

HubSpot vs Salesforce: where each one hides its real cost

Neither HubSpot nor Salesforce costs what its seat price suggests. Both roughly double their license line, but in different places: HubSpot in marketing contacts and onboarding, Salesforce in support, add-ons and implementation. Here is how to read each bill.

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HubSpot and Salesforce are the two CRMs most teams end up comparing, and the comparison almost always starts on the per-seat price. That is the wrong line to anchor on. Both platforms cost far more than their seat sticker once the rest of the bill stacks up, and the reason each one ends up expensive is completely different. Here is where each one hides its real cost.

Both are roughly double their license line

The shared truth is that the edition or plan price is the smallest part of the total. On our own published breakdowns, a standard HubSpot stack runs about 63,540 euro over three years against the roughly 50,040 euro the base-plan math suggests, and a 25-seat Salesforce Enterprise deal that lists at 52,500 dollars a year in licenses lands near 115,750 dollars in year one once everything is added. In both cases the headline number you anchored on is wrong by a wide margin. What differs is where the extra comes from.

HubSpot: the meter is marketing contacts

HubSpot Marketing Hub is metered on the number of marketing contacts you store, not on how much you send. The standard stack we model is Marketing Hub Professional plus Sales Hub Professional with 5 seats and 5,000 marketing contacts. Two lines push it past the plan math:

- A one-time onboarding fee, about 4,500 euro, that is easy to forget and gone after year one.
- Marketing-contact overage: at 5,000 contacts you are already past the 2,000 included, so the meter starts before you send anything, about 9,000 euro across 36 months.

So HubSpot year one lands near 24,180 euro and then settles to about 19,680 euro a year recurring. The number that moves it is your contact list, which grows on its own, so the bill you budget should be the year-two recurring figure, not the demo quote. See the full HubSpot true-cost breakdown for the line by line.

Salesforce: the meter is support, add-ons and implementation

Salesforce hides its cost somewhere else entirely. Take 25 users on Sales Cloud Enterprise at 175 dollars per user per month, which is 52,500 dollars a year in licenses. Three lines the quote tends to leave out stack on top:

- Premier support, priced as a percentage of net license and historically near 30 percent: about 15,750 dollars a year.
- CPQ or Revenue Cloud, billed per user on top of the base seat at a planning estimate of 75 dollars per user a month: about 22,500 dollars a year.
- A one-time implementation that often rivals a year of licenses: a planning estimate of 25,000 dollars in year one.

That is about 115,750 dollars in year one, settling near 90,750 dollars a year once implementation drops off, which works out to roughly 303 dollars per user a month all in against the 175 dollar sticker. The drivers are the support percentage and the per-user add-ons, both of which scale with you, plus a real year-one implementation hit. See the full Salesforce true-cost breakdown for the detail.

Why you cannot compare them on seat price

These are two different scenarios on purpose, because that is the point: the platforms are not comparable on a per-seat sticker. HubSpot can be the cheaper choice for a small team that does not store many marketing contacts, and the more expensive one for a large list. Salesforce can be the cheaper choice when you need deep customization at scale, and a heavy overpay when you do not. The only honest comparison runs your own seat count, contact count, support and add-ons through each estimator and reads the all-in total, not the edition price.

When neither is the right answer

For a small, sales-only team both platforms are usually more than the job needs. A focused sales CRM lists far cheaper per seat, with no marketing-contact coverage and no implementation line. HubSpot earns its premium on marketing breadth and Salesforce on enterprise depth; if you just want reps to close more deals, a lighter CRM is the cheaper fit. The cost-fit quiz walks your seats and needs and returns the three-year cost for each route, so you decide on the all-in number rather than the seat price.

Frequently asked questions

Is HubSpot or Salesforce cheaper?

It depends entirely on your seat count, your marketing-contact count and which add-ons you need, so the seat sticker is not a fair comparison. Both roughly double their license line once the hidden costs stack: HubSpot adds a one-time onboarding fee and marketing-contact coverage, while Salesforce adds a support percentage, per-user add-ons and a large one-time implementation. Model your own numbers in each estimator rather than comparing the per-seat prices.

Why is the per-seat price a bad way to compare HubSpot and Salesforce?

Because each platform drives its real bill off a different thing. HubSpot Marketing Hub is metered on the number of marketing contacts you store, so the bill climbs as your list grows even if your seat count does not. Salesforce charges a support fee as a percentage of license,

bills add-ons like CPQ per user, and carries a one-time implementation that can rival a year of licenses. Two companies on the same seat count can land on very different totals.

Which should a small sales team choose?

For a small, sales-only team both are usually more platform than you need at their full tiers. A focused sales CRM like Pipedrive lists far cheaper per seat and carries no marketing-contact coverage and no heavy implementation line. HubSpot earns its premium when you genuinely use the marketing automation and unified record; Salesforce earns its when you need deep enterprise customization. If you just want reps to close more deals, neither headline platform is the cheapest fit.

See which CRM fits, with the 3-year cost

Free, no signup: agent.mue.app/tools/which-crm-cost-fit-quiz

agent.mue.app/articles/hubspot-vs-salesforce-where-the-real-cost-hides

