ACROSS THE TABLE

BUSINESS CONSULTING

BUSINESS JOB 05 · EPISODE 5

Zapier vs Make vs n8n

Getting your software to pass work to itself, so you stop being the messenger

Knowledge Article 05

AI Stack Series · acrossthetable.biz

© 2026 Across the Table Business Consulting · acrossthetable.biz · All Rights Reserved

THE JOB THESE THREE DO

A customer fills in your website form. You get an email. You copy their name into your customer list, put a reminder in your calendar, and send them a welcome message.

Four actions, all of them copying information from one box into another, and every one of them depends on you being at a computer and remembering.

That is what these three do away with. One thing happens, and the next things happen by themselves. These tools do not think — they move work from one place to another without you in the middle.

WHO EACH ONE IS

Zapier — the easy one

What it is: Connects thousands of apps and AI models with no code.

Best for: Your first automations, and the widest app coverage.

Watch out for: Task-based pricing climbs fast once it works.

Zapier is where nearly everyone starts, and for good reason: it connects to more software than anything else, and setting up a simple chain takes about ten minutes with no code.

Make — the visual one

What it is: Visual automation builder with branching, loops and error handling.

Best for: Workflows too complicated for a straight line.

Watch out for: The canvas gets messy without naming discipline.

Make shows you your automation as a diagram you can see and rearrange. It handles branching — if this, do that, otherwise do something else — which Zapier does less comfortably.

n8n — the technical one

What it is: Automation you can self-host, with source-available workflows.

Best for: Teams with technical help and data they’d rather keep in house.

Watch out for: Someone has to own the server.

n8n you can run on your own server, which matters if you have data you would rather not send through somebody else’s system. It needs someone technical. If that is not you and you have nobody, this is not your tool.

© 2026 Across the Table Business Consulting · acrossthetable.biz · All Rights Reserved

HOW THEY COMPARE

	Zapier	Make	n8n
Best for	Easy automation	Visual complex automation	Technical / custom automation
Ease of use	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
Small-business fit	High	High	Medium
Larger-business fit	High	High	High
Its main job	Connect applications	Build workflow systems	Build highly customized workflows
Choose this if	You want to automate quickly	You need visual workflow control	You need technical flexibility
Price	Free tier; paid by task volume.	Free tier; paid by operations.	Free self-hosted; paid cloud.

This is the one card in the series where ease of use genuinely differs. Zapier is beginner, Make is intermediate, n8n is advanced. Pick honestly.

> **WHERE TO START**
> AI creates. Automation moves the work.

HOW A BUSINESS ACTUALLY USES EACH ONE

A home services business

Website enquiry arrives. The customer is added to the customer list, a follow-up task appears with a date, and a text goes out saying thanks and when to expect a call. The owner did nothing and the customer heard back in ninety seconds.

A business with conditions

Orders over a certain value need a manager to approve them; smaller ones go straight through. That is a branch, and branching is where Make earns its keep over Zapier.

A practice holding sensitive records

Client information that should not pass through an outside service. n8n runs on their own server, so the data never leaves. Someone has to look after that server, which is the trade.

© 2026 Across the Table Business Consulting · acrossthetable.biz · All Rights Reserved

WHAT IT COSTS

Zapier and Make both have free tiers. n8n is free if you host it yourself, paid if you want them to host it.

Watch Zapier’s pricing specifically. It charges by how many actions run, and once an automation is working well it runs constantly. Owners are regularly surprised by month three. Check the pricing page against your expected volume before you build anything important on it.

WHERE THIS SITS IN YOUR STACK

Here’s where automation becomes really powerful. A lead enters HubSpot. Your automation platform evaluates what happened and triggers the next steps. Gmail can send the appropriate communication. Slack can notify the salesperson. Airtable can update operational information. And when appropriate, financial information can move into the accounting workflow. Zapier, Make or n8n becomes the connector sitting between the applications your company already uses.

The pieces around it:

- HubSpot — CRM
- Gmail — communication
- QuickBooks — accounting
- Slack — internal notifications
- Airtable — operational data

THE CEO DECISION

- What are you copying between systems by hand right now? Write it down for a week. That list is your automation list.
- Do any of those need an "if this, otherwise that" decision? If yes, look at Make before Zapier.
- Do you have technical help? If not, n8n is not a real option however appealing self-hosting sounds.
- What happens when an automation fails quietly? Every one of these can fail without telling you. Decide how you would notice.

APPLY IT TO YOUR BUSINESS

For one week, note every time you copy information from one piece of software into another. Name, email, amount, date — all of it.

© 2026 Across the Table Business Consulting · acrossthetable.biz · All Rights Reserved

Pick the one you do most often and automate only that. One working automation teaches you more than a weekend of reading, and it is the one you will actually keep.

YOUR QUICK REVIEW

- ☐ What am I copying by hand between systems?
- ☐ Which of those happens most often?
- ☐ Does any of it need a decision in the middle, or is it a straight line?
- ☐ Who will notice if an automation silently stops?
- ☐ Have I checked what the pricing looks like at my real volume?
- ☐ What is the one automation I will build first?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Tool	Where to find it	What it is for
Zapier	zapier.com	Your first automations, and the widest app coverage.
Make	www.make.com	Workflows too complicated for a straight line.
n8n	n8n.io	Teams with technical help and data they'd rather keep in house.
Across the Table AI Assessment	acrossthetable.biz/#assessment	Fifteen minutes. Tells you which of the twenty jobs to start with.
The Scaling Edge	acrossthetablebiz.substack.com	Weekly newsletter for owners without a business background.

CONTINUE LEARNING

This is Business Job 05 of twenty. Episode 6 is Answer Customers — Intercom Fin, Zendesk AI and Gorgias.

Episode 1, ChatGPT vs Claude vs Perplexity, pairs with this one: the assistant creates something, and automation decides what happens to it next.

READ AND CONNECT WITH ACROSS THE TABLE

Across the Table website: https://acrossthetable.biz

The Scaling Edge newsletter: https://acrossthetablebiz.substack.com

© 2026 Across the Table Business Consulting · acrossthetable.biz · All Rights Reserved

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/@AcrossTheTableConnie

LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/connie-jacobo-ramirez

Questions: info@acrossthetable.biz · 480-582-4716

© 2026 Across the Table Business Consulting · acrossthetable.biz · All Rights Reserved

LEGAL NOTICE AND COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2026 Across the Table Business Consulting. All Rights Reserved.

Across the Table Business Consulting is a trade name of Bold and Beautiful Beauties, Phoenix, Arizona.

Trademarks

The CEO Shift™, JuntosHR™, the Across the Table brand name, and the methodologies described in this document are trademarks of Across the Table Business Consulting and may not be used without written permission. All other product and company names are the trademarks of their respective owners and are referred to here for identification only. No endorsement, affiliation or sponsorship is implied.

Permitted use

This article is provided to the reader for their own business education and for use inside their own company.

Prohibited use

No part of this document may be copied, resold, taught as the work of another, uploaded publicly, stripped of attribution, or used to build a derivative product. Coaching or group use requires a written licence obtained from info@acrossthetable.biz.

Enforcement

Across the Table Business Consulting reserves all rights available to it, including issuing takedown notices under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act and bringing civil proceedings under 17 U.S.C. § 501. Statutory damages of up to $150,000 per infringement may be sought for wilful infringement.

Disclaimer

This article is provided for educational purposes only. It is not legal, tax, accounting or financial advice, and no specific business outcome is guaranteed or implied. Prices, features and plan names for any software mentioned change without notice; confirm current pricing with the provider before committing. Always consult a qualified professional before making a financial decision for your business.

ACROSS THE TABLE BUSINESS CONSULTING

101 N First Ave, Suite 2325-1495, Phoenix, AZ 85003

info@acrossthetable.biz · 480-582-4716 · acrossthetable.biz