

The Tools I Use

The exact stack behind everything I build — what each tool does, what it's for, and roughly what it costs a month.

This is the whole stack. Nothing here is theoretical — it's what runs my live sites and tools right now. Prices are rough monthly figures; most of this starts free.

The Frameworks

Astro is the website framework. Static-first, so pages load fast. I use it for content sites and this site itself. You get server-side routes when you need them, but the default is pre-rendered HTML. Cost: free.

Next.js is the app framework for anything interactive — SaaS tools, user dashboards, anything with real state. Full React, serverless API routes, middleware. Cost: free.

Hosting and Deploys

Vercel hosts everything. Push to GitHub, it deploys. Serverless functions run automatically. Cron jobs, edge middleware, preview URLs on every pull request — it's all there. Cost: free Hobby tier; ~\$20/mo on Pro when you need team access or more compute.

Database and Auth

Supabase is Postgres in the cloud plus auth. I use the magic-link login (email someone a one-time link, no password needed) and store all user data, content, and logs here. Cost: free tier; ~\$25/mo Pro when you pass the row/storage caps or need daily backups.

Prisma is the database toolkit. Write your schema in one file, run a migration, and get fully typed database access in your app. It's not a separate service — it sits between your app and your database. Cost: free.

Payments

Stripe takes money. Checkout sessions, subscription management, webhooks when payment status changes — it handles all of it. You don't pay a monthly fee; Stripe takes 2.9% + 30¢ per transaction.

Email

Resend handles both transactional email (magic links, receipts, download links) and broadcast newsletters. One API, one dashboard. Cost: free tier; ~\$20/mo when your list or sending volume outgrows it.

AI

Anthropic Claude is the AI model behind everything I build that involves generation, analysis, or scoring. You send it text, it sends back an answer. The cost scales with how much text you process — a few pennies to a few dollars per run depending on the task.

Turnkey Auth (Clerk)

Clerk is a drop-in authentication service — sign-in UI, session management, user management — fully handled. I reach for it when I don't want to wire up Supabase auth by hand and just need something that works out of the box. Cost: free tier; ~\$25/mo on paid when you need more monthly active users.

Data and Infrastructure

Apify runs web scrapers (called “actors”) in the cloud. I use it when a tool needs live data that isn't available via an API — for example, pulling public data from TikTok. Cost: free tier exists but is very limited; the ~\$49/mo Starter plan is the practical entry point for any real workload.

Upstash Redis is a serverless cache and queue. I use it mainly for deduplication (making sure the same job doesn't run twice) and rate limiting. It's serverless, so you pay per request, not per hour. Cost: free tier; stays small for most workloads.

Sentry catches errors in production. When something breaks, I get a notification with a full stack trace. Without it, you find out about bugs when a user emails you. Cost: free tier; small when you exceed it.

The Dev Environment

Claude Code is how I actually build all of this. It's an AI-powered development environment — I describe what I want, it writes and edits code, runs tests, and manages files. Every repo above was built with it. Cost: it draws from the same Anthropic API budget as the Claude row above (per-token) if you use it lightly, or you can move to a flat monthly plan once usage climbs.

Type and Design

Google Fonts — specifically Fraunces (display headings) and EB Garamond (body text) — is what makes the type on my sites look the way they do. Free.

Canva covers quick graphics: social images, presentation slides, simple one-pagers when I don't need to code a layout. Cost: ~\$15/mo (or ~\$10/mo billed annually).

Domain and DNS

Cloudflare manages DNS for my domains and adds a free CDN layer. Registering a domain runs about \$12/year depending on the extension. Cloudflare itself is free for the basics.

Free vs. Scale

The near-free path

You can run this entire stack on free tiers when you're starting. Astro and Next.js are open source — free. Vercel's Hobby tier is free. Supabase's free tier handles a serious amount of data. Stripe has no monthly fee, just per-transaction. Resend's free tier covers a few thousand emails a month. Google Fonts is free. AI runs a few cents to a few dollars per use.

Realistic first-month bill: around \$0 plus a domain (~\$12/year) and whatever AI calls you make (a few dollars at most while you're testing).

The catch: free tiers have limits. You'll be fine until you have real traffic, real users, or real volume — and that's exactly when you should upgrade.

When you're scaling — what to pay for first, in order

1. **Vercel Pro (~\$20/mo)** — when you hit the Hobby compute limits, need team members on the project, or need more build minutes.
2. **Supabase Pro (~\$25/mo)** — when you pass the free row or storage caps, or when you need automated daily backups (you will want these).
3. **Resend paid (~\$20/mo)** — when your subscriber count or monthly send volume exceeds the free tier.
4. **Your AI spend** — this scales with usage automatically. Set a monthly budget cap in your Anthropic account. Don't let it run unchecked.
5. **Everything else** (Sentry, Upstash, Clerk, Apify) — only when you have a specific need that the free tier can't cover. Don't pre-buy.

The point: don't pay for tiers in advance. Upgrade when usage forces it.

Cost Snapshot

Line item	Starting out (near \$0)	Scaling
Hosting (Vercel)	Free	~\$20/mo
Database (Supabase)	Free	~\$25/mo
Email (Resend)	Free	~\$20/mo
Payments (Stripe)	Free (2.9% + 30¢/txn)	Same (no monthly)
AI (Claude + Claude Code)	Pennies per run; free/low to start on API credits	Scales with volume — set a cap; or move to a flat monthly plan
Domain + DNS	~\$12/yr + free	Same

If you want the walkthrough of how these fit together to actually ship something, that's what the Workshop is for.

KEEP GOING

Pick one step. Do it today. Ship the thing — then build the next one.

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The Creator Platform Playbook

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The AI Tool (Micro-SaaS) Playbook

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— *Paul*

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