

Beehiiv vs. Mailchimp vs. Constant Contact vs. Substack vs. ConvertKit

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Unvarnished Reviews Research

This report synthesizes data from 15,000+ verified user reviews and practitioner community posts collected from G2, Capterra, TrustRadius (Substack 6.8/10), Reddit r/emailmarketing and r/MailChimp, and independent pricing analyses. Pricing data reflects vendor pricing pages and documented pricing history current as of June 2026. Full research methodology at unvarnishedreviews.com/methodology. Research Notes available on request at editorial@unvarnishedreviews.com.

The Verdict Up Front

Mailchimp is the world's most recognized email marketing platform, and the platform whose post-acquisition trajectory has become a case study in what Cory Doctorow calls "enshittification." Since Intuit acquired Mailchimp for \$12 billion in 2021, the free plan has shrunk from 2,000 contacts to 250 contacts, an 87.5% reduction in four years. Automation was stripped from the free tier entirely by mid-2025. Paid plans increased 30%-33% between 2022 and 2024. Legacy account holders received an 11%-13% increase in April 2026 with minimal notice. A Reddit thread titled "Thank you MailChimp for increasing pricing for the third time since 2023" appeared in April 2026 and immediately drew references to enshittification. One user reported a \$160 bill on a plan expected to cost \$60. The product is functional. The commercial trajectory is documented and consistent: Mailchimp is moving upmarket and the small business and creator audience it was built for is no longer its priority.

Beehiiv is the newsletter-native platform built by former Morning Brew employees who understood from day one what newsletter operators actually need. Free plan to 2,500 subscribers with no feature restrictions. Built-in recommendation network, boosts monetization, referral programs, and a web publication layer that makes the newsletter a proper owned media property. G2 and Capterra reviewers consistently describe it as purpose-built for newsletter publishing in ways that Mailchimp and Constant Contact, both built for broadcast email marketing, are not.

Constant Contact is the small business email marketing standard, simpler than Mailchimp, more straightforward pricing, and a reputation for strong customer support. Its documented liability: it requires a phone call to cancel. In 2026, a platform that requires a phone call to cancel is making a deliberate commercial choice about subscriber retention that belongs in every evaluation.

Substack is the writer's platform, the simplest path from idea to paying subscribers, with a built-in discovery network of 20+ million readers. It takes 10% of subscription revenue. For writers who want to build a paid publication with minimal technical overhead and access to Substack's audience, it is the most appropriate choice. For businesses and brands that need data ownership, custom branding, and control over subscriber relationships, Substack's walled garden is a liability.

ConvertKit (now Kit) rebranded in late 2024 to reflect its evolution from an email tool into a broader creator operating system. Its free plan is the most generous in the category, 10,000 subscribers with unlimited sends and a built-in recommendation engine. For creators who want to earn money from newsletters through digital product sales and paid subscriptions, Kit's commerce integration is the strongest in the category.

Recommendations: For newsletter publishers and independent research brands: Beehiiv. For small businesses needing broadcast email marketing with simple automation: Constant Contact. For writers building paid publications: Substack until revenue warrants switching. For creators selling digital products: Kit. For organizations currently on Mailchimp: model your actual cost trajectory before renewing, the direction of travel is documented and consistent.

The Mailchimp Enshittification Timeline

This section deserves its own heading because the pattern is documented, sourced, and directly relevant to every organization currently on Mailchimp.

Free plan contact limit reduction:

- 2022: 2,000 contacts
- 2023: 500 contacts
- 2026: 250 contacts (500 in some sources, conflicting, both represent dramatic reduction from 2,000)

Automation stripped from free tier: Mid-2025. Previously, basic automation was available on free. Now requires paid Standard plan.

Paid plan price increases:

- Essentials (500 contacts): \$9.99 (2022) → \$13 (2026), +30%
- Standard (500 contacts): \$14.99 (2022) → \$20 (2026), +33%
- April 2026: Legacy accounts (pre-May 2019) hit with 11%-13% increase

The hidden cost that compounds: Mailchimp counts unsubscribed, non-subscribed, and duplicate contacts toward your plan limit. An organization with 5,000 active subscribers and 3,000 unsubscribes is paying for 8,000 contacts unless they manually clean their list regularly. This is documented as the most common billing surprise in r/MailChimp threads.

Overage charges are automatic and opaque: When your contact list exceeds the plan limit mid-billing cycle, Mailchimp charges overage fees automatically. The overage rates are not published on the pricing page.

The Reddit community response: In April 2026, practitioners on r/MailChimp applied the enshittification framework to Mailchimp unprompted, the reference to a concept describing platforms that degrade their product to extract more value from captive users appeared organically in community threads. One user wrote: "Yeah, I was not too happy yesterday when Mailchimp told me they're jacking my bill up for the second time in a year, doubling my fee. I don't need any bullshit new features, I just need to send emails. And I'm not paying \$308 a month to send to 7K subs."

Platform Ratings at a Glance

Platform	G2	Capterra	TrustRadius
Mailchimp	4.4 / 5	4.5 / 5	Strong
Beehiiv	4.6 / 5	4.6 / 5	Positive
Constant Contact	4.0 / 5	4.3 / 5	Moderate
Substack	Not rated	Not rated	6.8 / 10
ConvertKit/Kit	4.4 / 5	4.4 / 5	Strong

Who Each Platform Is Built For

Mailchimp was built for small businesses sending broadcast marketing emails, promotions, newsletters, announcements. It remains functional for this use case. Its current commercial trajectory is optimized for enterprise customers, not the small businesses and creators who built its reputation.

Beehiiv is built for newsletter publishers, individuals and organizations for whom the newsletter is the primary content and audience relationship vehicle. Its recommendation network, boosts monetization, referral programs, and publication layer are purpose-built for newsletter growth in ways that general email marketing platforms are not.

Constant Contact is built for small businesses that want straightforward email marketing with phone support, less technically complex than Mailchimp, more hand-holding available, and simpler pricing.

Substack is built for writers who want to publish and monetize written content with minimal technical overhead. Its 10% revenue cut is the price of its simplicity and distribution network.

ConvertKit/Kit is built for creators who sell digital products, courses, templates, memberships, and want their email list integrated with their commerce infrastructure.

What Users Report

Mailchimp: What Works

G2 and Capterra reviewers consistently praise ease of use for basic campaigns, the drag-and-drop editor, and template variety. For organizations that need to send a straightforward promotional email to a list under 500 contacts, Mailchimp's interface is accessible and well-documented.

Integration depth, Mailchimp connects with Shopify, WooCommerce, Salesforce, and hundreds of other platforms, is specifically cited as a strength for organizations with complex marketing stacks.

Mailchimp: What Doesn't Work

The billing model is the defining complaint. Documented above in detail. The combination of counting unsubscribed contacts, automatic overage charges, opaque overage rates, stripped free tier, and documented annual price increases since the 2021 Intuit acquisition has generated sustained community frustration across G2, Capterra, and Reddit. "Expensive" appears in 81 G2 reviews. "Limited Features" in 58. The platform that was built for small businesses has been rebuilt for enterprise.

Custom domains cost \$9/month extra, \$108/year on top of the plan price for Mailchimp landing pages.

Pay-as-you-go credits expire after 12 months, previously they never expired. Policy changed.

The Classic Automation Builder was deprecated June 2025, removing automation from the Essentials tier entirely.

Beehiiv: What Works

G2 and Capterra reviewers consistently praise the creator-focused approach, the all-in-one platform consolidation, and the recommendation network for audience growth.

The recommendation network, where Beehiiv newsletters recommend each other to new subscribers, is a distinctive audience growth mechanism that no competing platform matches. Practitioners report open rates of 40%-60% for engaged audiences, which reflects the newsletter-native audience quality.

The free plan to 2,500 subscribers with no feature restrictions is the most generous entry point in the category for newsletter publishers. No automation stripping, no template limitations, no Beehiiv branding removal fee.

As one G2 reviewer described: "the platform is easy to use and intuitive, but that's table stakes. What I truly value is that beehiiv is made by industry experts" who understand newsletter challenges.

Beehiiv: What Doesn't Work

Pricing steepens above the free tier. The Scale plan at \$99/month and Max plan at \$199/month are expensive for small newsletters that have grown past 2,500 subscribers but haven't yet monetized significantly.

No drag-and-drop email builder, Beehiiv uses an inline text editor. For publishers who want heavily designed HTML emails with complex layouts, this is a limitation. For text-first newsletter publishers, it's irrelevant.

Focused on newsletters, not broadcast email marketing. Organizations that need ecommerce integrations, complex behavioral automation, or CRM-connected email sequences will find Beehiiv's focus on newsletter publishing limiting.

Constant Contact: What Works

Reviewers consistently cite customer support quality and ease of use as Constant Contact's primary strengths. Phone support availability, increasingly rare in SaaS, is specifically valued by small business owners who want human help.

Pricing is more predictable than Mailchimp, Constant Contact counts only active subscribers, not unsubscribed contacts. This eliminates the "paying for contacts who will never see your emails" complaint that dominates Mailchimp threads.

Constant Contact: What Doesn't Work

Requires a phone call to cancel. This is documented and deliberate. In 2026, requiring a phone call to cancel a SaaS subscription is a commercial retention tactic. Organizations that value frictionless subscription management should factor this in.

G2 rating of 4.0/5 is the lowest in this comparison, reflecting an older platform that has not kept pace with modern newsletter and creator-focused features.

Pricing above competitors for equivalent feature sets at mid-list sizes.

Substack: What Works

Simplicity and built-in distribution are Substack's competitive advantages. The 20+ million reader discovery network means new publications can find audiences without external marketing. For writers who want to start publishing immediately without technical setup, Substack is the most frictionless path.

Substack: What Doesn't Work

10% revenue cut on paid subscriptions, Substack takes 10% of every dollar subscribers pay. At \$10/month with 1,000 paid subscribers, that's \$12,000/year going to Substack. At scale, this becomes a significant cost that all alternatives avoid.

Customer support is "not present", TrustRadius reviewers consistently cite unresponsive support. Substack's community-driven support model means most issues require self-service resolution.

Data ownership concerns. Subscriber email addresses on Substack are exportable but the platform relationship creates dependency on Substack's continued operation and policies.

No API access, limits integration with external tools and automation platforms.

ConvertKit/Kit: What Works

The free plan to 10,000 subscribers with unlimited sends is the most generous free tier in the category for high-volume senders. The built-in recommendation engine for cross-promotions is an effective audience growth tool. Commerce integration, selling digital products directly from the email platform, is the strongest in the comparison.

ConvertKit/Kit: What Doesn't Work

Revenue fee on commerce: 0.5%-0.6% of revenue on the free plan. At \$50,000 in annual product revenue, that's \$250-\$300/year to Kit, modest but worth noting.

Less newsletter-native than Beehiiv. Kit's web publication layer and newsletter-specific features are less mature than Beehiiv's purpose-built newsletter infrastructure.

Pricing Reality (June 2026)

Mailchimp

Plan	Price	Contacts	Key Limitation
Free	\$0	250 contacts, 500 emails/month	No automation, no scheduling
Essentials	\$13/month	500 contacts	Single-step automation only
Standard	\$20/month	500 contacts	Multi-step automation starts here
Premium	\$350/month	10,000 contacts	Full features

At 5,000 contacts: Standard costs \$100/month. At 10,000 contacts: \$135/month. Counts unsubscribed contacts. Overage charges automatic and unpublished.

Beehiiv

Plan	Price	Subscribers
Launch (Free)	\$0	Up to 2,500
Grow	\$42/month (annual)	Up to 10,000
Scale	\$84/month (annual)	Up to 100,000
Max	\$199/month (annual)	100,000+

Constant Contact

Plan	Price	Notes
Lite	\$12/month	Basic email
Standard	\$35/month	Automation, segmentation
Premium	\$80/month	Advanced features

Substack

Plan	Price	Notes
Free to publish	\$0	Free newsletters unlimited
Paid subscriptions	10% revenue cut	Substack takes 10% of all paid subscriptions

ConvertKit / Kit

Plan	Price	Subscribers
Free	\$0	Up to 10,000
Creator	\$25/month (annual)	Unlimited subscribers, automation
Creator Pro	\$50/month (annual)	Advanced analytics, team features

The Decision Framework

Choose Beehiiv if:

- Your primary use case is publishing a newsletter, not broadcast marketing email
- You want a free plan to 2,500 subscribers with no feature restrictions
- Audience growth through recommendations, referrals, and boosts is a priority
- You want a web publication layer that makes your newsletter a proper owned media property
- You are building an independent research, media, or creator brand

Choose Mailchimp if:

- You specifically need deep ecommerce integrations (Shopify, WooCommerce) that Beehiiv and Substack don't match
- You are already on Mailchimp with a well-managed list below 5,000 contacts where the cost trajectory is acceptable
- You have explicitly modeled your cost at 12, 24, and 36 months and the trajectory is within budget
- You are not on a legacy plan subject to the April 2026 price increase

Choose Constant Contact if:

- Phone support availability is a genuine operational requirement
- You prefer predictable contact counting (active subscribers only)
- You are a small business sending straightforward marketing emails without complex automation needs
- You have read and accepted the phone-call cancellation requirement

Choose Substack if:

- You are a writer building a paid publication and Substack's 20+ million reader discovery network is worth 10% of revenue
- Minimal technical setup is the primary requirement
- You are willing to export your subscriber list if you outgrow Substack

Choose ConvertKit/Kit if:

- You sell digital products (courses, templates, memberships) and want email and commerce integrated
- The 10,000-subscriber free plan is a priority
- Creator-economy workflows, landing pages, product sales, cross-promotions, are central to your model

The pre-signing checklist for Mailchimp specifically:

1. Count your total contacts including unsubscribed, that's what Mailchimp bills you for
2. Model your contact count growth at 12 and 24 months, identify which tier you'll be in
3. Calculate cost at that tier, including the documented trend of annual increases

4. Compare against Beehiiv, Constant Contact, or Kit at the same contact volume
5. Verify whether you're on a legacy pre-2019 plan subject to the April 2026 increase

The Bottom Line

The newsletter platform market has fractured into two distinct categories that buyers frequently confuse: broadcast email marketing (Mailchimp, Constant Contact) and newsletter publishing (Beehiiv, Substack, Kit). Choosing a broadcast email marketing platform for a newsletter is a category mismatch, and vice versa.

Mailchimp remains functional and widely integrated. Its post-Intuit trajectory, documented annual price increases, free plan degradation, automation stripping, and the Reddit community's enshittification framing, is the most important data point for any organization evaluating a multi-year commitment. The platform that was built for small businesses has been rebuilt for enterprise. If you are a small business or creator on Mailchimp, you are not the audience they are optimizing for.

Beehiiv is the most appropriate choice for newsletter publishers in 2026, purpose-built, free to 2,500 subscribers, with the recommendation network and monetization tools that general email marketing platforms don't offer. For independent research brands, media companies, and creator businesses where the newsletter is the primary audience relationship vehicle, Beehiiv is the category leader.

Constant Contact is the most appropriate choice for small businesses that value phone support and predictable pricing over newsletter-specific features.

Substack is the most appropriate choice for writers building paid publications who value distribution over data ownership.

ConvertKit/Kit is the most appropriate choice for creators who sell digital products and want the most generous free tier in the category.