

Zapier-style DIY automation vs custom-built

Where the \$30-a-month connector is plenty, and where a built system starts earning its price

DIY connectors (Zapier, Make)

You wire it yourself: one trigger, an action or two, no code

Typical cost at small business volume	\$20–\$100 / month
Time to a working automation	~20 minutes
Who builds and maintains it	You (or your office manager)
When it breaks	Stops silently
Pricing as you grow	Per task, climbs with volume

Right answer when **The workflow fits in one sentence**

GENUINELY ENOUGH FOR

- Website form → CRM → text alert
- Paid invoice → spreadsheet row
- Five-star review → Facebook post
- Any A-to-B handoff with no judgment in the middle

Start here if you're starting from zero. The pain you feel later tells you exactly what's worth building properly.

Custom-built automation

Designed, built, and monitored for how your business runs

Typical cost for a focused build	Low thousands, one-time
Ongoing	Small monthly for hosting + upkeep
Who builds and maintains it	The people you hired to
When it breaks	Someone's alerted that day
Pricing as you grow	Flat, volume doesn't punish you

Right answer when **The workflow reads, decides, or replies**

WHAT THE PRICE BUYS

- AI in the middle: sorts emergencies from price-shoppers
- One planned system, not fifteen mystery zaps
- Monitoring, so failures are loud instead of silent
- Stop rules and human handoffs built in

Worth it when a missed run costs a job, not when it costs a spreadsheet update.

The three walls DIY setups hit as you grow

Judgment

Connectors move data; they can't read a customer's reply and treat "ceiling is leaking" differently than "just wondering about pricing."

Silent failure

A renamed field or expired login stops a zap without an error. Leads leak for weeks and it looks like a slow month.

Sprawl

Two years in: fifteen zaps, half built by someone who left, named "New Zap 3 copy," and everyone's afraid to touch them.