



# TOOL STACK REFERENCE CARD

## The Real AI Side Hustle — Free Companion Resource

Every tool named in the book, what it costs, and whether you actually need it. Prices move — check the tool’s own site before paying. Last verified: mid-2026.

**THE HONEST FLOOR** You can start for ~\$15. The only thing you have to buy is a domain (~\$15/year). Everything load-bearing in the first few months has a real free tier. Paid tools come in when the site is working and you want to go faster — not before.

### THE FLOOR — WHAT YOU ACTUALLY NEED

What you need	Free option	Cost to start
AI assistant	Claude or ChatGPT (free tier)	\$0
Domain name	— (no free option)	~\$15/yr
Site builder / hosting	Lovable free tier or Vercel free tier	\$0
Keyword research	Mangools KWFinder free tier + Google Keyword Planner	\$0
Traffic tracking	Google Search Console + Google Analytics 4	\$0
Everything else	Add when the site earns it	—

### THE TWO BUILD PATHS

#### Path A — Accessible **Recommended for most readers**

Lovable → Hostinger/WordPress. Best for anyone who doesn’t want to write code. Describe the site, let the AI build it, iterate in plain English.

Tool	What it does	Cost (mid-2026)
Lovable	Describe a site, AI builds it. No code required.	Free tier; Pro \$25/mo
Hostinger	Managed WordPress hosting (alternative to Lovable)	~\$3/mo promo → \$11/mo after
WordPress	Content management system (open source)	Free
Yoast / All in One SEO	WordPress plugins; auto-generate llms.txt, handle on-page SEO	Free tier does the job

**Path B — Engineer**

Claude Code → Next.js → Vercel. Best for people who already code, or want to learn. Maximum control over performance, citation wiring, every detail.

Tool	What it does	Cost (mid-2026)
Claude Code	AI coding assistant; builds and maintains the sites	Paid tiers only (Claude itself has a free tier)
Vercel	Hosting for Next.js sites	Free tier; ~\$20/mo paid

Both paths get you a real site. The stack was never what decided which site did well.

**AI ASSISTANTS**

Tool	What it does	Cost (mid-2026)	Essential?
Claude	Writing, research, prompts, metaprompting, builds	Free; Pro ~\$20/mo	✔ Essential
ChatGPT	Drafting, image gen, web search	Free; Plus ~\$20/mo	Useful, not required if you use Claude
Claude Design	Generates page/site designs	Included with Claude Pro or Max only	Optional
Google Stitch	Design tool; pairs with Claude for WordPress themes	Free	Optional
Bolt / v0 / Replit	Alternative AI site builders (same job as Lovable)	Free + paid tiers	Optional

**KEYWORD RESEARCH & SEO**

Tool	What it does	Cost (mid-2026)	Essential?
Google Keyword Planner	Free keyword ideas and rough volumes	Free	✔ Starting point
Mangools (KWFinder)	Keyword volume + difficulty for niche validation	Free tier (limited); Basic \$61/mo	Pay 1–2 mo, cancel
Google Search Console	Impressions, clicks, positions from Google	Free	✔ Essential
Google Analytics 4	Traffic by channel (incl. new “AI Assistant” channel)	Free	✔ Essential
Ahrefs	Domain Rating, backlinks, AI-citation tracking	~\$29/mo Starter; \$699/mo page-level	Optional — Starter is enough
Semrush	Keyword research (Mangools alternative)	Paid	Optional

**Keyword research tip:** pay for Mangools for one or two months during your niche research phase, then cancel. You don’t need it running every month while you write.

## AFFILIATE NETWORKS & PROGRAMS

Platform	What it does	Cost	When to use
Amazon Associates	Easy on-ramp; instant approval; 1–4.5% commission	Free	<a href="#">Start here</a>
Impact / TravelPayouts	Direct program networks; higher payouts	Free to join	When you outgrow Amazon
Awin / CJ / FlexOffers / ShareASale / Rakuten	Larger networks; more programs	Free to join	Later, once you have traffic

## PUBLISHING & PRODUCT PLATFORMS

Platform	What it does	Cost (mid-2026)
Amazon KDP	Self-publishing (this book's path)	Free; Amazon takes a royalty cut
Etsy	Digital products marketplace	~\$29 to open + \$0.20/listing + 6.5%/sale
Gumroad	Digital products alternative (not personally tested)	Free + per-sale fee

CONTENT & VIDEO TOOLS

Tool	What it does	Cost (mid-2026)
Nano Banana 2	AI image generation	Free + paid tiers
Higgsfield	AI video generation; good for camera-shy creators	Free + paid tiers
CapCut	Video editing, short-form content	Free + paid tiers
Gemini Omni (Google)	AI video generation (worth exploring)	Check current pricing

WHAT THE MONTHLY BILL LOOKS LIKE AT STEADY STATE

Once you're past the startup phase and the site is running:

Item	Monthly cost
Claude Pro	~\$20
Domain (annualized)	~\$1.25
Lovable Pro (if on the accessible path)	\$25
Hosting / Vercel (engineer path)	\$0-\$20
Ahrefs Starter (optional, once you care about citations)	\$29
<b>Rough total</b>	<b>~\$45-\$75/mo</b>

This is a real range based on my actual stack as of mid-2026. It doesn't include one-time startup costs (domain, the initial Mangools month) or the optional StartupSubmit. The exact figure depends on which path you take.