



Build & Sell Apps Without Writing Code

The tool map, the 8 money models, and the honest limits — before you spend a rupee on a platform. No hype. Just what's real in 2026.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Everything that matters, in pointers

This mini gives you the honest map of no-code in 20 minutes: which tools build what, which of 8 business models actually pay, how to validate and ship, and the limits nobody puts on the sales page. Read it once and you'll know more than most people who bought a course.

01	The no-code moment	p.3
02	The tool map	p.5
03	What to build — 8 models	p.7
04	The build playbook	p.9
05	Automations & AI builders	p.11
06	Sell it — first client in 30 days	p.12
07	The honest limits	p.13
08	The 10 questions everyone asks	p.14

THE ONE IDEA TO HOLD THE WHOLE WAY

Spinning up an app in days is now assumed, not impressive. Differentiation has moved to judgment, validation, and distribution — building was never the hard part.

The no-code moment

- **The honest market:** strip out the hype and the defensible claim is a low-code market in the mid-\$40 billions, compounding at high-teens rates through 2030.
- **The Gartner "70%" claim:** a forecast about enterprise apps using LCNC somewhere in the stack — not "70% of apps are built by non-programmers." Directionally true, never audited.
- **The AI wave:** Lovable went \$7M → \$206M ARR in 11 months. Bolt.new hit \$4M ARR in its first 30 days. Both company-reported, both real.
- **The Base44 story:** a solo founder shipped an AI app builder, hit \$189K profit in a month with zero employees, and sold to Wix for ~\$80M cash — four months after launch.
- **Two families, not rivals:** classic no-code (Bubble, Softr) gives guardrails; AI builders (Lovable, Bolt) generate real code you own and must manage.

THE THESIS THIS WHOLE BOOK IS BUILT ON

"The ability to spin up an app in days is now assumed, not impressive — differentiation has moved to judgment, validation, and distribution."

One market, four headline numbers

\$44.5B

Gartner low-code tech, 2026

\$206M

Lovable ARR, Nov 2025 (from
\$7M)

\$80M

Base44's cash exit to Wix, 4
months

Market estimates vary wildly because analysts count different things — no-code + low-code combined runs ~\$52B, broadest estimates \$49–65B. AI app builders alone ("vibe coding") are already ~\$4.7B.

- **Vibe coding, coined:** Andrej Karpathy named it in early 2025 — describing an app in plain English and letting AI generate it. It went mainstream faster than any prior dev paradigm.

REMEMBER

These revenue numbers are company- and investor-reported. The lesson isn't "you'll sell for \$80M" — it's that the cost of building software collapsed, and the early movers noticed first.

CHAPTER 02

The tool map

Seven categories, 20+ tools, real 2026 prices. One rule of thumb covers 80% of website questions:

- **Websites:** Carrd (\$19/yr) for a landing page tonight · Framer (\$10–30/mo) for a beautiful startup site this week · Webflow (\$14–29/mo + add-ons) for client CMS work that pays.
- **Web apps:** Bubble (\$29–209/mo sticker, \$200–1,500/mo real all-in) is the deepest builder — full custom logic, but consumption-metered "workload units."
- **Mobile:** FlutterFlow exports real Flutter code (~\$105+/mo realistic all-in); Adalo is flat \$36/mo but ceilings near 5,000 users.
- **Automation — the money category:** at ~50,000 tasks/month, Zapier ≈ \$900+, Make ≈ \$250, self-hosted n8n ≈ \$20. A 47× spread.
- **AI builders:** Lovable, Bolt, v0, Replit Agent all bill by credits or tokens — complex apps burn budget fast.

THE GLIDE GOTCHA

Glide's \$49/mo Maker plan allows unlimited personal-email users — the moment users sign in with company emails, you're forced onto the \$199/mo Business plan. A 4× jump many builders discover at invoice time.

CHAPTER 02 · CONTINUED

Three ready-made stacks, by budget

STACK	COST	WHAT'S IN IT
Free	\$0	Carrrd + Tally + Notion + n8n self-host + Lovable free credits + Gumroad
Lean	~\$25/mo	Framer/Lovable/Bubble Starter + Tally + Payhip + Make Core
Pro	~\$100–150/mo	Bubble Growth/FlutterFlow + Airtable Team + Make/n8n + Circle

- Pattern to remember:** feature-priced tools (Tally, Payhip, Softr) protect you as you grow. Volume-priced tools (Typeform, Gumroad, Zapier) tax your success.
- Databases:** Notion (~\$8–10/user) wins for docs + light data; Airtable (\$20–45/user) is the relational workhorse but ~2.5× pricier at team tier.

What to build — 8 money models

- 1 • **Client MVPs:** fastest cash — solo fixed-price MVPs run \$2–10K; agencies charge \$10–40K for the same scope. India: ₹1.2–2.5 lakh for barebones builds.
- 2 • **Your own SaaS on Bubble:** Dividend Finance raised \$365M+ and was acquired, started on Bubble. MyAskAI hit \$25K MRR within 6 weeks. Slowest to first revenue — months, not weeks.
- 3 • **Marketplaces:** Sharetribe (\$39–299/mo) powers Studiotime, the "Airbnb for music studios." Hard model, proven tooling.
- 4 • **Directories:** Frey Chu reports \$2.3–3K/mo across 3 directory sites — self-reported but consistently documented. Lowest-skill entry: a CMS, a data set, and SEO patience.
- 5 • **Automation services — the hottest model of 2026:** setup fees \$1,500–12,000; retainers \$1,500–5,000/mo — against \$100–400/mo in client tool costs.

MODELS 6–8, IN BRIEF

Templates: realistic middle \$1–3K/mo (Thomas Frank's \$2.1M+ is the outlier).
Memberships: Skool Hobby (\$9+10% fee) only beats Circle Pro below ~\$900/mo revenue. Internal-tools consulting: Appsmith at \$750/mo vs Retool Business at \$2,500/mo for a 50-person team.

CHAPTER 03 · CONTINUED

The model-picker matrix

MODEL	CAPITAL	TIME TO CASH
1 · Client MVPs	~\$0	2–6 weeks
5 · Automation svcs	~\$0–50/mo	2–4 weeks
4 · Directories	\$15–30/mo	3–6 months
2 · Own SaaS	\$30–300/mo	Months

- How to choose:** need cash this month → services (1, 5, 8). Have an audience → templates or memberships (6, 7). Patient and SEO-minded → directories (4).
- Trust the flags:** this chapter separates hard-documented numbers (Base44's Wix exit) from self-reported ones (most template income) — the pattern holds even where a figure isn't audited.

UNDECIDED?

Model 5 — automation services — has the best 2026 demand-to-competition ratio.

The build playbook

- **Validate first — under \$100:** 15–20 free user interviews, a \$50–100 landing-page + waitlist test, or a concierge "Wizard of Oz" service run manually.
- **The benchmark:** 100+ waitlist signups (consumer) or 10+ pre-pay commitments (B2B) = validated. Pre-selling even \$5 beats a hundred "sounds cool" replies.
- **The 3-Feature Rule:** your MVP is exactly one core workflow + auth + payment. Everything else goes in the v2 parking lot.
- **Product Hunt in 2026:** only ~10% of launches get "Featured" now, down from 60–98% in 2020–23. Target 100+ upvotes in the first 4 hours.
- **The real goal:** email capture, not rank — 10K launch-day visits should become 1,000–3,000 leads.

THE 30-DAY TIMELINE

Days 1–7 validate · Days 8–21 build the 3-feature MVP, posting progress publicly · Days 22–27 pre-launch beta + fix top 3 complaints · Days 28–30 launch on Product Hunt, subreddits, IndieHackers.

The scoping worksheet

Fill this in before opening any builder. Ten minutes here saves ten weeks later.

- **Who pays?** One sentence naming the person and their specific pain.
- **Core workflow?** One loop, ≤ 5 steps, written as verbs — not profiles, not dashboards.
- **Auth needed?** Magic link, email login, or none for v1 (guest checkout).
- **Payment path?** Stripe / Razorpay / Gumroad — pick one, not three.
- **The v2 parking lot:** every other idea, written down and deliberately parked.

WATCH OUT

Feature creep doesn't feel like creep — it feels like "this one small thing."

Rule: if it's not the core loop, auth, or payment, it waits until a paying user asks for it.

Automations & AI builders

- **Task vs operation vs execution:** Zapier bills per task (every action), Make per operation, n8n per whole-workflow execution. The unit is everything at scale.
- **The 47x spread:** at ~50,000 tasks/month — Zapier \$900+, Make ~\$250, self-hosted n8n ~\$20. That gap is the automation agency's entire margin.
- **AI builders generate real code:** Lovable, Bolt, v0 and Replit Agent hand you React/Supabase-style code you own — and must maintain.
- **The security record is real:** 170+ production Lovable apps were exposed via RLS misconfigurations (CVE-2025-48757); Base44 had a platform-wide auth bypass; 40–62% of AI-generated code contains security flaws.
- **Choose your lane:** guardrails (classic no-code) if you never want to see code; ownership (AI builders) if you want speed and can debug — or pay someone who can.

NON-NEGOTIABLE RULE

Never store sensitive data without a security review. Test auth yourself — log out, try to reach another user's data by URL. Back up before letting an agent touch production.

Sell it — first client in 30 days

- **Real freelance rates:** Bubble \$40–100/hr (avg \$60–80); Webflow \$25/hr junior to \$200+/hr expert; South Asia \$15–35/hr.
- **Direct beats marketplace:** freelancers with direct client relationships earn 20–30% more than those on Upwork/Fiverr.
- **The winning positioning:** industry niche + productized package + retainer — "client-intake portals for law firms, \$6K fixed, \$500/mo support." Not "I do no-code."
- **The automation ladder:** \$500–1,500 quick win → \$1,500–5K/mo department retainer → \$5–20K/mo full stack, against \$100–400/mo in tool costs.
- **30-day plan:** pick a niche → build 2 spec demos → 25 outreach messages/week → close a small paid pilot → turn it into a case study → ask for referrals.

WHERE CLIENTS COME FROM

Bubble Experts Directory and Webflow Certified Partners are inbound — clients arrive pre-sold and pre-filtered. Everything else is outbound, and outbound is the expensive kind of effort.

The honest limits

- **Scale ceiling:** 68% of Bubble users saw performance problems under 10,000 monthly active users. Watch for >3s page loads and tables past 30–50K records.
- **Consumption pricing bites:** Bubble workload units, Glide's company-email jump, Zapier's per-task billing — all convert your growth into cost before it becomes revenue.

VENDOR LOCK-IN — THE ONE THAT CAN KILL YOU

Bubble, Glide, Adalo and Softr have no meaningful code export. Builder.ai raised \$450M, collapsed in 2025, and customer apps died with it. Run the test before you build: "can I run the export without the platform's runtime?"

THE MIGRATION PLAYBOOK

Under \$5K MRR: stay on no-code. \$5–15K MRR: plan the migration. Beyond: migrate piece by piece — full rebuilds take 6–12 months.

The 10 questions everyone asks

- **Is no-code dead now that AI writes code?** No — different audiences. AI builders are the new no-code; classic no-code is the guardrailed path.
- **Bubble vs Lovable — which do I learn?** Lovable for speed and code ownership; Bubble for complex logic with guardrails and client-work directories.
- **Can a no-code app really scale?** Yes for launch and traction — Dividend Finance raised \$365M+ starting on Bubble — but plan a migration path for hyperscale.
- **Are vibe-coded apps secure?** Not by default. Pay for a security review before storing anything sensitive.
- **Which tool for my use case?** Carrd tonight, Framer this week, Webflow for paid CMS, Bubble for complex apps, FlutterFlow for native mobile, n8n/Make for automation.

THE FIVE MUST-HIRE-A-DEVELOPER MOMENTS

SOC 2 / compliance gates · real-time features at scale · un-optimizable >3s loads · API timeouts blocking core features · security review before sensitive data.

YOU'VE GOT THE MAP. NOW GET THE TERRAIN.

This was the 20-minute version.
The full guide is the whole journey.

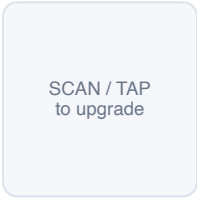
You now know more than most people who buy a no-code course and never ship. The complete **No-Code Empire** guide takes every chapter above and gives you the full tool comparisons, decision trees, and step-by-step build recipes.

- **The full 8 chapters** — every model, tool, and playbook above, illustrated and expanded.
- **The which-builder decision tree** so you pick the right tool in 30 seconds, every time.
- **The complete tool card** — 20+ tools with 2026 pricing, ceilings and catches, on one page.
- **The 20-term glossary** so you can talk pricing and lock-in like a pro.
- **The full appendix** — all 10 questions, answered with receipts.

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