

NO CODE · STEP BY STEP

94 **hours**
the yearly cost of
a 3-minute task
done 6 times a day



Build Your Own Automation

A hands-on **n8n** workbook for small businesses and
online sellers

Tested with n8n 2.x

Build Your Own Automation

A Step-by-Step n8n Workbook for Small Businesses and Online Sellers, No Coding Required

First English edition, 2026 · Electronic book (PDF)

Adapted from the Turkish original *Kendi Otomasyonunu Kur* (Skytek Yayınları, October 2026).

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Updates, corrections and the template: skytekpress.com

Published by: Skytek Tekstil Elektronik Teknoloji Yazılım Sanayi ve Ticaret A.Ş. (Skytek Press, known as Skytek Yayınları in Türkiye) · Işıktepeosb Mahallesi Park Caddesi No:8, Nilüfer, Bursa, Türkiye · skytek@skytek.live

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0 · Before you start

By the end of this chapter: You will know what this book asks of you, what it will give you, and what you need to have ready before you begin.

Time: 10 minutes.

What this book has you do

This book doesn't explain artificial intelligence or automation to you. It has you do a job:

1. You will list the tasks that repeat in your business every week.
2. You will work out how many hours a year each of them costs you.
3. You will decide which ones are worth automating and which ones you should not touch at all.
4. You will build, publish and monitor your first automation for the task you chose.
5. You will build the second one on your own.

You won't write code. The tool we use is **n8n**: a program where you connect boxes to build workflows that say "when this happens, do that."

What you will have when you finish, and what you won't

You will have:

- An automation map of your own business, sorted by yearly hours (using the template in Appendix A)
- A decision list that shows, with reasons, which tasks you will leave alone
- At least two workflows running live in your own account, with your own data
- Knowing where to look and what to do when something breaks

You won't have:

- An income guarantee. This book doesn't tell you that you'll find customers in thirty days or make money with automation. We don't promise what we can't guarantee.
- Workflows that use AI. Workflows that read the content of an incoming email and classify it are the subject of the second book. There is no AI inside the workflows in this book; most tasks don't need it.
- Installing n8n on your own server. This book works with the cloud version of n8n.

Who this book is for, and who it isn't for

This book is for you if:

- You run a business and do the same tasks every week
- You sell on an online marketplace or on your own website
- You work alone or with a small team

The test is this: If you can fill in a table in Excel or Google Sheets and sign up for a website and change its settings, you have enough skills for this book.

This book isn't for you if:

- You are a software developer. It will feel slow.

- You are not comfortable with computers at all. You will struggle; first get comfortable with a spreadsheet program.

What you need

What	Why	When
A computer and the Chrome browser	You will build the workflows in the browser. A phone is not enough	From Chapter 4
A Gmail account	The first workflow works with emails that arrive in Gmail	Chapter 4
Google Sheets	The workflow writes emails into a spreadsheet. It comes with your Gmail account	Chapters 1 and 4
An n8n Cloud account	The tool you build the workflows in	Chapter 4
Real data from your own business	Working with sample data doesn't teach you; use your own email and your own spreadsheet	Every chapter
About an hour per chapter	Reading is quick; doing takes time	Every chapter

Warning: don't open your n8n account before you reach Chapter 4. As of October 2026, the n8n Cloud trial lasts 14 days and doesn't ask for a credit card. If the trial ends and you don't move to a paid plan, your workspace is deleted. If you finish Chapters 1–3 first and open the account in Chapter 4, you will use the trial for building and publishing. Prices and the math are in Appendix E.

How to use this book

- **Go in order.** Each chapter uses the output of the one before: in Chapter 2 you decide with the table from Chapter 1, and in Chapter 5 you build the task you chose in Chapter 2.
- **Don't skip the “Apply it to your business” pages.** Reading the book to the end is easy; if you finish it without doing the work, you'll have nothing that runs.
- **Stop at the checkpoints.** Lines marked ☐ tell you whether you are on the right track. If you don't see what you should see, don't move on; look at the “If something goes wrong” table just below.
- **If you get stuck, see Appendix C.** The list of errors you may run into is there.
- **Keep the appendices at hand.** All checklists are in Appendix B, the expressions used in the book are in Appendix D, and the glossary and exercise answers are in Appendix F.

Conventions in this book

Marker	Meaning
Bold text	A button or field written exactly like this on the n8n screen, for example Add first step
<code>This typeface</code>	Something you should type exactly as shown
☐ Checkpoint	What you should see on your screen before you continue
Numbered orange circle	In a figure, where you click in the step with the same number
Dark grey box	In a figure, where personal information has been covered

A note on dates

Every screenshot and every price in this book has a date:
September-October 2026. The screens are from n8n version 2.x.

n8n releases a new version almost every week. If you are reading this six months from now, a button’s name or position may have changed; the logic stays the same. When something changes, we update the book. Current screens and corrections are here: **skytekpress.com**

This book’s approach in one sentence

Measure first, then automate. The task that annoys you most may not be the one that costs you most. You only know which one does if you measure. Chapter 1 starts there.

1 · Measure your time

By the end of this chapter: You will have a task list of at least 15 rows. Each row will show how many hours a year a task costs you, and the list will be sorted from largest to smallest.

Time: One hour. If you like, keep adding to the list for a week afterwards.

You need: - The **Automation Map** template from Appendix A (an Excel file; it also opens in Google Sheets) - Your calendar and your sent emails: they remind you of tasks you forget - The stopwatch on your phone

Remember

1. How did we sum up this book's approach in one sentence?
2. In which chapter will you open your n8n account, and why not earlier?

Just enough to know

Repeating task: A task you do every week or every month with roughly the same steps. For example "checking order notifications", "sending the price list to resellers" or "checking competitors' prices".

Hours per year: How many hours in total a task takes from you in a year. A task that takes a few minutes each time adds up to days in a year if it repeats often. The calculation is:

$$\text{Hours per year} = \text{Times} \times \text{Minutes each time} \div 60$$

Here “times” means times per week. For tasks you do once a month, multiply by **12 instead of 52**. The template does this for you: just type `week` or `month` in the “Period” column.

Why measure? The most expensive mistake in automation is not picking the wrong tool; it is picking the wrong task. If a workflow you spent two days building saves you twenty minutes a month, you never get those two days back. The task that annoys you most is often not at the top of the list.

Step by step

1.1 Open the template

1. Download the **Automation Map** file from Appendix A.
2. Open the file in Excel, or upload it to Google Drive and open it in Google Sheets. The header row shows these columns: **Task (write a verb), How often (times), Period (week/month), Minutes each time, Who does it, Note, Hours per year, Setup estimate (hours), Payback ratio, Level (1/2/3)**.
3. Read the example row. The rows you fill in will look like it.

You fill in the yellow cells. Hours per year and Payback ratio contain formulas; don't type anything into these two columns. You will fill in **Setup estimate, Payback ratio** and **Level** in Chapter 2.

1.2 Find your tasks with three questions

Before you write the first rows, know this: even if you think “I don't have that many repeating tasks,” you most likely do; you just haven't named them. These three questions bring the list out on their own.

4. **What did you do yesterday?** Write every task, from the moment you turned on the computer to the moment you turned it off, on a separate row.
5. **Which tasks did you do more than once this week?** Did you write the same email to three customers? Did you fill in the same spreadsheet twice? Write each one down.
6. **What did you forget last month?** Getting back to a customer, following up on a payment, checking a stock level? Forgotten tasks are usually reminder tasks, and reminders are the easiest kind of automation to build.
7. **If you sell online:** What do you do after an order comes in? Shipping, returns, bookkeeping, following reviews: write each one on a separate row.

How to write them: Write a verb, not a noun. Not “email”, but “read incoming emails and decided which ones to answer”. What gets automated is the verb.

Not like this	Like this
Orders	Opened and checked marketplace order notifications
Price list	Prepared and sent the current price list to resellers
Competitors	Checked competitors’ prices one by one and took notes

☐ **Checkpoint:** Does your list have at least 15 rows? If not, look at your calendar and your sent emails; something always turns up there.

1.3 Write down how often you do each task

8. For each row, type a number in the **How often (times)** column.
9. In the **Period (week/month)** column, type **week** or **month**.

For tasks you do several times a day, multiply the daily count by the number of days you work per week. If you do it 6 times a day, 6 days a week, type **36** and **week**.

How often you do it	Times	Period
6 times a day, 6 days a week	36	week
Once a week	1	week
4 times a month	4	month
Once a month	1	month

1.4 Measure how many minutes each one takes

- 10. For each row, type a number in the **Minutes each time** column.
- 11. Time the first five tasks on your list once with a stopwatch. The gap between the guess and the measurement is often surprising.

Why time it? People don't count three-minute tasks as "work", so they guess their duration too short. Timing once also helps you fill in the rest of the table more accurately.

1.5 Check the yearly hours

- 12. Look at the **Hours per year** column. Every row where you entered a frequency and minutes shows a number.
- 13. Calculate one row by hand and compare it with the template's result. For example **36** times, **week**, **3** minutes:

$$36 \times 3 \times 52 \div 60 = 93.6 \text{ hours}$$

❑ **Checkpoint:** Is your hand calculation the same as the number in the template?

If something goes wrong

What you see	Likely cause	What to do
Hours per year is empty	How often or Minutes each time is empty	Fill in both cells
A number about four times what you expected	week was typed for a monthly task	Change the Period cell to month
Text appears instead of a formula	Something was typed by hand into the Hours per year cell	Restore the cell by copying it from the example row

1.6 Sort the list

- 14. Sort the table by the **Hours per year** column from largest to smallest. In Google Sheets you do this from the **Data** menu; in Excel, from the **Data** tab. Select only the task rows (rows 7–31) before sorting, so the header row, the example row and the TOTAL row stay in place.
- 15. Look at the first five rows.

❑ **Checkpoint:** Is the task at the top of the list the one that annoys you most? If not, you’re not alone: for most people, the top spot goes to a task they never complain about but that quietly takes time every week.

1.7 Optional: put a money value on it

- 16. Decide what one hour of your time is worth to you.
- 17. Add up the yearly hours of the first three rows and multiply by that number.

This step is optional, but it keeps the number from staying abstract.

Good to know: The calculation counts 52 weeks a year and doesn't subtract holidays. If you take four weeks of holiday a year, set the **Working weeks per year** cell at the top of the template to 48. This makes the result about 8% smaller; it doesn't change the ranking.

Now you try

Calculate the yearly hours of the three tasks below by hand. Answers are in Appendix F.

Task	How often	Each time	Hours per year
Sending tracking numbers to customers one by one	4 times a day, 5 days a week	5 minutes	
Collecting month-end documents and sending them to the accountant	Twice a month	90 minutes	
Checking products that are running low in stock	3 times a week	20 minutes	

Which one surprised you? _____

Apply it to your business

Copy the first five rows of the list you sorted in the template here. In Chapter 2 you will make decisions with these five rows.

Rank	Task (as a verb)	Hours per year	Who does this task?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Total for the first five: _____ hours. If one hour of your time is worth _____, that is _____ a year.

Real example: three tasks, a working month a year

Three rows from Skytek’s table. Skytek is a small Turkish company that sells on eight online marketplaces. We took the frequencies from our use of the seller panels in September 2026 and converted them to a year using six working days a week. So these are not a measured yearly total; they are the yearly equivalent of today’s pace.

Task	Calculation	Hours per year
Checking marketplace order notifications	$36 \times 3 \times 52 \div 60$	$93.6 \approx 94$
Preparing the reseller price list	$4 \times 45 \times 12 \div 60$	36
Checking competitor prices	$1 \times 30 \times 52 \div 60$	26

A total of 156 hours: about 20 working days of eight hours. The top of the list went to a task we never complained about, because it took only three minutes each time.

Is the task at the top of your list the one you complain about most?

Checklist

- ☐ The template has at least 15 rows, each written as a verb
- ☐ Every row has its frequency, period and minutes filled in
- ☐ I timed the first five tasks with a stopwatch
- ☐ I calculated one row by hand and compared it with the template
- ☐ The list is sorted by **Hours per year** from largest to smallest
- ☐ I copied the first five rows into the “Apply it to your business” table

Test yourself

1. When calculating the yearly hours of a task you do once a month, which number do you multiply by instead of 52?
2. For a task you do 3 times a day, 5 days a week, what do you type in the **How often** column?
3. Which belongs on the list, “Invoice” or “saved the incoming invoice to the accounting folder”, and why?
4. Why should you time some tasks instead of guessing?

Answers are in Appendix F.