

# How Much Does It Cost To Start a Shopify Store?

Ask "how much does it cost to start a Shopify store?" and you will get answers ranging from "\$39 a month" to "\$50,000." Both are right, and that huge range is exactly the point.

Shopify's own subscription is the small, predictable part of the cost. What actually determines your startup budget is everything around it: your domain, the apps you add, the products you sell, and above all the marketing you need to bring customers to a store that, unlike a marketplace, sends you no traffic of its own.

This guide breaks down every cost of starting a Shopify store, what you pay Shopify, what you pay for a domain and apps, what your products cost, and what marketing really requires, then puts it all together in three realistic budget scenarios: low, medium, and premium. By the end, you will understand not just the sticker prices but where your money actually goes, so you can start a store on a budget that fits you and avoid the expensive mistakes beginners make.

All figures reflect Shopify's pricing and typical ecommerce costs as of mid-2026; prices change, so confirm current rates on Shopify's pricing page before you commit.

## Key takeaways

- **The subscription is the cheap part.** Shopify plans run from \$39/month (Basic) to \$399 (Advanced) and \$2,300+ (Plus), but that is usually the smallest line in your budget.
- **You can start lean for a few hundred dollars** (Basic plan, free theme, dropshipping or print-on-demand, organic marketing) or invest tens of thousands for a premium launch.
- **Marketing is the biggest variable cost.** Because Shopify brings no traffic, you pay to acquire every customer, with acquisition costs often \$45-\$175 each, and ad spend commonly eating 20-35% of revenue.
- **Product/inventory is the biggest upfront decision.** Holding stock costs money before you sell anything; dropshipping and print-on-demand avoid that but trade away margin.
- **Hidden ongoing costs (apps, payment processing, domain renewal) add up,** so budget for monthly running costs, not just launch costs.

## 1. Shopify Costs Overview

Before the line items, it helps to see the shape of the spending, because beginners almost always misjudge where the money goes. Starting a Shopify store involves four cost categories:

1. **Platform costs**, what you pay to run the store itself: your Shopify subscription, payment processing, a domain, a theme, and apps.
2. **Marketing costs**, what you pay to bring visitors to the store: ads, email tools, content, and so on. Usually the largest category.
3. **Product costs**, what your inventory or fulfillment costs: the goods themselves, samples, packaging, and shipping.
4. **One-time setup costs**, optional things like branding, a logo, product photography, or design help.

The single most important insight is this: **the Shopify subscription is usually the smallest of these**. New store owners fixate on the monthly plan price, then are blindsided by the cost of inventory and especially marketing. A store can run on a \$39 plan and still need thousands of dollars in ad spend to find customers. So while we will cover platform costs in detail, keep the proportions in mind, the plan is the floor, not the budget.

Two encouraging facts before the numbers. First, Shopify lets you test before paying: there is a short free trial, and new stores can typically start at around \$1/month for the first few months, so you can build and launch before committing real subscription money. Second, your startup cost is genuinely flexible. You can begin lean, validate that people want your product, and reinvest as you grow, which is exactly what the low-budget scenario later in this guide is built around. With that frame, let's price each category.

## 2. Platform Costs

These are the costs of running the store itself, and they are the most predictable part of your budget.

### Shopify subscription plans

Shopify offers a tiered set of plans (US pricing, monthly billing; annual billing saves roughly 25% on most plans):

Plan	Monthly price	Best for
Starter	~\$5	Selling via links/social, not a full storefront
Basic	\$39 (\$29 annual)	New stores; the standard starting plan
Grow (formerly "Shopify")	\$105	Growing stores needing better reporting
Advanced	\$399	Scaling brands needing automation and lower fees
Plus	from \$2,300	High-volume and enterprise businesses

For almost every beginner, **Basic (\$39/month) is the right starting plan.** It includes a full online store, unlimited products, hosting, SSL, and the core features you need. The Starter plan (\$5) is really for selling through links and social posts rather than a full storefront, and Grow, Advanced, and Plus are upgrades you grow into once volume justifies their lower processing fees and added tools, not where you begin. Higher plans mainly buy you lower payment-processing rates, more staff accounts, deeper reporting, and bigger shipping discounts.

## Payment processing

Every sale incurs a payment-processing fee, and this is a real, ongoing cost. With Shopify Payments (the built-in processor), online rates are about **2.9% + 30¢ per transaction on Basic**, dropping to 2.7% on Grow, 2.5% on Advanced, and around 2.15% on Plus. If you use a third-party gateway (like PayPal or Stripe) instead of Shopify Payments, Shopify adds a surcharge of roughly 0.5%–2% on top depending on your plan, which is why most stores use Shopify Payments. On a typical order, processing works out to around 3% of revenue, budget for it as a cost of every sale.

## Domain

Your store needs a web address. Shopify gives you a free `yourstore.myshopify.com` subdomain automatically, but for a professional brand you want a **custom domain** (`yourstore.com`). A domain costs roughly **\$10–\$20 per year** for a standard `.com`, whether you buy it through Shopify or an external registrar like Namecheap or GoDaddy and connect it. This is a small but recurring cost; premium or highly sought-after domain names can cost far more, but most new stores pay the standard annual rate.

## Theme (store design)

Your theme controls how the store looks. Shopify offers **free themes** (Dawn, Craft, Sense, and others) that are genuinely capable in 2026 and enough for many stores to launch and sell. If you want more design polish or built-in conversion features, **premium themes cost a one-time fee of roughly \$150–\$400** from the Shopify theme store. At the high end, a **custom-designed and developed store** can cost anywhere from several thousand to tens of thousands of dollars, an investment that only makes sense for established or well-funded brands, not a first launch.

## Apps

Apps extend your store with features Shopify does not include out of the box, email marketing, product reviews, upsells, subscriptions, SMS, analytics, and more. This is where ongoing costs can quietly balloon. Many apps are free or cheap, but paid apps typically run **\$5–\$50+ per month each**, and a typical store ends up running a dozen or more.

Realistically:

- A **lean new store** can launch with mostly free apps, spending **\$0-\$50/month**.
- A **growing store** commonly spends **\$50-\$200/month** on essential paid apps (a good email tool, reviews, perhaps an upsell app).
- A **scaling/mid-market store** can spend **\$350-\$1,400/month** across a full stack (email/SMS, reviews, subscriptions, analytics, and more).

The lesson: add apps deliberately. Each should earn its monthly fee. App bloat, stacking subscriptions you do not really use, is one of the most common ways store owners erode their budget.

### Platform cost summary

For a beginner, the realistic *platform* cost to launch is modest: a \$39 plan, a ~\$15/year domain, a free or ~\$200 theme, and minimal apps. That is well under \$100/month plus the domain, often under \$300 all-in for the first few months. The bigger money is in the next two categories.

## 3. Marketing Costs

Here is the cost that surprises new store owners most, and the one that most often decides whether a store succeeds: **marketing**. On a marketplace like Amazon or eBay, buyers are already there searching, you pay a high platform fee, but the traffic comes built in. On Shopify, you own a beautiful store that, by default, no one knows exists. Every visitor has to be earned or bought. That makes marketing typically the **largest cost of running a Shopify store**, and a line you must budget for from day one.

### Paid advertising

The fastest way to get traffic is paid ads, on Meta (Facebook/Instagram), Google, and TikTok. The key number to understand is **customer acquisition cost (CAC)**: what you spend in ads to get one paying customer. Across ecommerce, CAC commonly runs **\$45-\$175 per customer**, with the median direct-to-consumer brand spending well over \$100, and it has risen sharply in recent years. Put differently, **ad spend often consumes 20-35% of a store's revenue**.

For a new store, this means you should budget a real testing amount, at least a few hundred dollars, to learn what works, and expect to spend money before you make it back. A common beginner mistake is launching with no ad budget and assuming "if I build it, they will come." On Shopify, they will not, unless you bring them.

### Email and SMS marketing

Your highest-converting, lowest-cost channel over time is your own audience: email and SMS subscribers. A good email/SMS tool (Klaviyo is the common choice) often starts free or cheap and scales with your list size into the tens or hundreds of dollars a month. This is

one of the best marketing investments you can make, because once someone is on your list, reaching them again is essentially free, and email consistently converts several times better than cold ad traffic. Budget a small monthly amount here from the start.

### **Content, SEO, and organic**

Organic channels, SEO content, social media, short-form video, cost time rather than direct dollars, which makes them attractive for lean budgets. They are slower to pay off than ads but build durable, lower-cost traffic. If you outsource content, photography, or social management, those become real line items (a freelancer or agency can run from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars a month).

### **Influencers, UGC, and branding**

Optional but increasingly common: paying creators for user-generated content or influencer promotion, which can range from free product gifting to thousands of dollars per campaign. Branding (a logo, visual identity) and professional product photography are one-time costs that can be done cheaply (DIY or a few hundred dollars on a freelance marketplace) or expensively (a full agency brand package).

The honest summary: **plan to spend more on marketing than on the platform itself.** Even a lean store should budget for an email tool and at least a modest ad-testing fund; a serious launch budgets thousands for ads and content. Marketing is not the place to assume costs will be zero.

## **4. Product Costs**

What you sell, and how you source it, is the other big swing in your startup budget, and it depends heavily on your business model.

### **Holding inventory (private label / wholesale)**

If you buy or manufacture products to stock and ship yourself, **inventory is your largest upfront cost**, and you pay it *before* you sell anything. You will also likely pay for **samples** (to check quality before a bulk order) and meet **minimum order quantities (MOQs)** from suppliers, which can require buying dozens or hundreds of units at once. The advantage is control and margin; the cost is real cash tied up in stock that may not sell. A modest first inventory order might be a few hundred to a few thousand dollars; a serious one, much more.

### **Dropshipping**

With dropshipping, a supplier ships products to your customers only after you make a sale, so you hold **no inventory and have almost no upfront product cost.** This is why it is popular for lean starts. The trade-offs are thin margins, less control over quality and

shipping times, and heavy dependence on ads, but the startup product cost is essentially zero. You pay the supplier per order, out of each sale.

### **Print-on-demand (POD)**

POD (custom-printed apparel, mugs, art, and so on) works like dropshipping: items are made and shipped per order, so there is **no upfront inventory**. It is ideal for designs and niche merchandise, with low risk and modest margins. Startup product cost is near zero; you pay the base cost per item as sales come in.

### **Handmade / made-to-order**

If you make products yourself, your cost is **materials plus your time**. This keeps upfront cash low (buy materials as needed) but limits how fast you can scale.

### **Packaging and fulfillment**

Whatever the model, factor in **packaging** (boxes, mailers, inserts, branded touches) and **shipping** costs. If you fulfill yourself, that is supplies and postage; if you use a third-party logistics provider (3PL) as you grow, that is storage and per-order fees. Many stores offer "free shipping" and build the cost into their prices, but it is still a real cost you absorb.

The takeaway: **your business model sets your upfront product cost**. Dropshipping and POD let you start with almost nothing in product costs (trading margin for low risk), while holding inventory requires real upfront cash but offers more control and better margins. Choose the model that matches your budget and goals.

## **5. Budget Scenarios**

Now let's put it all together. Here are three realistic ways to start a Shopify store, lean, moderate, and premium, with itemized costs. Treat these as illustrative templates; your exact numbers will vary.

### **Low-budget scenario: starting lean (~\$100-\$500 to launch)**

This is the bootstrapper's path: validate your idea with minimal risk, using a no-inventory model and mostly organic marketing.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Shopify Basic plan	\$39/month (or ~\$1/month promo to start)
Domain	~\$15/year
Theme	Free (Dawn)
Apps	Free / minimal (\$0-\$30/month)
Product	Dropshipping or POD (no upfront inventory)
Marketing	Mostly organic + small ad test (\$0-\$200)
Branding/photos	DIY (free)
<b>Launch total</b>	<b>~\$100-\$500</b>
<b>Ongoing</b>	<b>~\$50-\$100/month + any ad spend</b>

This approach gets a real, professional store live for the price of a nice dinner out, plus your subscription. The constraint is traffic: with little ad budget, you rely on organic reach, which is slower, so this path rewards patience and content effort. It is the smartest way for most beginners to *start*, prove demand, then reinvest.

### **Medium-budget scenario: a serious start (~\$1,000-\$5,000 to launch)**

This is for someone treating the store as a real business from day one, with some inventory and a genuine marketing budget to drive early sales.

Item	Cost
Shopify Basic or Grow plan	\$39-\$105/month
Domain	~\$15/year
Premium theme	\$200-\$350 (one-time)
Apps (email, reviews, upsell)	\$50-\$150/month
Initial inventory	\$500-\$2,000
Branding + product photos	\$200-\$800
Ad budget (testing)	\$500-\$2,000
<b>Launch total</b>	<b>~\$1,000-\$5,000</b>
<b>Ongoing</b>	<b>~\$200-\$500/month + ad spend</b>

Here you can hold a modest inventory (better margins than dropshipping), present a more polished brand, and, crucially, fund a real ad-testing budget to find what converts. Most of the spend is split between inventory and marketing, exactly where it should be. This budget gives a store a genuine chance to gain traction within its first few months.

### **Premium-budget scenario: a funded launch (\$10,000-\$50,000+ to launch)**

This is for a well-capitalized brand or an experienced operator launching at scale, with custom design, substantial inventory, and aggressive marketing.

Item	Cost
Shopify Advanced (or Plus) plan	\$399-\$2,300+/month
Domain	~\$15/year (or premium domain purchase)
Custom design/development	\$5,000-\$50,000+
Full app stack (email/SMS, reviews, subscriptions, analytics)	\$300-\$1,400/month
Significant inventory	\$5,000-\$20,000+
Professional branding + photography	\$2,000-\$10,000
Ad budget + agency/influencers	\$5,000-\$20,000+/month
<b>Launch total</b>	<b>~\$10,000-\$50,000+</b>
<b>Ongoing</b>	<b>thousands/month</b>

At this level, the store is a fully-built brand from day one: custom storefront, deep inventory, professional creative, and the marketing firepower to scale fast. The risk is obvious, large sums are committed before the market validates the product, which is why this path suits those with capital, experience, or proven demand, not first-timers testing an idea.

### Which scenario is right?

For most beginners, **start with the low-budget scenario**, prove that people want your product with minimal risk, then graduate to the medium budget as you reinvest early profits. The premium path is for those who have either validated demand or have capital to deploy and the experience to deploy it well. The beauty of Shopify is that you can start small and scale your spending in step with your results, rather than betting everything upfront.

## 6. Common Mistakes

**Budgeting only for the subscription.** The \$39 plan is the cheapest part of running a store. Beginners who plan only for the subscription get blindsided by marketing and inventory costs. Budget for all four categories.

**Assuming traffic is free.** The most expensive mistake. Shopify brings no customers; you must earn or buy every visitor. Launching with zero marketing budget and waiting for sales is how most stores quietly fail. Plan to spend on marketing from day one.

**Over-investing in design before validating.** Spending thousands on a custom build or premium everything before you know people want your product is backwards. A free theme can sell just as well while you validate demand. Spend on design after the product is proven, not before.

**App bloat.** It is easy to stack a dozen \$20-\$50 apps until they cost more than your plan. Add apps only when each clearly earns its fee, and audit them regularly.

**Overbuying inventory.** Committing thousands to stock before you have sales is risky. Start with a small order (or a no-inventory model) to test demand, then scale orders based on real sales data.

**Ignoring ongoing costs.** Startup cost is not the whole story. Apps, payment processing, domain renewal, and especially marketing are recurring. Budget your *monthly* running cost, not just your launch cost.

**Choosing the wrong plan for your stage.** Paying for Advanced or Plus before your volume justifies the lower fees wastes money; staying on Basic when high volume would make an upgrade pay for itself also costs you. Match your plan to your sales.

**Forgetting the payment-processing fee.** That ~2.9% + 30¢ on every sale is a real cost that affects your margins. Factor it into your pricing, and avoid the third-party-gateway surcharge by using Shopify Payments unless you have a specific reason not to.

**Underestimating customer acquisition cost.** With CAC often over \$100, a store whose product margin cannot cover acquisition will lose money on every sale. Know your numbers before scaling ad spend.

## 7. FAQ

### **How much does it cost to start a Shopify store?**

It depends on your approach. You can start lean for roughly **\$100-\$500** (Basic plan, free theme, a dropshipping or print-on-demand model, and mostly organic marketing), spend **\$1,000-\$5,000** for a serious start with some inventory and an ad budget, or invest **\$10,000-\$50,000+** for a premium, custom-built launch. The Shopify subscription itself is the smallest part; marketing and inventory drive the real cost.

### **How much is Shopify per month?**

Shopify's plans are about **\$39/month for Basic**, \$105 for Grow, \$399 for Advanced, and from \$2,300 for Plus, with roughly 25% savings on annual billing. There is also a \$5 Starter plan for selling via links rather than a full store. Most beginners start on Basic. New stores can usually try Shopify on a free trial and a low introductory rate for the first few months.

You get a free `yourstore.myshopify.com` subdomain automatically, but for a professional brand you should buy a custom domain (`yourstore.com`), which costs about **\$10-\$20 per year**. You can buy it through Shopify or an external registrar and connect it. It is a small but recurring cost worth paying for credibility.

### **How much do Shopify apps cost?**

Many apps are free, and paid apps typically cost **\$5-\$50+ per month each**. A lean new store can launch spending \$0-\$50/month on apps, a growing store often spends \$50-\$200/month on essentials like email and reviews, and a larger store can spend \$350-\$1,400/month on a full stack. Add apps only when each earns its cost, since app subscriptions add up quickly.

### **What's the biggest cost of running a Shopify store?**

Usually **marketing**. Because Shopify sends you no traffic, you pay to acquire every customer, often \$45-\$175 each, and ad spend commonly consumes 20-35% of revenue. Inventory is the other big cost if you hold stock. The subscription, by contrast, is typically the smallest line in the budget.

### **Can I start a Shopify store with no money for inventory?**

Yes, by using **dropshipping or print-on-demand**, where products are made and shipped only after a customer orders, so you hold no stock and have almost no upfront product cost. The trade-off is thinner margins and less control. Holding your own inventory costs more upfront but offers better margins and control.

### **Do I need to spend money on ads?**

Not strictly, you can grow through organic channels (SEO, content, social, email), which cost time rather than direct dollars. But organic growth is slower, so most stores that want sales quickly budget at least a few hundred dollars to test paid ads. The key is not to assume traffic will appear on its own; Shopify provides the store, not the customers.

### **How much should I budget for marketing?**

Plan to spend more on marketing than on the platform. A lean store should at least fund an email tool and a small ad-testing budget (a few hundred dollars); a serious launch budgets thousands for ads and content. As a rule of thumb, expect marketing to consume a meaningful share of revenue (often 20-35%) once you are running ads.

### **Is the cheapest plan enough to start?**

For a real storefront, **Basic (\$39/month) is the right starting plan**, it includes everything you need to launch and sell. The \$5 Starter plan only supports selling through links and

social posts, not a full store, so it is not suitable for most new businesses. Upgrade to higher plans later, when your sales volume makes the lower processing fees worth the higher subscription.

### **What are the hidden costs of Shopify?**

The ones beginners overlook are payment-processing fees (~2.9% + 30¢ per sale), the third-party-gateway surcharge if you do not use Shopify Payments, app subscriptions that accumulate, domain renewals, premium themes, and, above all, marketing. None of these appear in the headline plan price, so build them into your budget from the start.

## **8. Conclusion**

So, how much does it cost to start a Shopify store? Anywhere from a few hundred dollars to tens of thousands, and the reason the range is so wide is that the Shopify subscription, the number everyone fixates on, is the smallest piece of the puzzle. The real costs live in three places: the apps and domain that round out your platform, the products or inventory you choose to sell, and above all the marketing required to bring customers to a store that the platform itself will not fill for you. Understand those proportions and you understand Shopify's true cost.

The most important lesson is to budget for the whole picture, not just the plan. A store can run on a \$39 subscription and still need an email tool, a few essential apps, a domain, product costs, and a marketing budget that often dwarfs everything else, because on Shopify, unlike a marketplace, you pay to acquire every visitor. The stores that fail rarely do so because the subscription was too expensive; they fail because they never budgeted for the traffic and inventory that turn a storefront into a business.

The encouraging reality is that Shopify scales to your budget. You can start lean for a few hundred dollars, using a free theme, a no-inventory model, and organic marketing to validate that people actually want your product, then reinvest your early profits into inventory, better design, and paid ads as you grow. That low-risk, prove-then-scale path is the right one for most beginners. Whatever budget you choose, plan for all four cost categories, spend on marketing from day one, add apps and inventory deliberately rather than all at once, and let your results, not your optimism, decide when to spend more. Do that, and you will start your store on a budget you can sustain, and give it a real chance to grow into a profitable business.

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*Shopify pricing and typical ecommerce costs reflect figures as of mid-2026 and change over time; actual costs vary by plan, region, billing term, business model, product category, and marketing approach. Always verify current rates on Shopify's pricing page before committing. This guide is general educational information, not financial advice.*