned this market for a decade and n8n competes in it only awkwardly, because n8n assumes fluency with JSON, HTTP semantics and expression syntax that this buyer does not have.

ASSESSMENT The second is the developer's convenience layer, and this is the one under active attack. A backend engineer who used n8n because wiring six APIs together by hand was tedious now has an agent that finds the tedium cheaper than opening the canvas. This buyer was never paying for the visual metaphor, they were paying to skip boilerplate, and boilerplate is precisely what got commoditised. This is the segment the author's own usage pattern sits in, and it is the segment where new-build volume decays first while existing workflows keep running.

ASSESSMENT The third is the governed runtime for an organisation that has to answer for what ran. This buyer wants a place where credentials live under rotation, where a failed run can be replayed with its exact input, where an approval step exists, and where an auditor can be shown a list. Nothing about a coding agent addresses this, and everything about a coding agent makes it more urgent, because the volume of things running unattended just went up. This is where n8n's durable business is, and it is the segment its per-execution pricing serves worst.

ASSESSMENT The three segments are drifting apart rather than converging, and a platform that tries to hold all three ends up with pricing that suits none of them. The commercial question for n8n is not which competitor wins. It is which of its own three markets it is actually building for, because the product decisions those segments imply now point in different directions.

The money, and what it proves

FACT On 12 May 2026 n8n announced a strategic investment from SAP and a multi-year commercial agreement to embed its workflow automation platform natively inside Joule Studio, SAP's agent-building environment. The announcement put n8n's valuation at 5.2 billion dollars, more than double the 2.5 billion dollar mark set less than a year earlier, and stated 1,400 or more enterprise customers and 1.7 million monthly active developers and builders. [2]

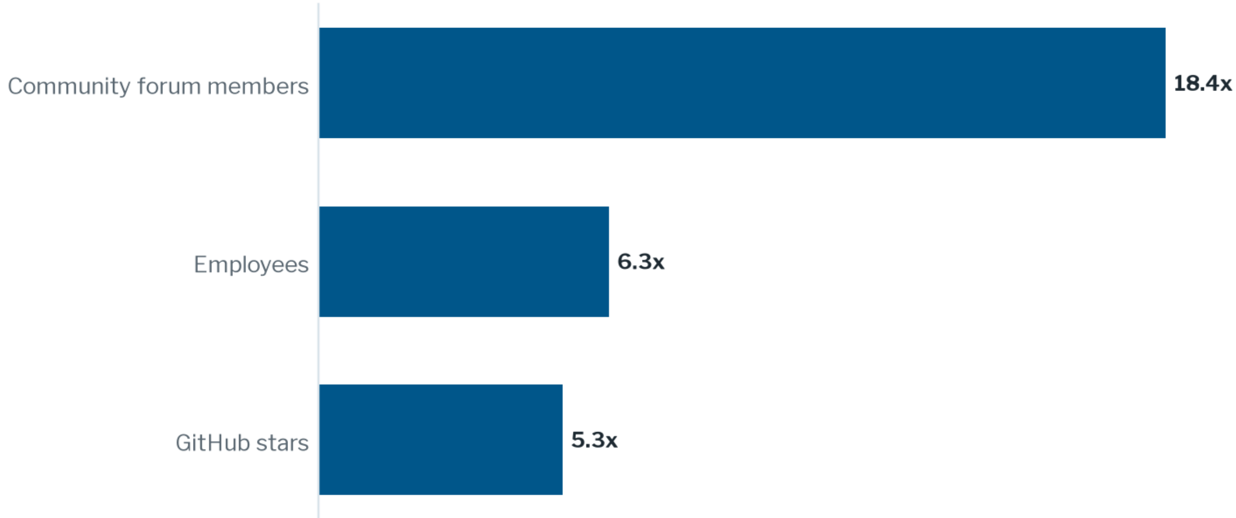
VENDOR CLAIM The customer and user counts in that release are company-stated and unaudited, and the two are not comparable measures. Monthly active developers and builders counts anyone touching an instance, including community edition users who pay nothing and are, by the terms of the licence, not billable. Reading 1.7 million as a commercial base would be a mistake. Reading 1,400 enterprise customers as the commercial base gives roughly 3.7 million dollars of valuation per enterprise account, which is a demanding number. [2] [6]

THIRD-PARTY ESTIMATE n8n has not disclosed revenue. Data brokers reconstruct it: Sacra estimated roughly 40 million dollars ARR in July 2025, and secondary write-ups circulating after the SAP announcement put it near 100 million dollars. Neither figure is company-confirmed. At the higher of the two, the May 2026 valuation implies something in the region of 52 times revenue. At the lower, it implies far more. The honest reading is that the multiple is unknown and that the range of defensible estimates spans a factor of two and a half on the denominator alone. [18]

ASSESSMENT Growth stated as a doubling of valuation tells you what investors believed on one day about one company's future, and nothing at all about revenue, retention or gross margin. It is the least informative number in this report and the one most likely to be quoted. A valuation set in a private round with a strategic investor who is simultaneously signing a commercial agreement is particularly weak evidence about standalone market value, because part of what SAP bought is the deal, not the equity.

THIRD-PARTY ESTIMATE The market forecasts circulating around this category deserve the same suspicion. Gartner's low-code development technologies forecast is widely quoted as reaching 58.2 billion dollars by 2029 at a compound rate of 14.1 percent, and Gartner separately predicted that 40 percent of enterprise applications would carry task-specific AI agents by the end of 2026, up from under 5 percent. Those two measure different things over different horizons and are routinely set beside each other in vendor decks as though they described one market. The second is also partly a prediction about a definition, since what counts as a task-specific agent is decided by whoever is doing the counting, and the counting is done by people with an interest in the answer. [14] [15]

FIGURE 1 **n8n's stated growth between version 1.0 and 2.0**



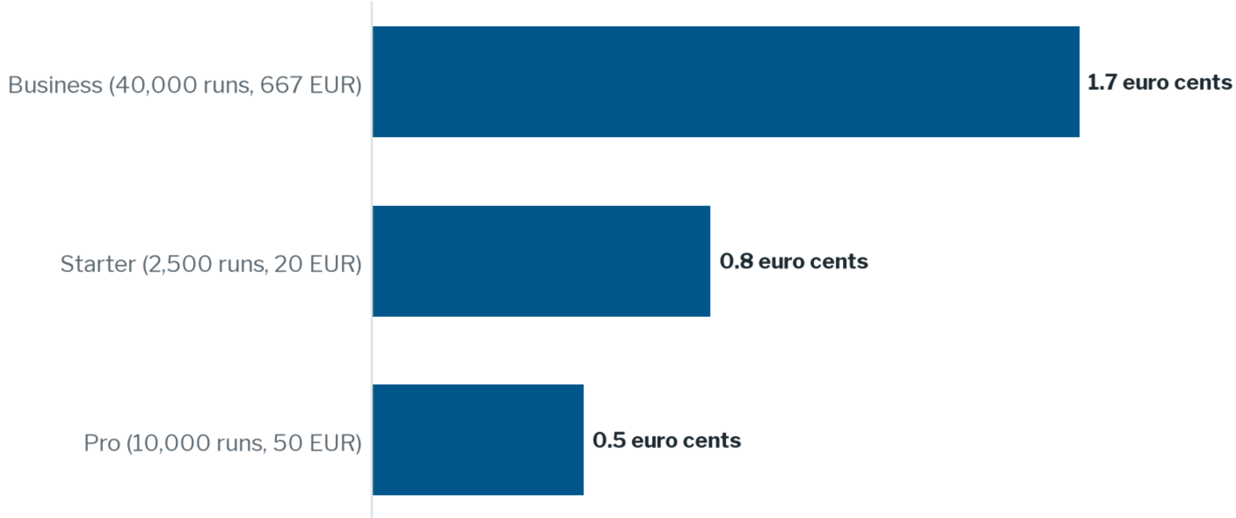
VENDOR CLAIM Growth multiples computed from counts n8n published itself in its 2.0 announcement, comparing July 2023 to December 2025. Forum members went from 6,267 to 115,192, employees from about 30 to 190 or more, GitHub stars from about 30,000 to more than 160,000. None are audited. The employee count is also the one most directly contradicted elsewhere: at least one third-party workforce tracker puts n8n near 923 people for the same period, a gap wide enough that at least one of the two is measuring something other than employees. [4] [22]

The unit economics of a canvas

Pricing is where the strategic problem becomes arithmetic, so it is worth doing the arithmetic rather than describing it.

FACT n8n's published pricing defines an execution as a single run of an entire workflow, charged once regardless of how many steps it contains, and includes unlimited users, unlimited workflows and every integration on all paid tiers. Starter is 20 euros a month billed annually for 2,500 executions and 5 concurrent runs. Pro is 50 euros for 10,000 executions and 20 concurrent runs. Business is 667 euros for 40,000 executions. Enterprise is quoted on request and lists 200 or more concurrent executions. [1]

FIGURE 2 n8n list price per workflow run, by tier



FACT Computed directly from n8n's published annual-billing list prices, dividing monthly price by included monthly executions. Overage rates and negotiated enterprise discounts are not published and are excluded, so real paid rates on the upper tiers will differ. The shape, not the absolute value, is the finding. [1]

ASSESSMENT A normal volume ladder gets cheaper per unit as you climb it. This one gets more expensive: Business costs 3.3 times as much per run as Pro. That is not a pricing error, it is a disclosure. The upper tiers are not selling throughput, they are selling single sign-on, environments, secret store integration, log streaming and retention, and the execution allowance is a proxy for company size rather than a resource being metered. Everyone involved knows this, which is why the meter survives. It survives badly.

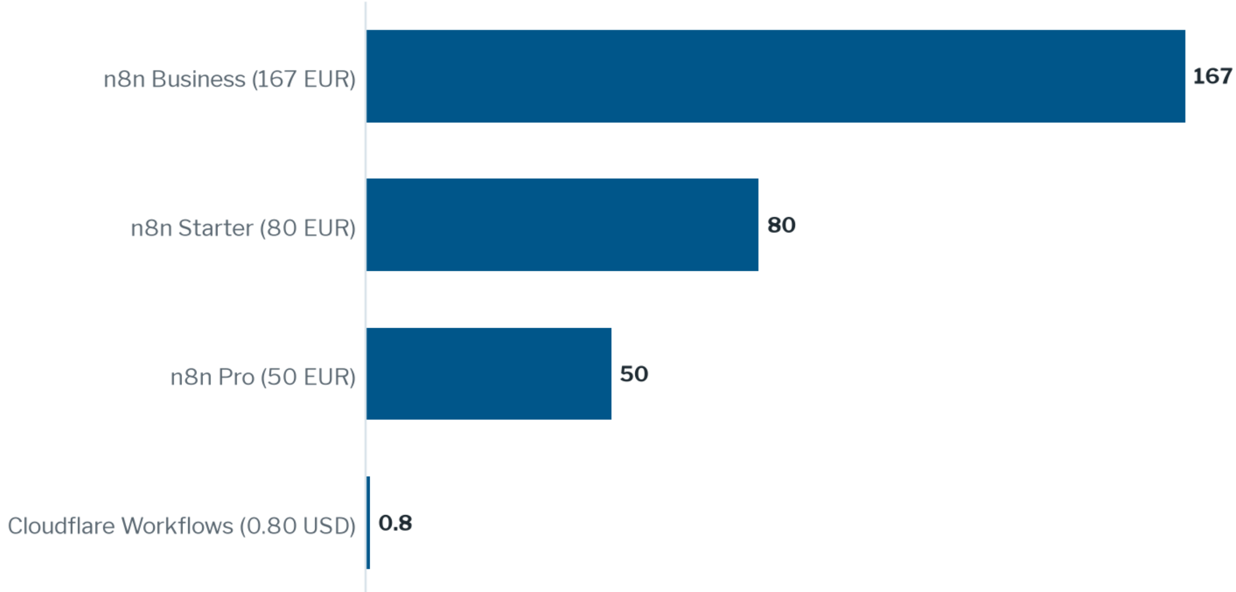
ASSESSMENT The meter breaks the moment an agent starts generating workflows, because the two variables move apart. Agent-authored automation raises run counts by an order of magnitude while lowering the perceived value of any individual run to near zero, since the thing that used to justify the price, an engineer's afternoon, is no longer being spent. A customer whose executions rise tenfold does not experience a tenfold increase in value received. They experience a bill.

The serverless comparison, done honestly

FACT Cloudflare's Workers Paid plan starts at 5 dollars a month and includes 10 million requests and 30 million CPU milliseconds, with additional requests at 0.30 dollars per million. Workflows, its durable execution engine, includes 500,000 steps per month on that plan with additional steps at 0.80 dollars per hundred thousand, plus 1GB of state storage. Workflows reached general availability with checkpointed steps, step-level retries and human approval gates that pause without consuming compute. [7] [24]

FACT Cloudflare extended that engine in May 2026 with dynamic workflows, which allow workflow definitions to be created at runtime per tenant and per agent rather than deployed ahead of time, on a rearchitected control plane supporting higher concurrency and creation rates. That is precisely the capability an agent-generated automation world requires, and it shipped on infrastructure metered by the request. [20]

FIGURE 3 **List price for 10,000 workflow runs a month**



FACT n8n figures are list price scaled to a common 10,000 runs; Starter requires four allowances to reach that volume. The Cloudflare figure is the marginal step cost of 10,000 ten-step workflows beyond the 500,000 steps already included in a 5 dollar Workers Paid plan. Euros and dollars are not converted; at a three-orders-of-magnitude gap no rate matters. The bar for Cloudflare is not missing, it is 0.80 and invisible at this scale, which is the point. This compares metered price only. It excludes the integration catalogue, the credential store, the editor and the operational labour, all of which n8n supplies and the serverless line does not. [1] [7]

ASSESSMENT The chart is not an argument that n8n should cost 80 cents. It is an argument that n8n should stop denominating its price in the unit where it is beaten by four orders of magnitude, because every customer who does this arithmetic reaches the same conclusion, and agent-assisted customers do the arithmetic more often. The defensible price is on the governed surface: how many credentials are under management, how many environments, how many people hold approval rights, how long execution history is retained. Those are the things a serverless function does not give you and cannot be conjured by a coding agent in an afternoon.

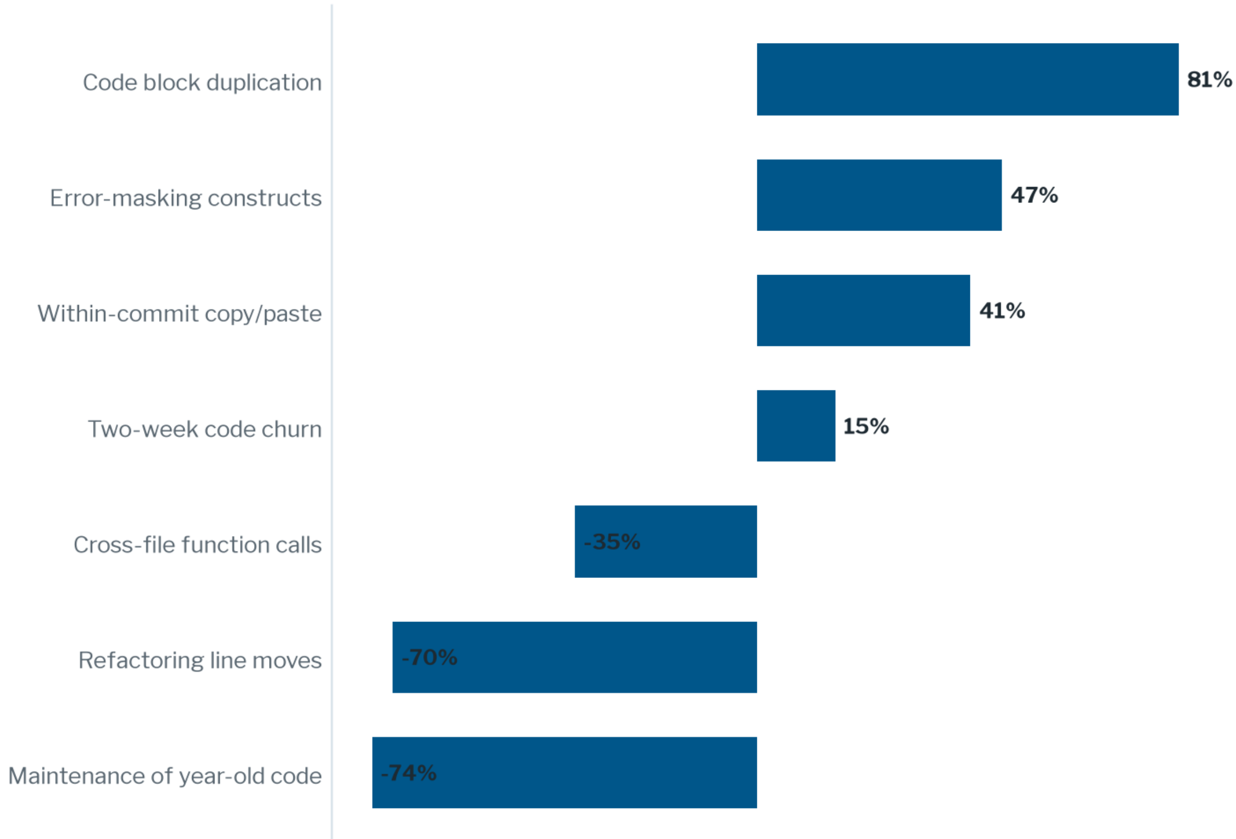
HYPOTHESIS If n8n moved to a governed-surface price with executions effectively unmetered, net revenue retention would rise rather than fall, because the customers who currently ration executions would stop rationing and would connect more systems, and connected systems are the thing that is genuinely hard to leave. This is testable inside the company today against existing tier-migration and overage data, and it should be tested before it is argued about. It would be refuted if the customers on execution overages turn out to be concentrated in a small number of high-volume accounts rather than spread across the base.

How much did code actually get cheaper

The disruption case rests on a claim about maintenance, not about speed: that an AI-written function is now as easy to keep as a drawn workflow. Speed is not in dispute. Maintenance is, and the evidence on it is worse than the enthusiasts allow and worse than the sceptics predicted.

FACT GitClear's January 2026 study analysed 623 million changes across 2023 to 2026 and tracked eight quality signals. Code block duplication rose from 40.3 to 73.0 per million changed lines, an increase of 81 percent. Copy and paste within a single commit rose from 9.4 percent of new code in 2022 to 15.7 percent in the first half of 2026. Properly moved, refactored code fell from 21 percent to 3.8 percent over the same window. Cross-file function calls fell 35 percent, from 343 to 223 per thousand changed lines. Changes touching code older than twelve months fell 74 percent, from 1.7 percent in 2023 to 0.46 percent so far in 2026. [8]

FIGURE 4 **Code quality signals in the agent era, change since 2022 to 2023 baseline**



FACT GitClear, January 2026, from 623 million analysed changes. Baselines differ by signal, 2022 for some and 2023 for others, so the bars are not strictly comparable to each other. The measures are correlational: they show what changed alongside agent adoption, not that agents caused it. The direction is consistent across all eight signals, which is the reason to take it seriously. [8]

ASSESSMENT Read the negative bars, not the positive ones. Duplication rising is unsurprising and mostly survivable. Maintenance of year-old code falling by three quarters is neither. It says the industry is producing artifacts it does not go back to, and an integration between two vendor APIs is exactly the artifact that must be gone back to, because the vendors will change the API whether anyone is watching or not. The generated Lambda function is cheap to write and cheap to abandon, and abandonment is not a cost that shows up until an endpoint deprecates.

FACT Anthropic's own January 2026 assessment of where agentic coding stands reports that around 60 percent of developer work now involves AI usage but that only 0 to 20 percent of tasks can be fully delegated. That is a vendor characterising the limits of its own product, which makes it the most credible number in this section and the one that most constrains the disruption thesis. [13]

THIRD-PARTY ESTIMATE The independent practitioner read converges on a similar place. A widely discussed February 2026 analysis argued for roughly 2x productivity from LLM-assisted coding rather than 10x, reasoning from the observation that coding is about a quarter of software work and planning, testing and review are the rest. Both the article and the comment thread beneath it are self-selected practitioner opinion, not measurement, and the comments split predictably between people reporting new work that would never have been attempted and people reporting review standards quietly dropping. Treat it as a sanity check on the 10x claims, not as a finding. [11]

ASSESSMENT The practitioner argument about low-code specifically splits three ways and has barely moved in six months. An essay titled RIP Low-Code 2014-2025 drew 157 comments on Hacker News, and the top-voted reply argued the opposite case: that low-code tools date back to the 1980s and the likely outcome is convergence, with models generating low-code rather than raw code. A third position, argued among others by the founder of a low-code vendor commenting under his own company's name, held that agents help low-code because the hard part was always teaching a disinterested human someone else's vocabulary. None of it is measurement. Its value is as evidence that the people closest to the question do not agree, which is reason enough to distrust confident claims in either direction, including the ones in this report. [9]

ASSESSMENT The synthesis matters more than either camp. Code got roughly twice as fast to write and appreciably worse at being maintained, and those two effects do not cancel. They separate: the value of writing collapsed and the value of a place that keeps things running went up. That is bad news for anyone selling authoring and good news for anyone selling a runtime, which is a more precise statement of n8n's position than either side of the argument usually manages.

The MCP question

The suspicion is worth stating plainly because it is the sharpest version of the bear case: low-code vendors added MCP servers so that an external AI has to route through their platform, which preserves a subscription the platform no longer earns on its own merits. If a third-party model does the thinking and a third-party model does the building, paying a platform to sit in the middle looks like rent for the sake of rent.

FACT n8n's documentation describes its built-in MCP server as a way to describe the workflow you want in your favourite AI tool, and names Claude, ChatGPT, Claude Code, Codex, Gemini CLI, Cursor, VS Code, Windsurf, Lovable and Google ADK agents as clients. It supports creating workflows, editing them from version 2.13 onward, building data tables, searching, running and iterating. n8n also ships an MCP Server Trigger node that turns a workflow into a tool an external client can call, and an MCP Client node that consumes external servers. [5] [17]

ASSESSMENT The motive reading is correct and the conclusion drawn from it is not. n8n did build this because the authoring step was slipping away, and admitting that is the healthiest thing in the company's recent product history. But an MCP server that lets any agent write into your runtime is not a toll booth, it is the opposite: it removes the requirement to use n8n's editor, which was the last piece of genuine lock-in the product had. A vendor defending rent does not hand the keys to a competitor's coding agent. A vendor repositioning from editor to runtime does exactly that.

ASSESSMENT Where the rent objection lands is on price, not architecture. If the agent writes it and n8n runs it, then n8n is being paid to run it, and being paid per run is a defensible model only when running is the scarce thing. It is not scarce. Durable execution is available from Cloudflare, from AWS Step Functions, from Temporal, from Inngest, and the marginal cost of a step is small fractions of a cent. What is scarce is a governed place with a thousand maintained connectors, rotated credentials and an audit trail. Charge for the scarce thing and the arrangement stops looking like rent. Keep charging by the run and the objection is not paranoia, it is arithmetic.

THIRD-PARTY ESTIMATE On whether MCP itself is durable, the evidence points in two directions and the disagreement is instructive. Third-party trackers report Fortune 500 MCP implementation near 28 percent within eighteen months and 41 percent of surveyed software organisations running MCP servers in limited or broad production, with new tool integrations shipping MCP first. Those figures come from commercially interested measurement firms and should not be leaned on. Against them, an April 2026 post on n8n's own blog characterises MCP as having risen fast and then fizzled. When a platform's own commentary is more bearish on a protocol than the protocol's boosters, the useful inference is not about MCP, it is that n8n does not appear to have decided internally whether MCP is a strategic bet or a checkbox. [3] [19]

ASSESSMENT The user-facing test is simple and anyone can run it. If n8n's MCP server is still in public preview a year after launch, unbilled and unmentioned in the pricing page, it was a checkbox. If it becomes a named tier with its own limits and its own SLA, it was a bet. As of this writing the pricing page does not mention it. [1] [5]

What decides purchases now

The published comparisons in this category rank platforms on connector counts and feature checklists. Those are not what closes or loses deals, and the gap between the checklist and the decision is where most of the commercial risk sits.

ASSESSMENT What decides an enterprise purchase is who is accountable when an unattended workflow does something expensive at three in the morning. A platform with a replayable execution log, credential rotation and an approval gate answers that question. A repository of agent-written functions deployed by whoever asked for them does not, and the person who has to sign the attestation knows it. This is the single strongest thing n8n sells and it is nearly absent from how n8n prices and markets itself.

ASSESSMENT What decides a developer's individual choice is whether the tool survives contact with version control and code review. Workflow JSON can be exported and committed, and n8n has enterprise Git integration for moving published flows between environments, but the community around the product has built at least four separate third-party bridges to GitHub, which is the reliable signal that the native answer is not sufficient. A category where users keep rebuilding the same missing feature is telling the vendor what to build. [4]

ASSESSMENT What does not decide purchases, despite dominating the comparison content, is the number of integrations. Past a few hundred, the marginal connector matters only if it is the one you need, and the one you need is increasingly something an agent can write against an OpenAPI spec in minutes. Integration count was a moat when writing a connector was a week of work. It is a catalogue now, and catalogues are defended by maintenance, not by size.

ASSESSMENT Ranked by how often each ends a purchase rather than by how loudly it is complained about, the failure modes run: cost unpredictability at scale first, because a bill that moves with volume is a bill finance will not approve; then operational ownership of the self-hosted deployment, which is the hidden cost that converts free into expensive; then debugging opacity when a run fails inside a node; then the data-structure literacy the product assumes, which is the one most complained about and the least commercially damaging, because the people it stops were never going to be the buyer.

Competitive position

The competitor set that matters is not the one in the comparison articles. Zapier and Make are the named rivals and are the least dangerous, because they share n8n's exposure. The dangerous entrants are the ones that do not look like automation platforms at all.

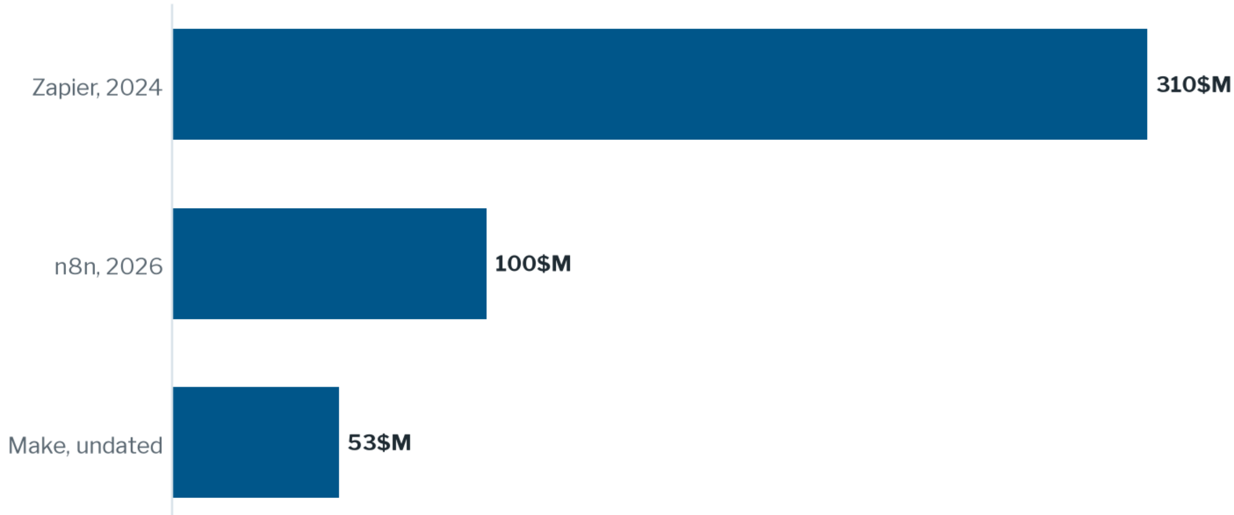
Player	Where it wins	Principal constraint	What would break its position
n8n	Self-hostable runtime with a large connector catalogue and real developer escape hatches; the only credible open-core option at enterprise scale	Per-execution pricing that fights its own growth; assumes technical literacy the non-developer segment lacks	Buyers repricing automation as infrastructure and refusing per-run meters
Zapier	The non-developer segment coding agents have not taken; profitable since 2014 and distribution nobody else has	Highest price per unit of work in the category; nothing to sell the developer segment	Any general assistant that can act on a user's SaaS accounts directly
Make, inside Celonis	Process-mining pull-through into large accounts already buying Celonis	Strategic subordinate to a process-mining business with different priorities	Celonis deciding automation is a feature of process intelligence rather than a product
Microsoft Copilot Studio	Default for anyone governed through Entra, Teams and Dataverse; the governance argument arrives pre-won	Weak outside the Microsoft estate; agent quality tracks Microsoft's own model access	Nothing near-term; this is the structural competitor
Cloudflare, AWS, Temporal, Inngest	Durable execution at four orders of magnitude lower unit cost, with retries, checkpoints and approval gates as primitives	No connector catalogue, no credential UI, no non-developer story at all	Any of them shipping a maintained connector catalogue and a credential manager
Coding agents directly	Authoring; they have already won this and it is not close	No runtime, no credential custody, no audit surface, no accountability	A model vendor shipping a hosted, governed execution surface of its own

ASSESSMENT The row that should worry n8n is the fifth. Cloudflare, AWS and Temporal are missing only the things that are expensive but not hard: a connector catalogue and a credential manager with a decent interface. n8n is missing the thing that is genuinely hard to build and impossible to buy: infrastructure-grade unit economics on a network someone else already paid for. Between the two gaps, the one that closes faster is the catalogue, and agent-assisted development is what closes it.

FACT The counter-evidence to the death-of-the-canvas thesis is that the best-funded canvas already died. OpenAI told developers on 4 June 2026 that Agent Builder, launched at DevDay in late 2025, would be gone by 30 November 2026, directing them to the Agents SDK for anything that should stay code and to Workspace Agents in ChatGPT for anything better served by prompting. Developer reaction in the announcement thread ran to frustration at the speed of the reversal, with migration discussion settling on Lambda and Cloudflare Workers. [12]

ASSESSMENT That deprecation reads two ways and both are true. It removes a competitor with unmatched distribution, which is good for n8n in the short run. It also demonstrates that the company with the best view of what agents can do concluded that a visual canvas sits in the dead zone between an SDK and a prompt. n8n's answer to that has to be that its canvas is not an authoring metaphor but a representation of a running system, which is a defensible answer and one the product does not currently make.

FIGURE 5 **Reported annual revenue of automation platforms, mixed vintages**



THIRD-PARTY ESTIMATE This chart should not be used to rank these companies and is included to show why. None of the figures is audited or company-confirmed. They come from three different data brokers, cover at least two different years, and the n8n figure is a secondary write-up of an undisclosed number. A two-year gap in a category growing this fast is larger than the gaps between the bars. It is reproduced here because these numbers circulate as if they were comparable, and the comparison is the error. [18] [21]

The community edition problem

FACT n8n is not open source in the OSI sense. It ships under the Sustainable Use License, a fair-code licence permitting use and modification for internal business purposes, personal use and non-commercial purposes, and prohibiting embedding n8n in a commercial product or reselling it as a service without a commercial agreement. Commercial consulting and workflow-building services are explicitly permitted. Code in directories marked as enterprise features sits outside the community licence entirely. [6]

ASSESSMENT The licence is well drafted and does the job it was written for, which was preventing a hyperscaler from reselling n8n. It does nothing about the failure mode that actually matters now. The community edition's commercial function is to convert technically capable users into paying ones over time, and that conversion depends on the user continuing to build. If new-build volume in the developer segment decays because a coding agent absorbed it, the funnel dries at the top with no observable event: no cancellation, no downgrade, no support ticket, no reduction in running executions. The workflows already built keep running perfectly. That is the shape of the risk and it is invisible by construction.

HYPOTHESIS New workflow creation per active community instance is falling year on year among users who have been on the platform more than twelve months, even where total execution volume is flat or rising. n8n can test this today from anonymised telemetry on self-hosted instances that check for updates, and from the ratio of new workflow IDs to active workflow IDs on Cloud. It would be refuted if creation rates hold steady and the composition of new workflows simply shifts toward AI-node-containing flows. This is the single highest-value measurement available to the company and it is worth more than any market forecast in this report.

ASSESSMENT The strategically correct response is not to restrict the community edition. Restricting it converts a quiet funnel problem into a loud community one, and n8n's 115,000-member forum and 160,000 GitHub stars are worth more than the marginal conversions a restriction would force. The response is to make the community edition the place where the governance features are demonstrated rather than withheld, so that the buying trigger is an organisation crossing an accountability threshold rather than crossing an execution count. [4]

What n8n should do

The brief behind this assessment asked directly whether n8n should build proprietary AI as good as a frontier coding agent and charge an uplift for it. That is the right instinct pointed at the wrong target, and it is worth separating carefully, because the difference between building the model and building the agent is the difference between a strategy and a bonfire.

Do not build a frontier coding model. Build the agent on someone else's.

ASSESSMENT n8n has raised roughly 493 million dollars in total. Secondary estimates put a single competing coding product's annualised run-rate at around 2.5 billion dollars, on top of a foundation model business measured in tens of billions. Those numbers are second-hand and should not be trusted to the digit, but they are not wrong by the order of magnitude that would be required for a frontier-model programme to be a rational use of n8n's balance sheet. Attempting it would consume the company. [23]

ASSESSMENT The agent layer is a different proposition and it is both affordable and necessary. n8n has three assets no model vendor has: a formal workflow graph with known-valid node types, a catalogue of more than a thousand maintained integrations with their real authentication quirks, and, uniquely, execution telemetry showing which generated workflows actually ran to completion and which failed at which node. That last one is a verification signal, and verification is the scarce commodity in agent-generated anything. A first-party builder that generates a workflow, runs it against real credentials in a sandbox, reads the failure, and fixes it before showing the user is a product no external coding agent can match, because the external agent cannot see the run.

ASSESSMENT Charge for that on the verified deploy, not on tokens. Token margin is a race to zero against the suppliers, and any uplift denominated in model usage will be arbitraged away by customers who bring their own key. An uplift denominated in successfully deployed, tested and monitored automations is denominated in the outcome, which is what the customer wanted to buy in the first place.

Reprice on the governed surface and stop metering runs

ASSESSMENT Move the meter to connected credentials under management, environments, seats holding approval or publish rights, and execution history retention. Make executions effectively unmetered. This is defensible against the serverless comparison in a way per-run pricing is not, it grows with the customer's dependence rather than with their traffic, and it stops punishing the exact behaviour n8n wants, which is connecting more systems. The risk is a revenue dip through the transition as high-volume, low-governance accounts reprice downward, and that dip is the price of not being compared to 0.80 dollars per ten thousand runs for the next five years.

Make the MCP server a product with a price on it

ASSESSMENT It is currently the most strategically significant thing n8n ships and it is a preview feature that the pricing page does not mention. If external agents write into n8n instances at scale, n8n becomes the default deployment target for agent-authored automation, which is a far larger position than being an editor. That requires it to be supported, rate-limited, billed and sold, and it requires n8n to be comfortable that most of its users will never open the canvas again. The company's public commentary suggests it is not yet comfortable with that. [1] [3] [5]

Sell the maintenance gap, with the numbers

ASSESSMENT The strongest commercial argument available to n8n in 2026 is not ease of use, it is that generated code is being written and not maintained, at measurable rates, while a workflow graph is inspectable, diffable, replayable and survives the person who made it. GitClear's data makes that case better than any marketing n8n has produced. Publishing an honest study of how agent-generated n8n workflows fare against agent-generated code on the same integration task, including the cases where the code wins, would do more for the company's position with technical buyers than another connector announcement. [8]

Treat the SAP arrangement as a clock, not a moat

ASSESSMENT Embedding inside Joule Studio buys reach into accounts n8n could not reach and simultaneously trains those accounts to think of n8n as a canvas inside SAP rather than as a platform. SAP controls the packaging, the pricing and the renewal conversation there. The value of the arrangement is the time it buys to establish the direct governed-runtime business, and that window closes when SAP's own agent tooling matures or when the commercial agreement comes up for renegotiation from a weaker position. [2]

Pick the segment

ASSESSMENT The developer convenience segment is going and should be allowed to go, retained through the MCP server rather than through the editor. The non-developer glue segment is defensible but is Zapier's home ground and requires a product that stops assuming

JSON literacy, which is a different product. The governed runtime is where the durable money is and where every structural force in this report points. Trying to hold all three produces the pricing table this report opened by criticising, and the cost of not choosing is paid in exactly that form.

Scenarios to mid-2028

Point forecasts do not survive in a category where the best-funded product in the segment shipped and was deprecated inside thirteen months. What follows is four structured futures with subjective probabilities. The probabilities are the least reliable content in this document. The earliest visible signs are the most useful, because anyone can watch them without private information.

SCENARIO A Runtime consolidation 40 percent

n8n repositions on governed execution, reprices away from per-run metering, and the MCP server becomes the primary way workflows arrive. The editor persists as an inspection and approval surface rather than an authoring one.

Consequence. Revenue growth decouples from execution growth; gross margin improves; the developer segment stops churning because it stops needing to open the product.

Earliest visible sign. A pricing page that meters credentials, environments or seats rather than executions, and an MCP tier with published limits.

SCENARIO B Component capture 30 percent

The SAP arrangement and similar embeds become the dominant channel. n8n's technology reaches far more users while its direct commercial relationship with them weakens, and packaging decisions move to partners.

Consequence. Reported user counts keep rising while net revenue retention on direct accounts flattens; the brand becomes a feature name inside other products.

Earliest visible sign. A second major embed deal on similar terms, or n8n marketing that leads with partner logos rather than with its own product.

SCENARIO C Infrastructure encroachment 20 percent

Cloudflare, AWS or a Temporal-class vendor ships a maintained connector catalogue and a credential manager on top of durable execution, at infrastructure unit cost. The technical mid-market leaves for the cheaper runtime.

Consequence. n8n's self-hosted and Pro-tier segments erode from below while enterprise holds; the category splits permanently into governed and cheap.

Earliest visible sign. Any hyperscaler announcing a first-party connector marketplace with managed OAuth, or acquiring a connector catalogue outright.

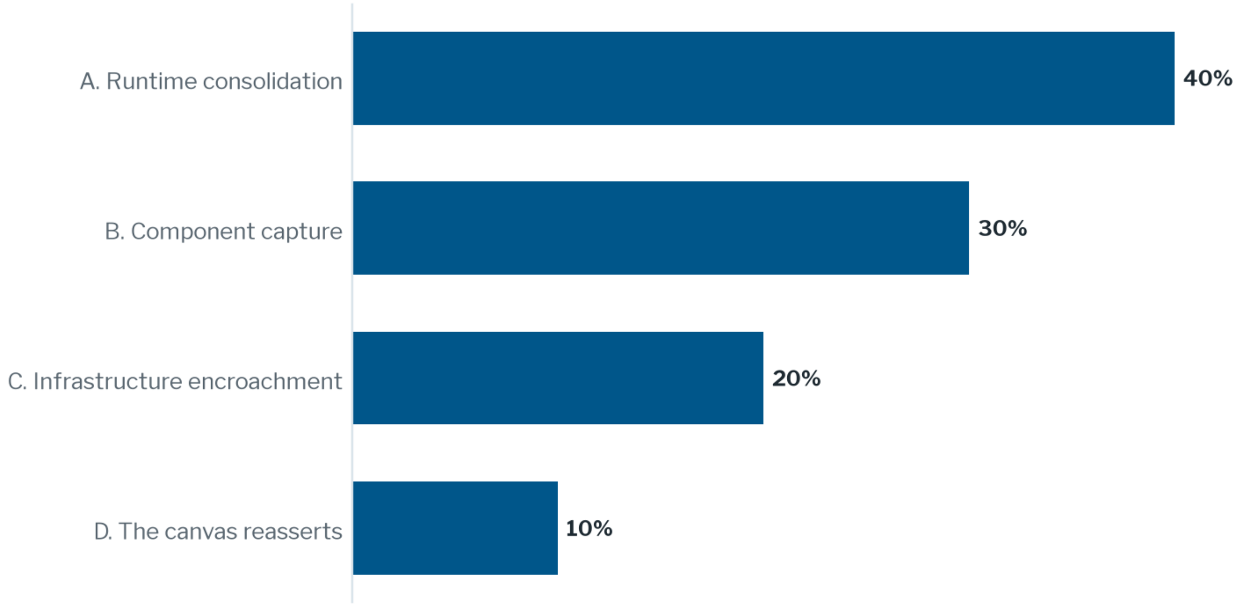
SCENARIO D The canvas reasserts 10 percent

Agent-generated code proves unmaintainable enough at scale that enterprises mandate inspectable, replayable automation formats, and visual workflow representation becomes a compliance requirement rather than a convenience.

Consequence. Per-execution pricing survives because the alternative is prohibited; n8n's current model works and the repricing argument in this report is wrong.

Earliest visible sign. An auditor, regulator or major insurer naming reviewable automation artifacts in a published control framework.

FIGURE 6 **Subjective probabilities to mid-2028**



SCENARIO The author's subjective probabilities, summing to 100 percent. These are judgments, not measurements, and they are the weakest content in this report. The scenarios are not fully exclusive: A and B can occur together and probably would. Use the earliest visible signs listed with each scenario instead of the numbers.

Leading indicators

Everything in this table is observable from outside the company. None of it requires a briefing, a subscription or a source.

If this happens	It means	Moves toward	Where to watch
n8n's pricing page stops leading with execution counts	The repricing argument has been won internally	Scenario A	n8n.io/pricing

If this happens	It means	Moves toward	Where to watch
The MCP server exits preview with published limits and a tier	Runtime positioning is a bet, not a checkbox	Scenario A	n8n docs and pricing page
n8n ships a first-party builder that runs and repairs its own output	The verification asset is being used	Scenario A	n8n release notes and blog
Cloudflare or AWS announces a managed connector catalogue with OAuth	The last gap in the infrastructure offer closes	Scenario C	Cloudflare blog, AWS re:Invent
A second SAP-shaped embed deal is announced	Channel is becoming the business	Scenario B	n8n press releases
A named control framework requires reviewable automation artifacts	Inspectability becomes a purchase requirement	Scenario D	SOC 2 criteria updates, ISO drafts, insurer questionnaires
GitClear's 2027 data shows maintenance signals recovering	The maintenance gap was transitional	Weakens A and D	gitclear.com research
n8n discloses ARR alongside a raise or a listing	The valuation multiple becomes checkable	Any	Company announcements

Implications

For buyers

ASSESSMENT Buy the runtime, not the editor, and negotiate accordingly. If the workflows will be authored by an agent, the execution allowance is the wrong thing to be negotiating and the retention period, the credential handling and the replay capability are the right ones. For anything genuinely high-volume and low-governance, the serverless arithmetic is not close and should be run before renewal rather than after. For anything an auditor will ask about, it is not close in the other direction, and the price difference is cheap relative to one incident.

ASSESSMENT The community edition remains excellent value and the licence permits internal business use without payment, which covers most organisations' actual situation. The cost that catches people is operational: patching, backups, scaling and the person who owns all three. Price that person in before calling it free. [6]

For investors

ASSESSMENT The diligence question is not growth, it is the ratio between seat growth and execution growth, and whether net revenue retention is being produced by customers connecting more systems or by customers exceeding execution allowances. Those two look identical in a revenue chart and mean opposite things about durability. Ask for the split. A refusal to provide it is itself informative.

ASSESSMENT The 5.2 billion dollar mark was set by a strategic investor concluding a commercial agreement at the same time, which makes it weak evidence of standalone value in either direction. Treat the multiple as unknown until revenue is disclosed rather than reconstructing it from broker estimates, and note that the two circulating ARR figures differ by a factor of two and a half.

For vendors in this category

ASSESSMENT The instinct to add an MCP server is right and the instinct to keep the old meter attached to it is what will do the damage. Any platform whose price is denominated in a unit that a hyperscaler sells for a thousandth as much is running a countdown, and the countdown runs faster now because customers have an assistant that will do the comparison unprompted. Move the meter to whatever your customer cannot get from a coding agent and a cloud account: custody, accountability, continuity, and the maintenance of things that break when someone else changes an API.

ASSESSMENT The segmentation n8n published in April 2026, that coding agents are for coders and non-developers will not write custom applications, is being tested every day inside n8n's own community forum, where non-developers describe using an external chatbot to build their workflows for them. The line between developer and non-developer is not disappearing, but it is moving, and a strategy that assumes it stays where it is assumes the one thing this category has never done. [3] [16]

What this document cannot answer

These questions decide the argument and none of them can be settled from outside the company. They are the ones worth commissioning primary research on.

What n8n's revenue actually is, and how it splits between Cloud, Enterprise self-hosted licences, and the SAP commercial agreement. Every revenue figure in this report is a third-party reconstruction and the two circulating estimates differ by more than the gap between n8n and its nearest listed comparator.

Whether execution overage revenue is spread across the customer base or concentrated in a handful of accounts. The entire repricing argument turns on this and it is a single query inside n8n's billing system.

Whether new workflow creation per active instance is falling among users older than twelve months. This is the direct measurement of the thesis and it is available to n8n and to nobody else.

How agent-authored n8n workflows perform against agent-authored code on the same integration task, measured over twelve months of API drift rather than at the moment of creation. Nobody has published this and it would settle the maintenance argument for the whole category.

What the r/n8n and r/automation communities are actually saying. This was requested and could not be gathered here because the platform blocks the crawler used. Anyone with direct access should treat that as an open item rather than assuming the Hacker News reading transfers; the populations are different and Hacker News over-represents the developer segment that has the strongest reason to declare low-code dead.

The commercial terms of the SAP arrangement, including whether n8n is paid per SAP seat, per execution, or as a fixed licence, and how long the exclusivity runs. This determines whether scenario B is a growth channel or a slow acquisition.

Half-life of this assessment

Decays within six months: every price quoted here, the preview status of the MCP server, the aftermath of the OpenAI Agent Builder shutdown on 30 November 2026, and the specific competitive claims about which vendor ships what. Pricing pages in this category changed more than once in the past year and the per-run figures should be re-derived before being quoted.

Decays within twelve months: the valuation and every multiple derived from it, the revenue estimates, n8n's headcount, and the assessment of where the SAP arrangement sits between distribution and capture. The scenario probabilities should be re-scored at twelve months against the leading indicators rather than carried forward.

Decays within twenty-four months: the competitive table, particularly the fifth row. If a hyperscaler ships a managed connector catalogue, that row and the conclusions resting on it are void. The GitClear maintenance findings also sit here, because they measure a transition and transitions end.

Architectural, and unlikely to decay: the separation of authoring from running, and the fact that value accrues to whichever one is scarce. The observation that generated artifacts are cheap to create and expensive to keep. The mismatch between a per-unit meter and a unit whose production cost has collapsed. These outlive the specific vendors named here and are the parts of this document worth reading in 2029.

Limitations

This assessment was produced independently. The author holds no position in any company named, has no commercial relationship with n8n, SAP, Cloudflare, Zapier, Celonis, Microsoft, OpenAI or Anthropic, and was not commissioned by any of them. The author is a long-standing user of n8n's community edition and states that plainly, because it shapes the reading: the segment described here as decaying is the segment the author sits in, and a sample of one is a sample of one.

The evidence base has four specific weaknesses. Reddit, the largest venue for the practitioner sentiment this assessment was asked to characterise, was not reachable by the research tooling used, so the practitioner reading rests on Hacker News, n8n's own forum, and vendor-hosted review aggregates, all self-selected and none representative. No customer interviews were conducted, so the section on what decides purchases is reasoned from published evidence and the author's own practice rather than from primary buyer research. Every private company revenue figure is a broker reconstruction, and one of them was reported to this analysis in two versions differing by a factor of two and a half. And the headcount figures for n8n conflict between the company's own statement and a third-party workforce tracker by roughly a factor of five, which is disclosed above rather than resolved, because it cannot be resolved from public sources.

The pricing comparisons use published list prices only. Enterprise pricing in this category is negotiated and unpublished, and the real rate a large customer pays for n8n may differ substantially from the Business tier arithmetic used here. The comparison against Cloudflare deliberately excludes the connector catalogue, credential management, editor and operational labour that n8n supplies and a serverless runtime does not; it is a comparison of metered units, not of total cost of ownership, and treating it as the latter would be a misuse of it.

The GitClear findings are correlational. They show what happened to code quality signals during the period of agent adoption and do not establish that agents caused the change. Confounders including hiring composition, interest rates, and the shift toward greenfield AI projects are not controlled for in the published methodology available.

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