

# N8N Junction: When You Need It

Week 5: The Map // Automation Engine

## THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENS

The N8N Junction is the automation engine of the Goblin Cave. It's where things happen while you're asleep, on a walk, recording a video, eating your lunch, or just living your life.

*"The room where it happens — without you asking."*

Every five minutes, RJ's infrastructure check workflow runs. It pings every service she runs — is this alive, is this alive, is this alive? If something goes down, she finds out before her clients do. That workflow runs completely on its own. She never touches it. It just works.

She didn't write it. She described what she needed. Claude built a first version. They refined it. Eventually it was exactly right.

This is what N8N is for.

## WHAT AN EXECUTION IS

This is the question that confuses people coming from Zapier, Pabbly, or Make.com, because those platforms charge in confusing, hard-to-predict ways.

**In N8N:** one complete workflow run = one execution. That's it.

A 30-step workflow that fires once: **1 execution.**

A 3-step workflow that fires 2,000 times: **2,000 executions.**

It doesn't matter how many nodes are inside. It doesn't matter how many API calls are made. It doesn't matter how long the workflow takes to run. The moment a workflow starts and finishes: that's one execution.

This makes it much easier to predict what you'll use and what you'll pay.

## PRICING

Cloud (Hosted by N8N)

N8N hosts the software for you. No setup. No maintenance. They keep it running.

Plan	Price	Executions
Starter	~\$20/month	2,500
Pro	~\$50/month	10,000
Enterprise	Custom	50,000+

All plans include unlimited steps per workflow, unlimited workflows, and access to all node types.

**For most people starting out: the Starter plan at \$20/month is plenty.** If you're running a simple store with occasional automations and a few chatbots, 2,500 executions per month is more than you'll use.

Annual pricing is available — check their site for current rates, as they update periodically.

## Self-Hosted

You install N8N on your own server (or pay someone else to host the server). N8N provides the Community Edition for free. You pay only for the hosting.

**Cost:** typically \$20-25/month for a basic VPS (Virtual Private Server).

**Executions:** unlimited. All of them. Forever.

**Who it's for:** people who hit the upper limits of the cloud plans, or who need the cost efficiency of unlimited executions.

*"I can do over 50,000 executions a month. And it's cool. I don't have to go higher up in price."*

One-click installation is available through many hosting providers — same concept as installing WordPress through a host. You pick the option, it installs itself, and the hosting provider handles server maintenance, uptime, and security.

RJ is currently migrating off Hostinger (after a 7-hour outage) and investigating Vultr and Azure. She'll share where she lands.

## The Zapier Comparison

*"If you've got stuff on Zapier — try this: tell Claude 'I've got some stuff on Zapier, I want to transfer it somewhere else.' It will say, okay, where do you want to put that?"*

Zapier charges per "zap step" and the math gets complicated fast. N8N does not. Same functionality, more predictable pricing, more flexibility.

If you're on Zapier, ask Claude to help you migrate. It's a supported conversion.

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## WHEN YOU NEED N8N

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You do NOT need N8N for everything. If you're building widgets and deploying pages, you might not need it at all right now.

#### You need N8N when:

- You want something to happen automatically on a schedule (daily reports, weekly emails, infrastructure checks)
- You need to process information without being present (match records, compare data, run calculations)
- You're building a chatbot that needs to respond to questions on its own
- You need an AI to read, analyze, and act on information without you triggering it manually
- You need to connect two services that don't talk to each other natively

#### You probably don't need N8N yet if:

- You're only doing things with Claude directly
- You're building and deploying pages
- You're exploring MCPs and connectors
- Everything you need to do, you trigger yourself

### The Rule

*"When you need to process information — when you need to do math, when you need to involve an AI to read and analyze information, when you need an AI to answer back for a character you're writing a bot for — that's when you're going to need this."*

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## GETTING STARTED

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### Don't Build It Yourself

Seriously. Don't open N8N and start dragging and dropping nodes before you know what you're building.

#### The right order:

1. Describe what you want to automate to Claude in plain English
2. Let Claude ask clarifying questions
3. Let Claude build the first version of the workflow
4. Test it. Refine it. Repeat.

You never need to understand what every node does. You need to understand what the workflow is supposed to accomplish. Claude handles the rest.

### What the Interface Shows You

Each workflow in N8N is a visual graph: boxes connected by lines. Each box is a step. The lines show what flows between steps. That's all it is: if this, then that. If something goes wrong here, do this instead.

*"It's step-by-step processes. It's just — if this, then that — is all it is."*

You can look at any workflow and understand its intent without understanding the code inside. If something breaks, take a screenshot and hand it to Claude. It will tell you exactly what's wrong and how to fix it.

## Credentials and Security

N8N has a credentials manager — a secure vault for all the API keys and tokens your workflows need. Once you enter a key, you never see it again. The workflow uses the credential by reference.

The only way to expose a credential is to accidentally paste it into a chat window. Don't do that. Never paste your keys anywhere visible. If you accidentally expose one, go change it immediately wherever it lives.

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## WHAT SHARED PROJECTS MEAN

When comparing N8N cloud plans, "shared projects" means you can invite other users to access the same workflows and credentials. Useful if you're building bots for clients and want them to see what's running. Not relevant for solo use.