

WUNDERLANDMEDIA

The WordPress Cost Audit Worksheet

Nine line items, priced off the vendors' own pages in September 2026. Fill in your own numbers beside mine.

By Kemal | wunderlandmedia.com

\$91

Per month, year one

\$111

Per month, year two

9

Line items

1 How to Audit Your Own Stack

The stack I priced

One brochure or content site for a small business. Around 25,000 visits a month. A contact form that has to talk to a payment processor or a CRM. An owner who does not want to think about updates, backups or malware. No shop, no membership, no multilingual layer. If your site is bigger, your numbers go up, not down.

WHERE EACH COST IS ACTUALLY HIDING

- ☐ **1a. Hosting invoices**
The one bill you already know about. Find the annual figure, not the monthly headline, and note the renewal date.
- ☐ **1b. The plugin licence emails nobody files**
Search your inbox for "licence key", "your order" and each vendor name. These arrive once and are never looked at again.
- ☐ **1c. Auto-renewing card charges**
Open your card statement, filter the last twelve months, and write every website-related charge into one list with its renewal date.
- ☐ **1d. Domain and DNS**
Often on a different card, a different registrar and a different anniversary from everything else.
- ☐ **1e. Email sending**
The transactional service behind the contact form. Free until a volume threshold, then a monthly line you never approved.
- ☐ **1f. Sites covered versus sites owned**
Write down what each licence covers. Paying for 500 sites and running one is the most common line on this worksheet.
- ☐ **1g. The cancel test**
For each row, answer one question: what breaks if I cancel this? On most small business sites, two or three rows have no answer.

YOUR FIGURES, BESIDE MINE

Where to look	My figure (year one)	Your figure	Renewal date
Hosting	\$350		
Plugin licences (8 rows)	\$561.88 + €168.75		
Domain and DNS	~\$10		
Email sending	\$0 on free tier		
CDN / WAF add-on	\$0 (or \$25/mo Cloudflare Pro)		
Total	~\$1,090 / year		

Currency note, kept honest

Every number here came off the vendor's own pricing page in September 2026. Where a page showed euros instead of dollars, it is left in euros rather than inventing an exchange rate. European vendors serve European pricing. That is worth knowing if you are comparing your invoice to a US blog post.

2 Hosting: The Tiers Compared

Plan	Promo price	Renewal price	Commitment	Your figure
Kinsta Single 20GB, annual	\$350 / year	\$350 / year	1 site, 35,000 visits	_____
WP Engine Essential	\$336 / year	Higher (20% new-customer discount)	Annual	_____
Bluehost Starter	\$3.99 / mo	\$9.99 / mo	36 months upfront	_____
Bluehost Business	\$6.99 / mo	\$13.99 / mo	36 months upfront	_____

\$120

The honest cheap-hosting number per year, not \$48. The \$3.99 headline requires a 36-month term paid upfront, and the Starter plan renews at \$9.99 a month.

WHAT THE CHEAP TIER ACTUALLY GIVES YOU

- ☐ **2a. No staging environment**
Every change is made on the live site, which is how plugin updates take shops offline on a Friday.
- ☐ **2b. No real backups**
This is exactly why the UpdraftPlus row exists further down the table. The cost moved, it did not vanish.
- ☐ **2c. No server-level caching**
So you buy WP Rocket at €49.95 to do in PHP what the host could have done at the server.
- ☐ **2d. No WAF included**
Which is why the Wordfence Premium row exists, and why people add Cloudflare Pro at \$25 a month on top.
- ☐ **2e. Nobody at 2am**
When the site is serving a Japanese pharmacy ad, someone has to answer. On cheap hosting, that someone is you.

HONEST COMPARISON

\$120 cheap hosting **plus** the backup, security and caching plugins that replace what managed hosting includes.

THE COMPARISON PEOPLE RUN

"\$48 a year versus \$350." Ignores the 36-month term, the \$9.99 renewal, and three plugin rows.

The \$230 question

Cheap hosting saves roughly \$230 against managed. On managed hosting, backups and a WAF are often included and you can strike two rows off the table. Cheap hosting does not remove the cost, it moves it into your plugin bill and into your Saturday.

3 The Line Items: Build, Speed, Search

PAGE BUILDER

- ☐ **3a. Elementor Pro Essential — \$49, year one**
Covers 1 site. The single-site tier of a builder that most small business themes now assume you are running.

CACHING

- ☐ **3b. WP Rocket Single — €49.95, year one**
Covers 1 site. Euro-denominated on the vendor's own page, left in euros here rather than converted.
- ☐ **3c. Check whether your host already caches**
On managed hosting with server-level caching, this row is often duplicated work you are paying for twice.

SEO

- ☐ **3d. Yoast SEO Premium — €118.80 ex VAT, year one**
Covers 1 site. Ex VAT, so your invoice will be higher depending on where you are billed.
- ☐ **3e. Rank Math PRO — €95.88 year one, €107.88 renewal**
The alternative to Yoast. Note it is one of the few plugins that prints its renewal increase on its own page.

Line item	Product	Year one	Sites covered	Your figure
Page builder	Elementor Pro Essential	\$49	1 site	
Caching	WP Rocket Single	€49.95	1 site	
SEO	Yoast SEO Premium	€118.80 ex VAT	1 site	
SEO (alternative)	Rank Math PRO	€95.88	—	

"WP Rocket at €49.95 will do more for a slow site in an hour than most consultants do in a week."
Kemal, Wunderlandmedia

Read this before you cancel anything

The problem is not any individual price. Every tool in this table earns its price for somebody. The problem is that nobody owns the total.

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The Line Items: Safety, Forms, Assets

BACKUPS

- ☐ 4a. UpdraftPlus Premium Personal — \$85.40, year one
- Covers 2 sites. Lower confidence: this was shown as an Italian VAT-inclusive price, so your figure will differ by country.

SECURITY

- ☐ 4b. Wordfence Premium — \$149, year one
- Covers 1 site. Lower confidence: the vendor's pricing page would not load cleanly, so this is the figure carried consistently across current 2026 listings. Check your own renewal notice.

FORMS

- ☐ 4c. WPForms Pro — \$159.60 year one, \$399 renewal
- Covers 5 sites. The 60 percent introductory discount is printed in public on their own pricing page. Almost nobody reads it.
- ☐ 4d. Gravity Forms — \$59 for one site
- A genuinely fair price for what it does, and it does not have a renewal jump. Worth pricing against your forms row.

IMAGE OPTIMISATION AND THEME

- ☐ 4e. Imagify Growth, annual — \$59.88
- Covers unlimited sites. You have one.
- ☐ 4f. GeneratePress Premium — \$59
- Covers up to 500 sites. You have one.

Line item	Product	Year one	Sites covered	Your figure
Backups	UpdraftPlus Premium Personal	\$85.40	2 sites	
Security	Wordfence Premium	\$149	1 site	
Forms	WPForms Pro	\$159.60	5 sites	
Image optimisation	Imagify Growth, annual	\$59.88	unlimited	
Theme	GeneratePress Premium	\$59	up to 500 sites	

\$911.88

The nine dollar rows in year one. The two euro rows add €168.75 on top, landing you somewhere around \$1,090 a year, or \$91 a month, for a site that does nothing but sit there and describe a business.

You are paying for capacity you will never use

GeneratePress covers 500 sites. Imagify covers unlimited. WPForms Pro covers five. That overage is not the vendors being greedy. It is what happens when a single-site owner buys tools priced for agencies, because the single-site tier often does not exist or does not include the one add-on you need.

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The Renewal Trap

The headline example: WPForms Pro

\$159.60 for your first year. It renews at \$399. That single line adds **\$239.40** with no change in what you get. Not a typo, not a scam, printed on their own pricing page where anyone can read it.

WP Engine Essential: the discount you were not told about

The Essential plan advertises \$336 a year, but their page states plainly that the first-year price includes a 20 percent new-customer discount. Year two is higher, and you find out when the card gets charged.

Bluehost: the promo is a three-year commitment

Starter renews at \$9.99 a month against a \$3.99 headline that requires a 36-month term paid upfront. Business goes \$6.99 promo to \$13.99 renewal.

TWO PRICES FLAGGED AS LOWER CONFIDENCE

- ☐ **5a. UpdraftPlus \$85.40 was a VAT-inclusive quote**
Shown as an Italian VAT-inclusive price, so your figure will differ by country. Verify against your own invoice before you use it in a comparison.
- ☐ **5b. Wordfence \$149 did not come from the vendor page**
Their pricing page would not load cleanly, so this is the figure carried consistently across current 2026 listings rather than one read off their own page. Check your own renewal notice on that one.

Line item	Year one	Renewal	Delta	Your renewal
WPForms Pro	\$159.60	\$399	+\$239.40	
Rank Math PRO	€95.88	€107.88	+€12	
WP Engine Essential	\$336	Higher, unstated	20% discount ends	
Bluehost Starter	\$3.99 / mo	\$9.99 / mo	+\$6 / mo	

\$111

Per month in year two. Run the same table again and the dollar side goes from \$911.88 to about \$1,151, landing near \$1,330 a year. Same site. Same traffic. Same nine tools. Nothing improved.

And then someone mentions a WAF

Add Cloudflare Pro at \$25 a month because someone told you the site needed one, and you have cleared **\$1,600 a year** without ever having a meeting about it.

6 The Alternative, Honestly Costed

This is not a free stack

Here is what genuinely remains when the same brochure site is a static Astro build on Cloudflare Pages. These are the lines that actually showed up across three client migrations, not a wishlist.

WHAT STILL COSTS MONEY

- ☐ **6a. The domain — around \$10 for a .com**
Cloudflare Registrar states it applies no markup at all and charges registry and ICANN cost. This row never goes away.
- ☐ **6b. Hosting — the row that mostly disappears**
Static asset requests on Pages are free and unlimited, and the free Workers tier covers 100,000 requests a day, which a small business brochure site will not touch.
- ☐ **6c. A CMS, if the client edits their own content**
Sanity's free plan covers 20 seats and 10,000 documents. Their Growth plan is \$15 per seat per month if you outgrow it.
- ☐ **6d. Transactional email for the contact form**
Resend is free up to 3,000 emails a month with a 100-a-day cap, then \$20 a month.
- ☐ **6e. Form handling needs an endpoint**
Genuinely fiddly on a static site. This is real work, not a checkbox, and it is the part people underestimate.
- ☐ **6f. Development time — the biggest line of all**
On three client sites moved from WordPress to Astro, build time was the single largest cost in the whole project, larger than several years of licence renewals combined.

Line item	Free tier	Paid tier	Your figure
Domain (Cloudflare Registrar)	—	~\$10 / year, no markup	_____
Hosting (Cloudflare Pages)	Free, unlimited static requests	—	_____
Workers	100,000 requests / day	—	_____
CMS (Sanity)	20 seats, 10,000 documents	\$15 / seat / month	_____
Email (Resend)	3,000 / month, 100 / day cap	\$20 / month	_____
Forms endpoint	Build it yourself	Development time	_____

AT THE FREE TIERS

The recurring cost is a domain. Around **\$10 a year**.

WITH PAID CMS SEAT AND PAID EMAIL

Roughly **\$430 a year**. Still well under the \$1,330 WordPress renewal year.

That comparison is dishonest until you add one row

The rebuild. A migration is not a weekend, and the build cost is the row nobody wants to write down. Page 8 is how you price it.

7 The Payback Calculation

Why there is no rebuild number in this PDF

It depends entirely on page count, how much of the design survives, and whether anyone documented what those nine plugins were doing. So instead of a quote, here is the arithmetic to run against your own.

```
# The whole calculation
payback_years = rebuild_quote / annual_saving

# On the stack in this PDF:
annual_saving = $900 to $1,200 per year
```

WORKED EXAMPLE

Step	My worked example	Your number
1. Your rebuild quote	Whatever your developer quoted	_____
2. Your current WordPress year-two total	~\$1,330 / year	_____
3. Your Astro running cost	\$10 free-tier, ~\$430 paid	_____
4. Annual saving (2 minus 3)	~\$900 to \$1,200	_____
5. Payback period (1 divided by 4)	In years	_____
6. Years until your next redesign anyway	Be honest here	_____

PAYBACK IN TWO YEARS

And the site is three years from a redesign anyway. The maths is straightforward. Rebuild.

PAYBACK IN SIX YEARS

Stay where you are and go cancel two plugins instead. That is a genuinely better use of your afternoon.

IF THE ANSWER IS "STAY", DO THIS INSTEAD

☐ 7a. Run the cancel test on every row

What breaks if I cancel this? On most small business sites, two or three rows have no answer.

☐ 7b. Check what your host already includes

On managed hosting, backups and a WAF are often included. Two rows can come straight off the table.

☐ 7c. Downgrade licences priced for agencies

You are on a five-site or 500-site tier for one site. Sometimes there is a cheaper tier you were never shown.

☐ 7d. Replace the small plugins with code

Several plugin rows are a few lines of PHP in disguise. That is the cheapest afternoon on this list.

☐ 7e. Put all nine renewal dates on one calendar

Nine dates from nine card charges is why the number never appears anywhere as one number.

8 Quick Reference: The Whole Stack

Line item	Year one	Renewal	Per-site or unlimited	Your figure
Managed hosting — Kinsta Single 20GB	\$350	\$350	1 site, 35,000 visits	_____
Page builder — Elementor Pro Essential	\$49	—	1 site	_____
Caching — WP Rocket Single	€49.95	—	1 site	_____
SEO — Yoast SEO Premium	€118.80 ex VAT	—	1 site	_____
Backups — UpdraftPlus Premium Personal	\$85.40 (VAT-inc)	—	2 sites	_____
Security — Wordfence Premium	\$149 (unverified)	—	1 site	_____
Forms — WPForms Pro	\$159.60	\$399	5 sites	_____
Image optimisation — Imagify Growth	\$59.88	—	unlimited sites	_____
Theme — GeneratePress Premium	\$59	—	up to 500 sites	_____
Dollar rows	\$911.88	~\$1,151	—	_____
Euro rows	€168.75	—	—	_____
Total	~\$1,090 / yr (\$91 / mo)	~\$1,330 / yr (\$111 / mo)	—	_____

"It is never one bad decision. It is nine defensible ones and no annual review."

Kemal, Wunderlandmedia

The whole recommendation, and it is not "migrate"

Open your card statement, filter the last twelve months, and write every website-related charge into one list with its renewal date. Then, for each row, answer one question: what breaks if I cancel this?

One thing this worksheet cannot do

It cannot tell you which rows are load-bearing on *your* site. Every tool in that table earns its price for somebody. The structural problem is that nobody owns the total.

Total shocked you?

Read the full line-by-line breakdown at wunderlandmedia.com/wordpress-hosting-and-plugin-costs

If you want a second opinion on which rows are load-bearing, that is a conversation I am happy to have. Find me at wunderlandmedia.com.