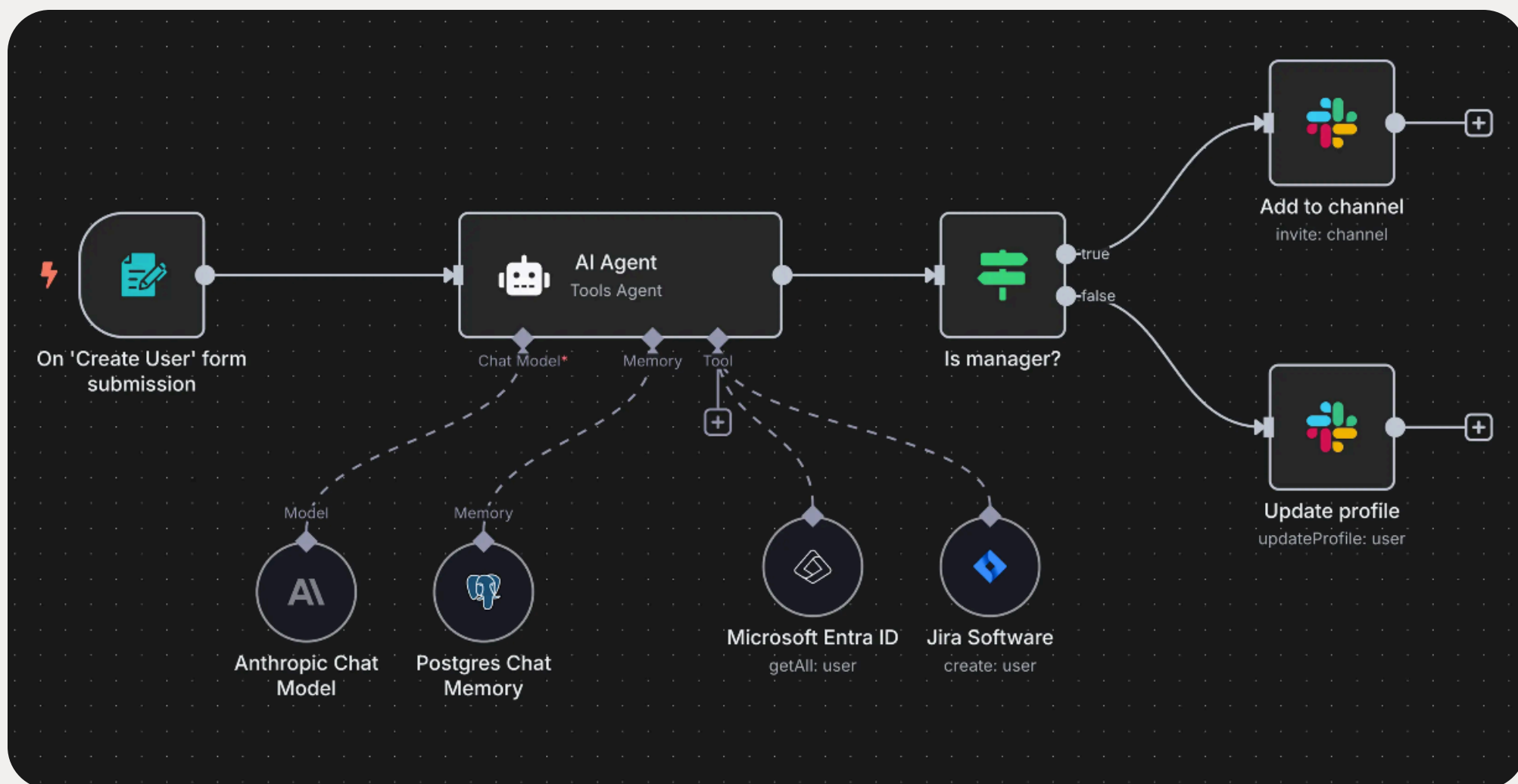


The n8n Automation Starter Guide



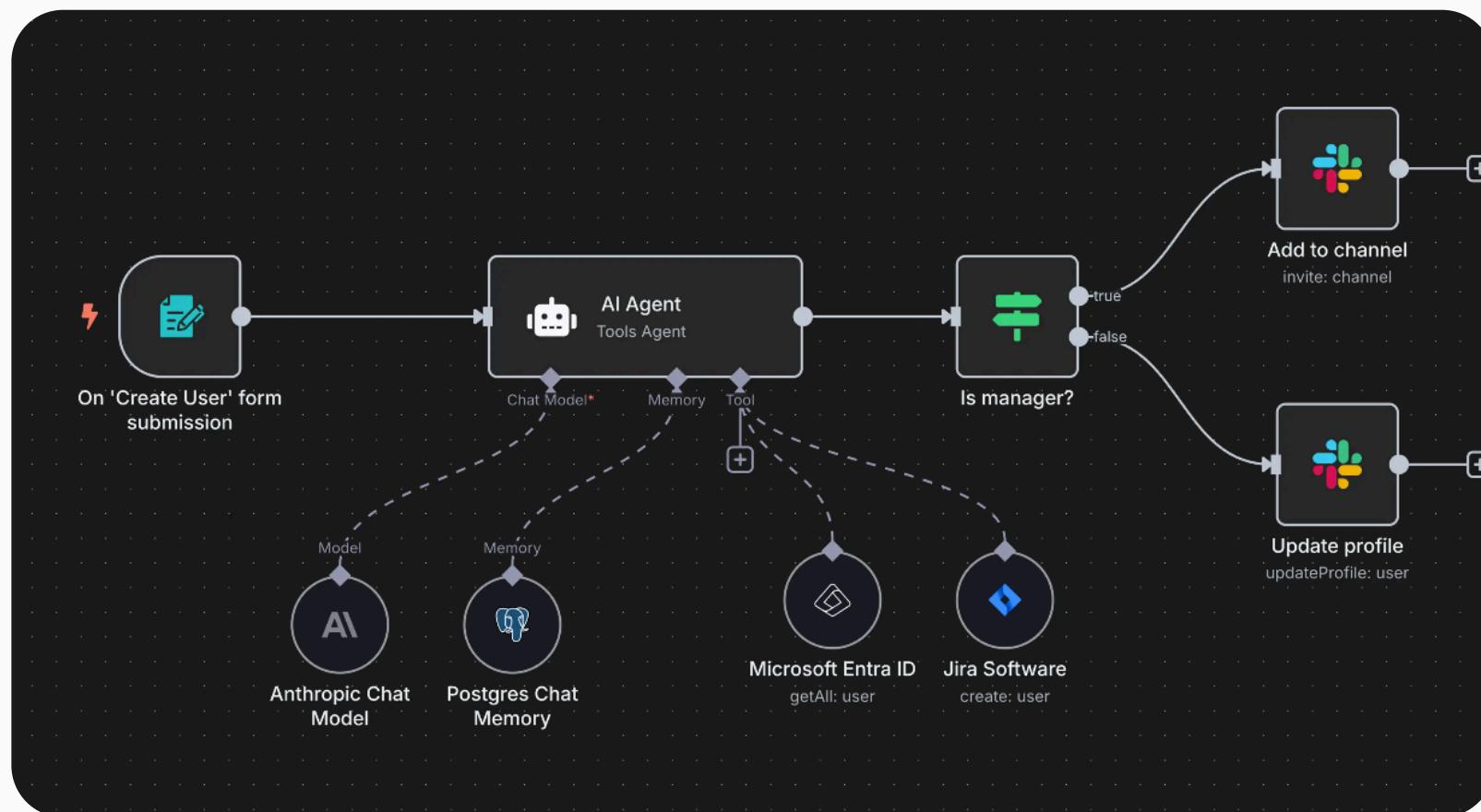
Chiranjeev Gaggar

Strategy Consulting | Building AI Agents



Swipe →

What is n8n?



What is n8n?

n8n (pronounced "n-eight-n") is a powerful workflow automation platform that connects your apps and services without coding.

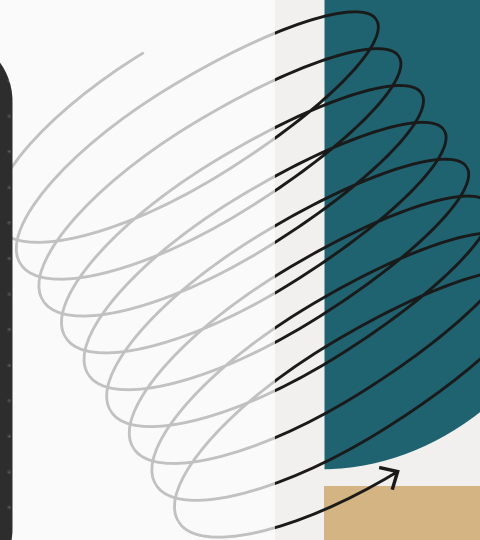
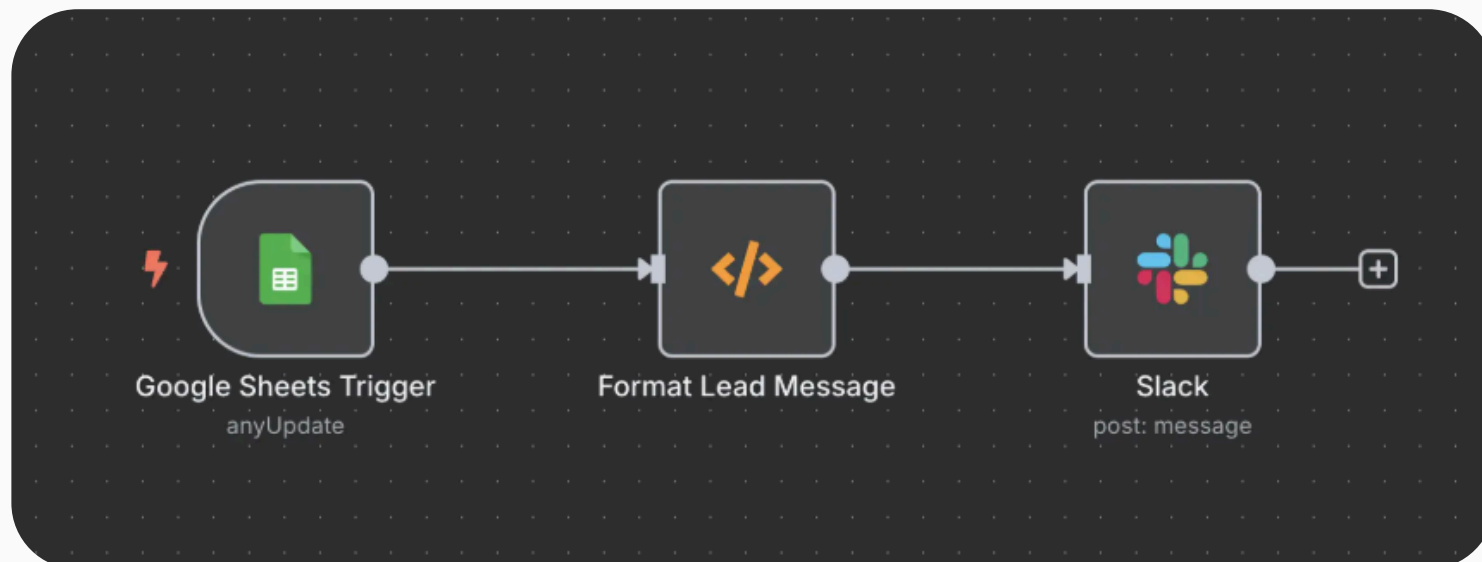
Key Benefits:

- 400+ integrations – Connect Gmail, Slack, Google Sheets, and more
- Visual workflow builder – Drag-and-drop interface anyone can use
- AI-native platform – Build chatbots and AI agents easily
- Cost-effective – Much cheaper than Zapier or Make
- Self-hosting option – Keep your data secure on your own servers

Perfect for:

- Automating repetitive tasks
- Syncing data between apps
- Building AI-powered workflows
- Creating custom business processes

Understanding Workflows



How n8n Workflows Work

Think of workflows like a recipe – a series of connected steps that happen automatically.

The Flow:

1. Trigger – Something starts the workflow (new email, schedule, webhook)
2. Process – Data moves through connected nodes, getting filtered or transformed
3. Action – Something happens (send message, save data, create task)

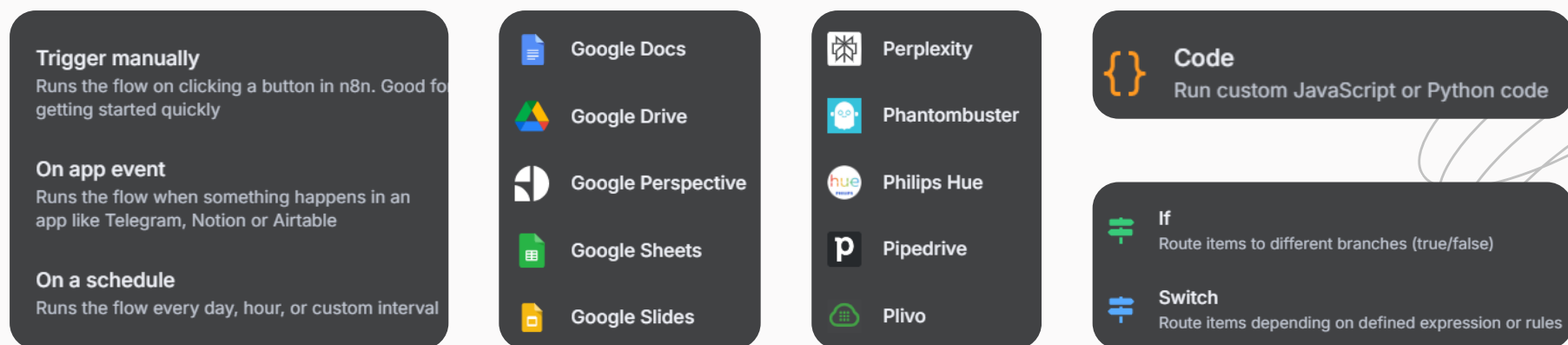
Key Concepts:

- Nodes – Individual steps in your workflow (each with specific task)
- Connections – Gray lines showing data flow between nodes
- Data – Information passed from one node to the next as objects
- Execution – When the workflow runs from start to finish (left to right)
- Testing – You can test each step individually before executing full flow

Example Flow: New Gmail → Check if from VIP → Send Slack notification

Why This Matters: Breaking complex automations into simple connected steps makes them easy to build and debug.

Overview of Node Types



Understanding n8n Node Types

Every workflow is built with three main types of nodes, each serving a specific purpose.

The Three Node Types:

● Trigger Nodes (Lightning bolt icon)

- Start your workflows
- Respond to events or schedules
- Examples: Gmail trigger, Schedule trigger, Webhook

● Action Nodes (App icons)

- Connect to specific apps and services
- Perform tasks like sending, creating, updating
- Examples: Slack, Google Sheets, Notion, Airtable

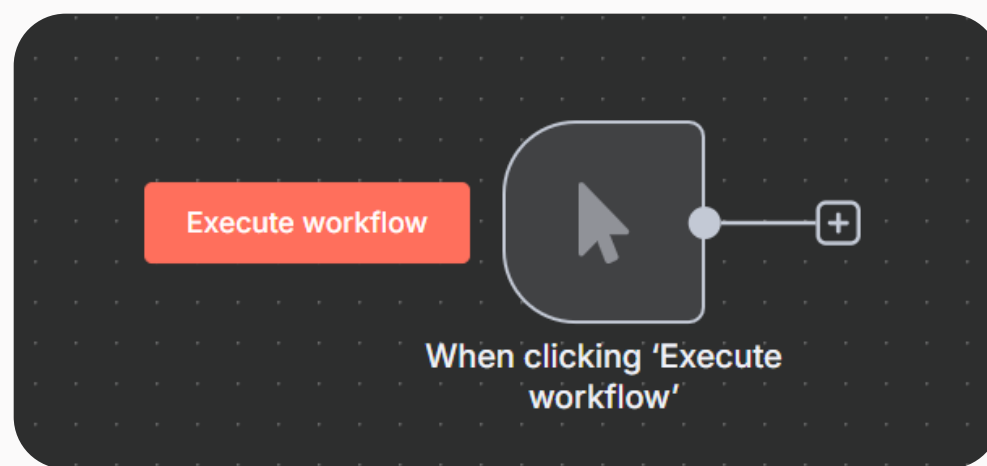
● Core Nodes (System icons)

- Provide logic, processing, and utilities
- Handle data transformation and workflow control
- Examples: If/Then logic, Code, HTTP requests

How They Work Together:

Trigger → Core (optional processing) → Action Every workflow needs at least one trigger and typically ends with an action.

Manual Trigger



Manual Trigger – Your Testing Friend

The Manual Trigger is the simplest way to start a workflow – perfect for testing and one-time executions.

What It Does:

- Starts workflows when YOU click "Test Workflow"
- No automatic execution – only runs when manually triggered
- Essential for building and testing new workflows

When to Use:

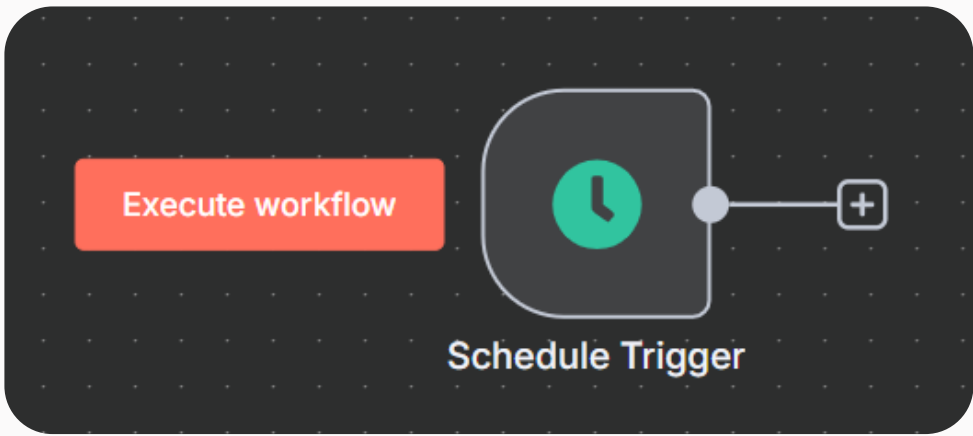
- Testing workflows before adding automatic triggers
- One-time data processing tasks
- Workflows you want to run on-demand only
- Learning and experimenting with n8n

How It Works:

1. Add Manual Trigger as your first node
2. Build your workflow steps
3. Click "Test Workflow" to run it
4. Later, replace with automatic trigger if needed

Pro Tip: Always start with Manual Trigger when building new workflows – it lets you test each step safely before going live.

Schedule Trigger



Schedule Trigger – Automate on Time

The Schedule Trigger runs your workflows automatically based on time - like having a digital assistant that never forgets.

What It Does:

- Starts workflows at specific times or intervals
- Runs automatically without any manual intervention
- Perfect for recurring tasks and regular data processing

Common Schedule Options:

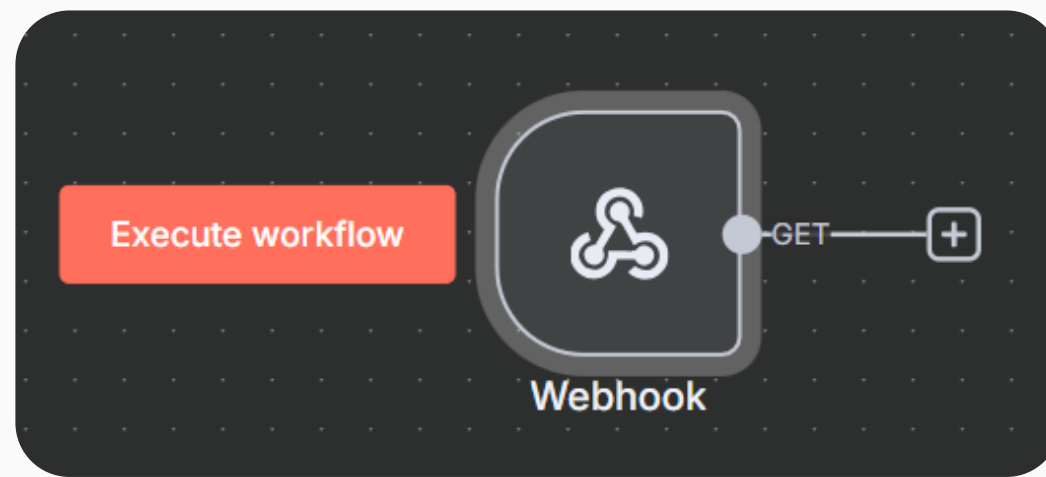
- Every X minutes/hours - For frequent updates
- Daily at specific time - Morning reports, daily backups
- Weekly - Weekly summaries, regular maintenance
- Monthly - Monthly reports, billing tasks
- Custom cron expressions - Advanced scheduling

Popular Use Cases:

- Daily sales reports at 9 AM
- Weekly data backups every Sunday
- Monthly invoice generation
- Hourly social media monitoring

Pro Tip: Start with simple schedules (daily/weekly) before using complex cron expressions.

Webhook Trigger



Webhook Trigger – React to External Events

The Webhook Trigger lets other apps and services start your workflows automatically when something happens.

What It Does:

- Creates a unique URL that other apps can "call"
- Starts workflows instantly when external events occur
- Receives data from the triggering app/service

How It Works:

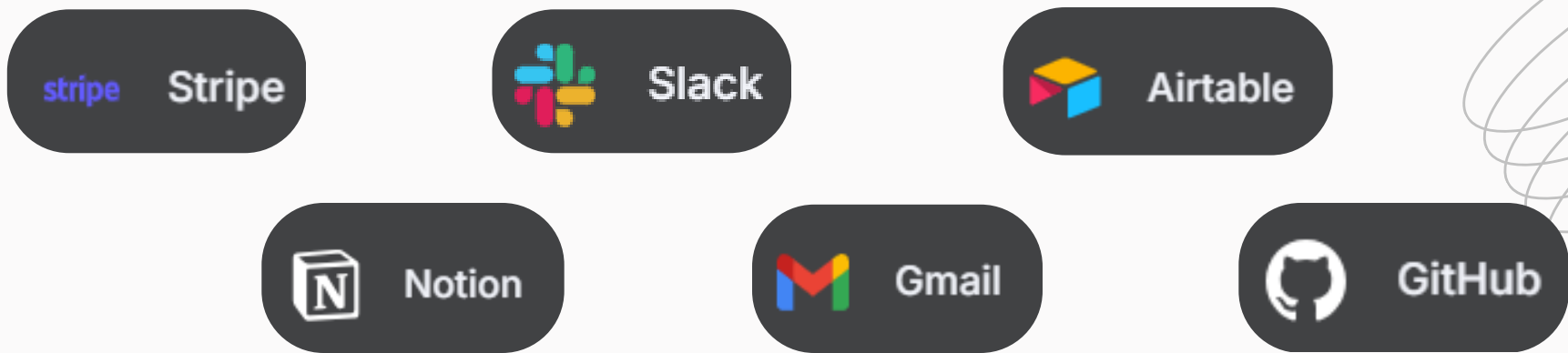
1. n8n gives you a unique webhook URL
2. You configure external apps to send data to this URL
3. When they do, your workflow starts automatically
4. The incoming data becomes available to use in your workflow

Common Use Cases:

- New form submissions from your website
- Payment notifications from Stripe
- New leads from marketing tools
- GitHub code commits
- Customer support ticket creation

Real Example: Contact form submission → Webhook receives data → Create lead in CRM → Send welcome email

Action Nodes



Popular Action Nodes – Connect Your Favorite Apps

Action nodes are where the magic happens – they connect to your everyday apps and perform specific tasks.

Most Popular Integrations:

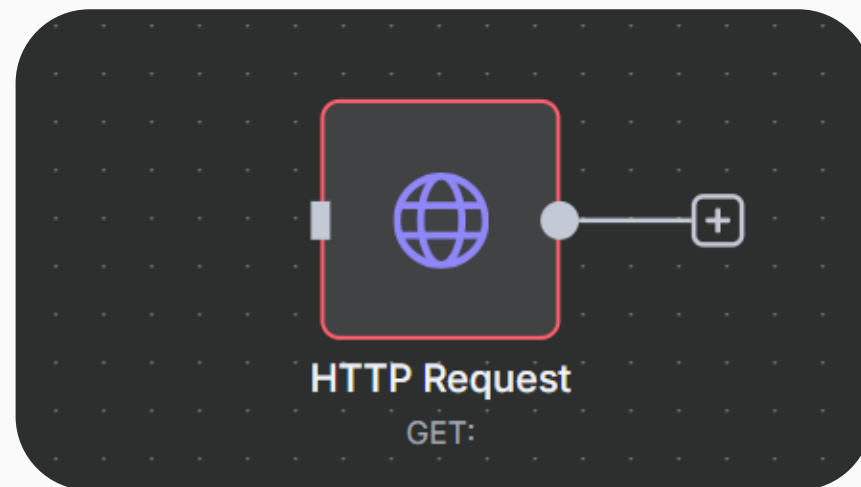
- ✉ Gmail – Send emails, read messages, manage labels
- 💬 Slack – Send messages, create channels, manage users
- 📊 Google Sheets – Add rows, read data, update cells
- 📝 Notion – Create pages, update databases, manage content
- 🗄️ Airtable – Add records, update fields, manage bases
- 📅 Google Calendar – Create events, check availability
- 💳 Stripe – Process payments, manage customers
- 👤 GitHub – Manage repos, create issues, track commits

What They Do:

- Send data TO external apps
- Retrieve data FROM external apps
- Update existing records
- Create new items/content
- Delete or archive information

Note: Most action nodes require credentials (login info) to connect securely to your accounts.

HTTP Request Node (The API Node...)



HTTP Request Node – Connect to Any API

The HTTP Request node is your universal connector – it can talk to any service with an API, even if n8n doesn't have a dedicated node for it.

What It Does:

- Makes API calls to any web service
- Sends GET, POST, PUT, DELETE requests
- Handles authentication (API keys, OAuth, etc.)
- Processes API responses for use in your workflow

When to Use:

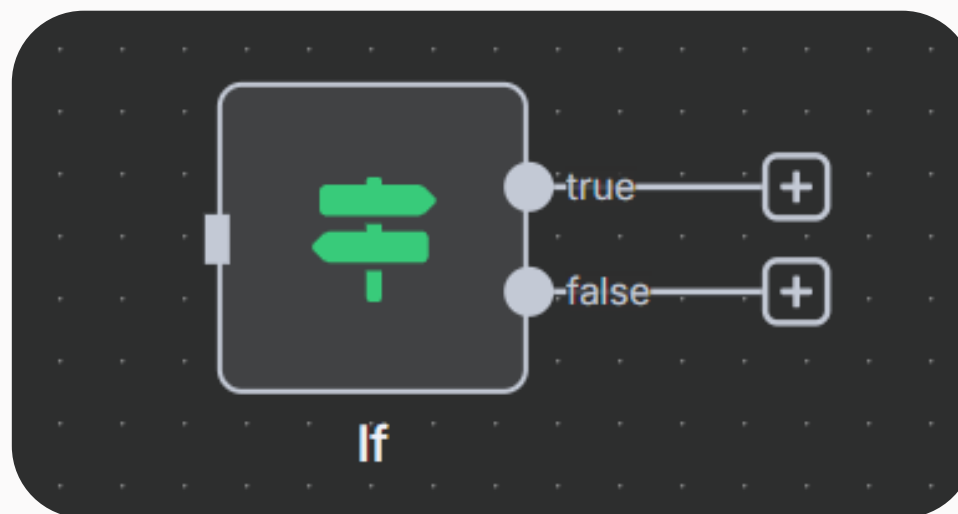
- Connecting to apps without dedicated n8n nodes
- Custom integrations with your own systems
- Advanced operations not covered by standard nodes
- Building connections to niche or enterprise tools

Common Examples:

- Custom CRM systems
- Internal company APIs
- Specialized industry tools
- Custom webhooks and data endpoints

Why It's Powerful: With 400+ built-in nodes AND the HTTP Request node, you can literally connect to anything with an API.

IF Node (Logic)



If Node – Add Smart Decision Making

The If node adds conditional logic to your workflows – making them smart enough to handle different scenarios automatically.

What It Does:

- Creates two paths: TRUE and FALSE
- Compares data and makes decisions
- Routes workflow execution based on conditions
- Handles "what if" scenarios in automation

Common Comparisons:

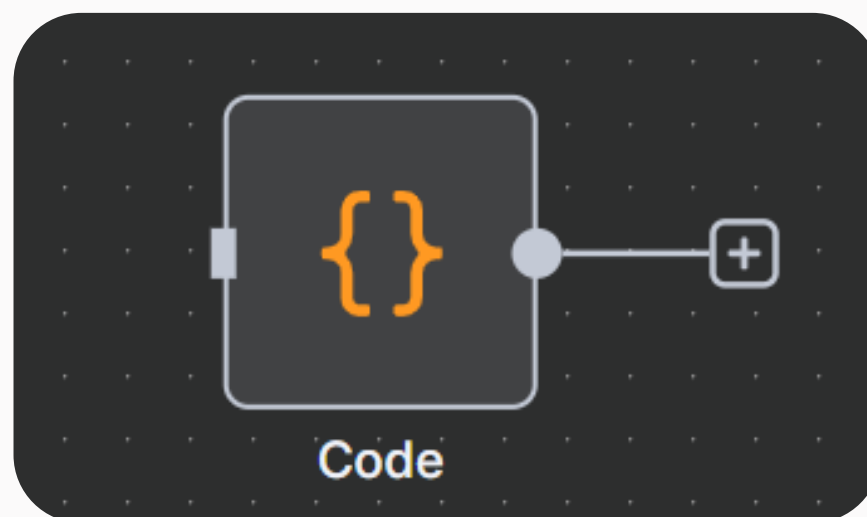
- Text contains specific words
- Numbers are greater/less than values
- Dates are before/after certain times
- File sizes exceed limits

Real-World Examples:

- Email filtering: "If subject contains 'urgent' → send to priority channel"
- Lead scoring: "If deal value > \$10,000 → notify sales manager"
- File processing: "If file type is PDF → extract text, else skip"
- Time-based: "If current time is business hours → process normally"

Why It's Essential: Without conditional logic, workflows can only do the same thing every time. The If node makes them intelligent and adaptable.

Code Node (Logic)



Code Node – Unlimited Flexibility

The Code node lets you write custom JavaScript or Python when visual nodes aren't enough – giving you unlimited power and flexibility.

What It Does:

- Runs custom JavaScript or Python code
- Processes data in ways visual nodes can't
- Performs complex calculations and transformations
- Integrates with external libraries and APIs

When to Use:

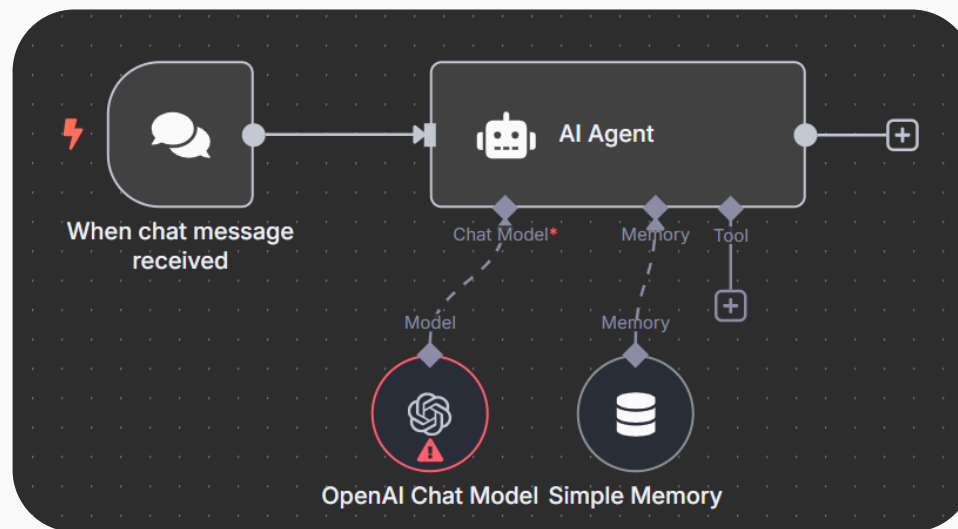
- Complex data transformations
- Mathematical calculations
- Text processing and formatting
- Advanced data filtering and manipulation

Common Examples:

- Calculate shipping costs based on complex rules
- Parse and clean messy data formats
- Generate custom reports with calculations
- Validate data against business rules

Pro Tip: Start with visual nodes when possible, then add Code nodes only when you need that extra flexibility.





AI Features in n8n



AI Features – Build Smart Automation

n8n includes native AI capabilities, making it easy to build chatbots, AI agents, and intelligent workflows without complex setup.

Key AI Components:

-  AI Agent Node – Create intelligent assistants that can reason and make decisions
-  Chat Trigger – Build conversational interfaces and chatbots
-  LLM Nodes – Connect to OpenAI, Claude, Google Gemini, and other AI models
-  LangChain Integration – Advanced AI workflow building blocks

What You Can Build:

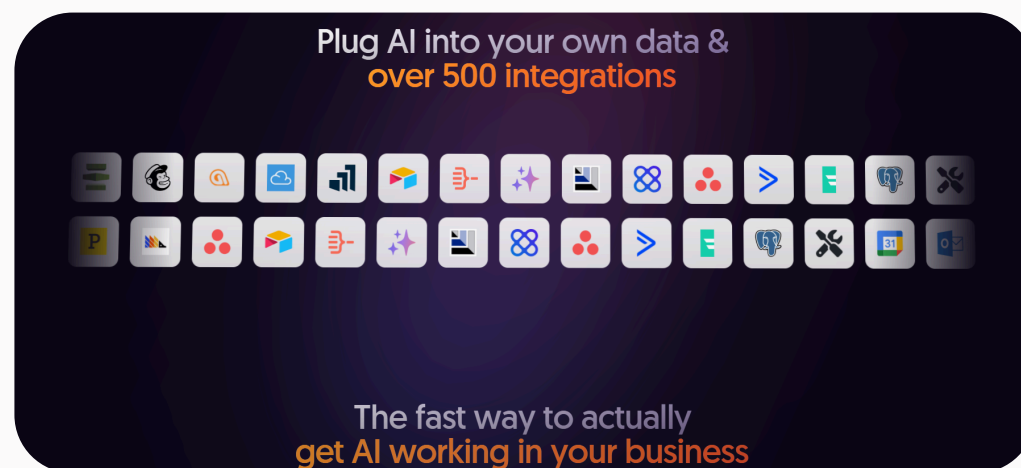
- Customer support chatbots
- Document analysis and Q&A systems
- Content generation workflows
- AI-powered data processing

Real Examples:

- "Analyze customer emails and auto-categorize support tickets"
- "Generate social media content from blog posts"
- "Extract key info from invoices and receipts"

Why It's Game-Changing: AI automation was previously complex and expensive. n8n makes it as easy as connecting visual nodes.

Next Steps in Your Automation Journey



Ready to Start Automating?

You now understand the core building blocks of n8n. Here's how to continue your automation journey:

Immediate Next Steps:

- Try n8n Cloud – Sign up at <https://n8n.io> (free trial available)
- Start simple – Begin with Manual Trigger + one action
- Use templates – Browse 800+ workflows at <https://n8n.io/workflows>
- Join the community – Active forum at <https://community.n8n.io>

Learning Resources:

- n8n Course Level 1 – <https://docs.n8n.io/courses/level-one/>
- Documentation – Comprehensive guides at <https://docs.n8n.io>
- YouTube Channel – Tutorials at <https://youtube.com/@n8n-io>
- Community Forum – Get help at <https://community.n8n.io>

Popular First Automations:

- Email notifications for important messages
- Data sync between Google Sheets and other apps
- Simple chatbots and AI assistants
- Social media posting automation

Remember: Start small, think big. Every complex automation started as a simple 2-3 node workflow.