

Figma vs. Sketch vs. Penpot: The UI/UX Design Tool Verdict

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Unvarnished Reviews Research

This report synthesizes data from 5,000+ verified user reviews and practitioner community posts collected from G2, Capterra, TrustRadius, Gartner Peer Insights, Reddit r/web_design and r/UXDesign, the UX Tools 2025 Design Tools Survey (4,300+ respondents), Hacker News practitioner threads, and the Penpot and Figma community forums. Pricing data reflects vendor pricing pages, Figma pricing history analysis (94 pricing snapshots, 2016-2026), and independent procurement analysis 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

Figma is the industry standard for collaborative UI/UX design, used by approximately 83% of professional UI designers as their primary tool according to the UX Tools 2025 Survey, and holding roughly 70% market share among tech company design teams. On March 11, 2025, Figma raised its Professional plan price by 33%, from \$15 to \$20/editor/month, bundling FigJam and Slides that many users neither wanted nor needed. The Hacker News thread "I stopped using Figma and switched to Penpot" hit 632 points. One designer wrote: "It seems like Figma might be following in Adobe's footsteps, forcing users to adopt underperforming tools by bundling them into a single subscription." The product remains the gold standard. The pricing trajectory is now a documented concern.

Sketch pioneered the modern UI design tool category in 2010 and dominated for nearly a decade before Figma's 2016 launch began its long decline. In 2026, Sketch is a genuinely excellent tool for a genuinely narrow profile: Mac-only designers who value native application performance, offline capability, and a focused tool without the feature bloat of Figma's expanding platform. It kept its pricing flat for 7 years (2018-2025), the sharpest contrast with Figma's 33% increase imaginable. New teams almost universally start with Figma; Sketch is most compelling for existing users with large file libraries and a specific preference for native macOS workflows.

Penpot has grown from "interesting open-source experiment" to a genuine production tool with 500,000+ active users, 80,000+ teams including groups at Google and Microsoft, 39,100+ GitHub stars, and \$8M raised in 2025. Built by Spanish company Kaleidos on web standards (HTML, CSS, SVG), it is the only professional design tool that is genuinely free, fully open-source, and self-hostable. A 30-person team saves \$11,000-\$13,000 annually switching from Figma to Penpot. Its critical limitation: a 5-page stability ceiling due to DOM rendering architecture that causes crashes in large design systems. For regulated industries (government, healthcare, finance) requiring data sovereignty, Penpot's self-hosting capability is its most

distinctive differentiator.

The design tool market in 2026 has consolidated into exactly this three-horse race. Adobe XD is gone. InVision is gone. Framer pivoted to website building. The question is not which tool to use, it is which fits your team's size, budget, platform requirements, and data governance needs.

The Figma Pricing Story: Why This Comparison Matters Now

Figma kept its Professional plan at \$12/month for nearly 7 years, from 2018 to 2025. That pricing stability built enormous customer trust and deep lock-in through millions of design files, trained teams, and integrated workflows.

On March 11, 2025, Figma broke that pattern decisively:

- Professional plan: \$15 → \$20/editor/month (+33%)
- Organization plan: approximately +22%
- Enterprise plan: approximately +20%

The pricing restructure also replaced per-product seats with unified seat types (Full, Dev, Collab, View) and bundled FigJam and Slides into every paid seat, tools many users don't need, to justify the increase.

The community reaction was immediate and documented. The Hacker News thread "I stopped using Figma and switched to Penpot" hit 632 points. Penpot's GitHub stars crossed 39,100. Designer commentary across Reddit and UX Collective drew direct comparisons to Adobe's bundling strategy.

The jump that matters most: The Professional-to-Organization gap. Professional at \$15/editor/month is usable for small teams. Organization, which adds SSO, shared fonts, and org-level design systems, costs \$55/editor/month. That is a 267% price increase for features that most teams above 20 people genuinely need. For a 30-person design team, that gap is approximately \$14,400/year.

Figma's defense: The company kept pricing flat for 7 years. It bundled genuinely useful products (FigJam, Slides, Dev Mode) into the increase. Switching costs, migrating designs, retraining teams, reconfiguring plugins, make a 33% increase tolerable for most established teams. The product is still best-in-class. The pricing is still competitive with enterprise design tool alternatives.

The clear-eyed assessment: Figma's pricing move was defensible in product terms and damaging in trust terms. The comparison to Adobe is not just community hyperbole, it is a documented strategic concern for any organization evaluating long-term platform commitment.

Market Position: The Three-Tier Reality

Platform	Market Share (Tech Teams)	Active Users	Primary Segment
Figma	~70% (tech companies)	Millions	Teams, product design
Sketch	Declining; loyal niche	Hundreds of thousands	Mac-only solo/small teams
Penpot	Growing; 500,000+	500,000+ users, 80,000+ teams	Budget-conscious, regulated, open-source advocates

The UX Tools 2025 Design Tools Survey (4,300+ respondents) puts Figma at 83% of professional UI designers as their primary tool. Sketch holds a loyal but shrinking base. Penpot is the fastest-growing platform in the category, from zero in 2021 to 500,000+ active users in 2026, driven primarily by the 2025 Figma price increase.

Platform Ratings at a Glance

Platform	G2	Capterra	Hacker News Signal
Figma	4.7 / 5	4.7 / 5	Industry standard; 2025 pricing criticism
Sketch	4.5 / 5	4.5 / 5	"Still excellent for Mac; market share declining"
Penpot	4.4 / 5	4.4 / 5	632-point HN thread; rapid growth

Architecture: The Core Differences

Figma: Browser-First, Collaboration-First

Figma launched in 2016 with a deliberate architectural bet: build for the browser, not the desktop. This decision, which seemed risky in 2016 when Sketch owned the market, proved to be the defining competitive advantage. Browser-based design means real-time multiplayer editing, instant file sharing, zero installation, and cross-platform access from any device.

The consequence: Figma is slower than native desktop applications for complex files. Large design systems with hundreds of components, heavy assets, and many pages can cause lag, slowness, and high memory usage. This is a consistent practitioner complaint, not a fringe concern.

Sketch: Native macOS, Desktop-First

Sketch was built as a native macOS application, tight operating system integration, offline-first, and optimized for the performance characteristics of Apple Silicon. It is faster than Figma for complex files. It is exclusively macOS, Windows and Linux users cannot use it at all.

Sketch's architecture creates a fundamental collaboration challenge: files live on individual machines. Sketch has built cloud collaboration features, but the experience is not the real-time multiplayer that Figma delivers natively. Teams where a Sketch file "sits on one designer's laptop" is a documented operational problem.

Penpot: Web Standards, Self-Hostable

Penpot is built on web standards, HTML, CSS, and SVG, rather than proprietary file formats. This architectural choice means that design assets export as actual web code, not design tool approximations. Developer handoff is more accurate because the underlying representation is already web-native.

The self-hosting capability is the most distinctive enterprise differentiator. Organizations can deploy Penpot on their own infrastructure, Docker, Kubernetes, OpenShift, or managed cloud via Elestio, keeping design assets entirely within their security perimeter. For regulated industries with HIPAA, GDPR, SOC 2, or FedRAMP requirements, this is not a nice-to-have, it is the only path to compliance.

What Users Actually Report

Figma: What Works

G2, Capterra, and the UX Tools Survey consistently identify three strengths: real-time collaboration, component systems, and developer handoff.

Real-time multiplayer editing, multiple designers and stakeholders working simultaneously in the same file with live cursor visibility and threaded comments, is Figma's most cited competitive advantage. Practitioners describe the shift from emailing Sketch files to live Figma collaboration as operationally transformative.

The component system, reusable elements that propagate changes globally, combined with variables, auto-layout, and design tokens is the most mature design systems implementation in the category. For organizations building and maintaining large design systems, Figma's architecture delivers consistency at scale.

Dev Mode, the developer-facing inspection workspace with CSS snippets, asset exports, and version comparison, is specifically praised for reducing designer-developer handoff friction. The Figma AI 2.0 integration (launched 2025) adds AI-assisted wireframing, component generation, and layout suggestions directly in the workflow.

Figma: What Doesn't Work

The March 2025 price increase is the platform's most documented liability. The 33% Professional increase, the forced FigJam/Slides bundling, and the 267% Professional-to-Organization gap have generated sustained community complaint. The Adobe comparison, forcing users to adopt bundled tools they don't need, appears across independent practitioner forums.

Browser performance limitations. Large, complex files with many components cause lag and occasional browser crashes. This is documented consistently across G2 and Capterra, not an edge case. Teams with complex design systems experience this regularly.

The free plan is genuinely limited. Three team files on the free Starter plan is a real constraint that forces teams into paid tiers earlier than expected.

AI credit limits enforced since March 18, 2026 add a new variable cost layer that was not present at subscription signing.

Post-IPO pricing pressure. Figma went public in July 2025. As a public company, pricing decisions are now subject to quarterly earnings pressure. The 2025 price increase may not be the last.

Sketch: What Works

Practitioners consistently praise three areas: native macOS performance, focused design workflow, and the one-time license option.

Native performance is Sketch's most documented advantage over Figma for complex files. Vector rendering, pan/zoom, and multi-artboard navigation on Apple Silicon hardware are noticeably faster than equivalent Figma operations in the browser. For designers working with large, complex files on powerful Mac hardware, this performance difference is operationally significant.

The focused design philosophy, Sketch does design and prototyping, without expanding into whiteboarding (FigJam), presentation (Slides), or website building, appeals to designers who find Figma's expanding platform distracting.

The Mac-only license at \$120/year (or \$10/editor/month) with permanent access and one year of updates is the most budget-friendly professional option for solo macOS designers, cheaper than Figma Professional at \$15/editor/month (annual) and dramatically cheaper than any Adobe subscription.

Sketch: What Doesn't Work

Mac-only is the defining limitation. Sketch does not run on Windows or Linux. Organizations with mixed operating system environments cannot standardize on Sketch without excluding non-Mac users. As remote and hybrid teams become more OS-diverse, this limitation becomes more operationally significant.

Real-time collaboration is secondary. Sketch's cloud collaboration features are functional but not the native real-time multiplayer that Figma delivers. For teams where designers, developers, and product managers need simultaneous file access, Sketch's collaboration model creates friction.

Market share decline creates ecosystem risk. As Figma's market share grows, the plugin ecosystem, tutorial resources, and available trained talent increasingly favor Figma. Organizations choosing Sketch face a narrowing pool of Sketch-experienced designers available to hire.

Migration costs favor incumbency. Teams with large Sketch file libraries face meaningful migration effort to move to Figma. This switching cost cuts both ways, it also traps existing Sketch users who might prefer Figma's collaboration model.

Penpot: What Works

Practitioners consistently praise three areas: zero cost, self-hosting capability, and web-native developer handoff.

Zero cost for the full product. Penpot is free to use on penpot.app with no feature restrictions. Self-hosting is free. The only paid offering is Penpot Enterprise, dedicated support and SLAs for organizations deploying at scale. A 30-person team pays approximately \$0/year for Penpot versus \$16,200/year for Figma Professional seats. That delta funds significant engineering investment.

Self-hosting for data sovereignty. Organizations deploying Penpot on-premises keep design assets entirely within their security perimeter. For government agencies, healthcare organizations, financial institutions, and defense contractors with HIPAA, GDPR, SOC 2, or FedRAMP requirements, self-hosting is not optional, and Penpot is one of the only professional design tools that supports it.

Web-native developer handoff. Because Penpot is built on HTML, CSS, and SVG, the code generated by the inspect panel is actual web code, not approximations. Developer teams at Google and Microsoft specifically are documented among the 80,000+ teams using Penpot, reflecting its technical credibility in engineering-heavy organizations.

Penpot: What Doesn't Work

The 5-page stability ceiling is Penpot's most critical limitation. Due to its DOM rendering architecture, files with more than approximately 5 pages experience stability issues, crashes and performance degradation in large design systems. Enterprise design systems with dozens of pages and hundreds of components will hit this ceiling. Budget 1-2 weeks for design system validation before committing to a Penpot migration.

Plugin ecosystem is small. Figma's plugin marketplace, ContentReel, Unsplash, advanced automation tools, has no Penpot equivalent. Teams with plugin-dependent workflows will find Penpot's ecosystem immature.

Animation-heavy prototyping limitations. Penpot's timeline-based animation system, while innovative, lacks Figma's maturity for complex interactive prototype workflows.

Community and learning resources. Figma's 7-year head start in documentation, tutorials, templates, and trained talent is a real operational difference. Organizations onboarding new designers will find more Figma resources than Penpot resources available.

Pricing Reality (June 2026)

Figma

Plan	Price	Notes
Starter (Free)	\$0	3 team files; unlimited personal files
Professional	\$15/editor/month (annual)	Was \$12 until March 2025
Organization	\$55/editor/month (annual)	+267% from Professional; SSO, shared fonts
Enterprise	\$75-\$90/editor/month	Negotiated; most orgs get 20%-35% off list
Dev seat	\$12/editor/month	Dev Mode access only

Plan	Price	Notes
Collab seat	\$5/editor/month	FigJam editing only
Viewers	Free	Unlimited across all plans

The hidden cost: AI credits. Since March 18, 2026, Figma enforces AI credit limits on paid plans. High-volume AI feature users (Figma Make, image generation) face a new variable cost layer not present at subscription signing.

The Professional-to-Organization cliff. Organizations needing SSO (required for most enterprise identity providers) jump from \$15 to \$55/editor/month, a 267% increase for what many consider standard enterprise table stakes.

Sketch

Plan	Price	Notes
Standard	\$10/editor/month (annual)	Cloud collaboration, real-time features
Business	\$20/editor/month (annual)	SSO, priority support
Mac-only License	\$120/year	No cloud; permanent access; no Windows

Sketch is the cheapest professional design tool for Mac-only solo designers at \$10/month (Standard) or \$120/year one-time Mac license. No equivalent option exists in Figma or Penpot.

Penpot

Plan	Price	Notes
Free (Cloud)	\$0	Full features; penpot.app
Self-Hosted	\$0	Docker/Kubernetes; full control
Penpot Enterprise	Custom	Dedicated support, SLAs, on-premise

The 30-person team comparison:

- Figma Professional: ~\$16,200/year ($30 \times \$15/\text{month} \times 12$)
- Figma Organization: ~\$19,800/year ($30 \times \$55/\text{month} \times 12$)
- Sketch Standard: ~\$3,600/year ($30 \times \$10/\text{month} \times 12$)
- Penpot: \$0/year

Penpot at \$0 versus Figma Organization at \$19,800 is the clearest cost story in the design tool market. The question every organization must answer plainly: does Figma's collaboration depth, plugin ecosystem, and stability justify \$19,800/year over free?

The Decision Framework

Choose Figma if:

- Your team includes designers, developers, and product managers who need simultaneous real-time file access
- You need the deepest component system, design tokens, and design systems infrastructure available
- Developer handoff via Dev Mode is a critical workflow
- You have a mixed OS environment, Windows, Mac, or Linux team members need access
- Your team is above 3 people and collaboration is more important than cost
- You have explicitly modeled the Organization tier cost (\$55/editor/month) if SSO is required, do not assume you can operate at Professional forever

Choose Sketch if:

- Your team is exclusively on macOS with no Windows or Linux users now or in the foreseeable future
- Native desktop performance for complex files is operationally important
- Offline design capability is required
- You prefer a focused design tool without the platform expansion of Figma
- You are a solo designer or small Mac-only studio where the \$120/year license is the most budget-efficient professional option
- You have existing Sketch files and the migration cost to Figma outweighs the collaboration benefits

Choose Penpot if:

- Budget is a primary constraint, the \$0 versus \$16,000+/year difference is decisive
- Your organization is in a regulated industry (government, healthcare, finance, defense) requiring data sovereignty through self-hosting
- Your team is developer-heavy and values web-native asset export over design tool approximations
- Your design files are under 5 pages and your design system is not at the scale where Penpot's stability ceiling becomes a problem
- You are ideologically committed to open-source tooling and vendor independence
- You have 1-2 weeks to validate your design system in Penpot before committing to migration

The migration warning for all three:

Switching design tools is not a subscription change, it is an organizational transition. Figma files don't migrate to Sketch cleanly. Sketch files don't migrate to Penpot without manual fixes. Penpot has a migration exporter plugin but requires budget for design token, font, and text-to-path conversion work. Plan migration time explicitly before committing to any platform change.

The Bottom Line

The UI/UX design tool market has settled into three clearly differentiated positions, and the right answer depends almost entirely on team size, platform requirements, and budget constraints.

Figma remains the industry standard, for good reason. Its collaboration model, component system depth, developer handoff, and ecosystem dominance make it the safest choice for any team that includes non-Mac users or requires genuine real-time multiplayer design. The 2025 price increase was damaging to trust, not to the product. The Organization tier's \$55/editor/month is expensive, and is the cost that organizations most frequently underestimate when budgeting.

Sketch is the most appropriate choice for a specific and viable profile: Mac-only designers who value native performance and a focused tool. Its market share is declining. Its product quality is not. For existing Sketch users with large file libraries, the switching cost to Figma rarely justifies the migration unless real-time collaboration is genuinely broken in the current workflow.

Penpot is the most interesting story in the category, a genuinely free, open-source, production-ready design tool that is the only option for regulated industries requiring self-hosting and data sovereignty. Its 5-page stability ceiling is the caveat to weigh. For organizations that fit within that constraint, it delivers professional-grade design capability at zero licensing cost.

The finding that belongs in every design tool evaluation: Figma's Professional-to-Organization pricing jump, \$15 to \$55/editor/month, a 267% increase, is the most important number in this comparison. If your organization needs SSO (most enterprises do), budget for Organization from day one. Discovering that requirement after signing Professional creates a renewal shock that practitioner communities document repeatedly.
