Bright Data vs Oxylabs vs Decodo: which residential proxy actually fits

These are the three residential proxy providers most people shortlist, and headline price per GB is the wrong thing to shortlist on. List rates move, differ by region and collapse once you commit volume, so comparison sites honestly quote different numbers for the same provider. Bright Data and Oxylabs are the premium, KYC-gated pair with the deepest toolsets; Decodo, rebranded from Smartproxy in April 2025, is the cheaper self-serve pick. Which one wins depends on how hard your target fights, whether you need a managed unblocker, and how fast you need to start.

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Bright Data, Oxylabs and Decodo are the three residential proxy providers most scraping shortlists come down to, and the instinct is to rank them by price per GB. That is the wrong sort first. List rates move, differ by region, and collapse once you commit monthly volume, which is exactly why five comparison pages will quote you five different numbers for the same provider and all be honest. The real differences are billing model, whether you need a managed unblocker, and how fast you can start.

The three, in one line each

- Bright Data: the largest and most feature-heavy network. Per-GB residential proxies plus a managed unblocker (Web Unlocker) and a Scraping Browser, at a premium price, with KYC-first onboarding.
- Oxylabs: the other enterprise incumbent. A similar premium tier, per-GB residential, its own scraper APIs and unblocker, and the same compliance-heavy onboarding.
- Decodo: rebranded from Smartproxy in April 2025. Self-serve, cheaper per GB, aimed at small-to-mid jobs, and expanding from a proxy service into a broader scraping platform.

What the per-GB price actually is, and why comparisons disagree

Line up several comparison sites and you get several per-GB numbers for the same provider, because pay-as-you-go list rates move, vary by region, and fall once you commit volume. As a rough shape most sources agree on: the premium pair list around 8 to 12 dollars per GB pay-as-you-go and fall toward the low single digits only at high commitment; Decodo lists meaningfully below that and reaches roughly 2 to 3 dollars per GB at terabyte scale; and a budget tier, IPRoyal, Webshare and similar, starts under about 3 dollars per GB. (List rates, checked July 2026, they move.) Treat any single headline figure as a starting point, not a quote, and price your real volume.

The line most comparisons skip: onboarding and KYC

Bright Data and Oxylabs both take a KYC-first approach to residential access, and higher-volume residential plans, commonly reported around the 500-dollars-a-month mark, typically trigger a KYC call and a compliance review before your traffic is switched on. That is a feature, not a flaw: it is part of what keeps the pool clean and the vendor on the right side of data-protection law. But if you need to start scraping this afternoon, it is a real difference from the more self-serve Decodo, which also runs KYC but gates less of its entry tier behind it. Factor onboarding time in, not just price per GB.

Billing model matters more than the sticker

All three sell residential proxies by the gigabyte, so on raw residential the cheapest-per-GB provider wins a job where you already know the target lets a plain proxy through. The moment the target fights back with fingerprinting and CAPTCHAs, the useful product is not a raw proxy but a managed unblocker that bills per successful request and folds retries in. Bright Data (Web Unlocker, Scraping Browser) and Oxylabs both sell that layer; it costs more per record but carries the block-handling code you would otherwise write and keep alive as the target changes. On a hard target the unblocker, not the per-GB rate, is the number that decides the bill.

The biggest lever on a per-GB bill is what you download

Because the meter is gigabytes, the largest saving on the table is usually not the cheapest-per-GB provider, it is downloading fewer gigabytes. Most of a page is not the data you came for. The 2025 median web page is about 2.9 MB on desktop, and of that images are roughly 1.06 MB and JavaScript roughly 0.7 MB, while the raw HTML is only about 22 KB (HTTP Archive Web Almanac 2025). If the value you are scraping lives in that HTML, rendering the full page through a residential proxy means paying premium rates for something close to a hundred times the bytes you actually need.

There are two levers, and both cut the bill before you ever compare providers. First, fetch the HTML directly rather than driving a headless browser, when the data is in the server-rendered markup or reachable through a JSON or XHR endpoint the page already calls; you skip the images, fonts and scripts entirely. Second, when the site is a client-side app you genuinely have to render, block images, media, fonts and analytics at the request level so the browser never pulls them through the proxy. Either one can strip most of the page weight, and on a per-GB bill that is a bigger lever than switching from one provider to another.

The caveat is that some hard targets fingerprint on whether a real browser loads its assets, so blocking resources too aggressively can itself get you flagged; that trade-off is part of what a managed unblocker is handling for you. So measure gigabytes per successful record, not just the sticker per-GB rate, and price the real page weight you download rather than the full page. The calculator estimates your monthly GB from exactly that page weight, so trimming what you fetch lowers the number it quotes.

Where each one wins

- Bright Data: the hardest targets and the widest toolset. Reach for it when you need the managed unblocker or the largest network and can absorb the premium price and the KYC onboarding.
- Oxylabs: the enterprise alternative at a similar tier. A fit when you want that scale and support from a different vendor, or its scraper APIs suit your stack better.
- Decodo: the value pick for small-to-mid jobs. Cheaper per GB, self-serve and fast to start, which is often all a lightly defended target needs.
- The budget tier (IPRoyal, Webshare and similar) and self-hosted datacenter proxies are cheaper still, and genuinely enough when the target barely defends itself. Do not pay residential rates for a site that never asked for them.

Pick the tier before the brand

The recurring mistake is shortlisting on brand and headline price before knowing which tier the target forces. A weakly defended site runs fine on cheap datacenter or budget residential IPs; a hard one needs a managed unblocker, and there the brand is a rounding error next to that choice. Put your real page count, page weight and target difficulty into the calculator: it estimates your monthly GB, picks the tier that actually gets through, and prices it, so you shortlist providers for the tier you actually need instead of the one with the loudest homepage.

Frequently asked questions

Which is the cheapest residential proxy of the three?
Decodo, of the three named here. It lists meaningfully below the Bright Data and Oxylabs premium tier per GB and reaches roughly 2 to 3 dollars per GB at terabyte volume, while the premium pair list around 8 to 12 dollars per GB pay-as-you-go and fall toward the low single digits only at high commitment. Budget providers like IPRoyal and Webshare are cheaper still. (List rates, checked July 2026, they move.) But cheapest per GB only wins if the target lets a plain proxy through; a hard target needs a managed unblocker, where price per successful request, not per GB, sets the bill.

Is Bright Data or Oxylabs better?
They sit at the same premium tier, so it is rarely a price decision between them. Bright Data markets the largest network and the widest toolset, including its Web Unlocker managed unblocker and a Scraping Browser; Oxylabs is the enterprise alternative with its own scraper APIs and unblocker. Pick on which product shape and support fit your stack, and expect the same KYC-first onboarding from either on higher-volume residential plans.

Is Decodo the same as Smartproxy?
Yes. Decodo is Smartproxy rebranded, which happened in April 2025; the network, pricing structure and accounts carried over, and the company has since expanded from a proxy service toward a broader web-scraping platform. If a guide still says Smartproxy, it is describing the same provider.

Do I even need residential proxies?
Only if the target defends itself enough to block cheaper datacenter IPs. Residential proxies are billed per GB and cost several times more than datacenter, so on a weakly defended site they

are money you do not need to spend. Start with the cheapest tier the target allows and step up only when it stops getting through; the calculator picks the tier for you from your target difficulty.

Why do proxy comparison sites quote different prices for the same provider?
Because pay-as-you-go list rates move, vary by region, and collapse once you commit monthly volume, so a page that tested at 10 GB and one that tested at 10 TB will honestly report very different per-GB numbers for the same provider. Treat any single headline rate as a starting point and price your own expected volume rather than trusting one quoted figure.

How do I reduce residential proxy bandwidth costs?
Download fewer bytes, because residential proxies bill by the gigabyte and most of a page is not the data you came for. The 2025 median web page is about 2.9 MB on desktop, of which images are roughly 1.06 MB and JavaScript roughly 0.7 MB, while the raw HTML is only about 22 KB (HTTP Archive Web Almanac 2025). If the field you need sits in that HTML or in a JSON endpoint the page already calls, fetch it directly instead of rendering the whole page; if you must drive a headless browser, block images, media and fonts so they never load through the proxy. Either can cut per-page bandwidth by most of the page weight, which on a per-GB bill is usually a larger saving than switching providers.

Price your own scraping job

Free, no signup: agent.mue.app/tools/proxy-scraping-cost-roi-calculator

agent.mue.app/articles/bright-data-vs-oxylabs-vs-decodo-residential-proxies