ToolGPA

NOVEMBER 2026

Zen Cart

The Insider's Guide

Free open-source PHP shopping cart you host yourself



Every plan, grade, refund rule and rival among online store builders, read from Zen Cart's own pages.

Made by Zen Cart · checked Nov 13, 2026 · toolgpa.com

2.0
GPA



Contents

01 Welcome
What it is, who it suits, its grades and the ten things to know first

02 What it costs
Every plan, the free plan, ways to pay less and how prices have moved

03 What it does
Its main features, where it runs, what it works with and who makes it

04 Where it stands
Its grades against its category, and whether to keep it or make your own

05 The alternatives
The tools it is most often weighed against, side by side

06 Quick answers
The questions people ask about it, each answered in a line or two

07 About ToolGPA
Who made this guide, what else is on the site, and how to cite it

ToolGPA put this guide together from Zen Cart's own pages, its app-store listings and our grades. Every fact in it is on Zen Cart's page too, where it is kept up to date. Checked Nov 13, 2026.

Welcome

What it is, who it suits, its grades and the ten things to know first

2.0

GPA, above 29 of the 80 other online store builders we grade

Zen Cart is a free, open-source ecommerce application written in PHP that store owners upload to their own web server. Its project says it was the first open-source ecommerce application to be fully PA-DSS certified. Support comes from a community forum, and the code lives in a public GitHub repository.

To get you started, here are **8 things to know about Zen Cart**, taken from its own pages and our grades.

> **You install it from a zip on your own server and look after it.**
>
> From our grade for ease of use

1 **Best for self-hosted PHP shops run by someone who likes to tinker**

Zen Cart is a free, open-source PHP shopping cart that you install on your own server.

2 **It is free**

Zen Cart has no paid plan at all.

3 **It runs on Web**

Web.

4 **Full-function shopping cart**

The project describes Zen Cart as a full-function ecommerce application for a website, with storefront and admin back end.

5 **PA-DSS certified version**

The project says version 1.5.4 was PA-DSS certified, and later releases build on it with PHP 8 updates.

6 **Self-installed from a zip**

The install is a download, an upload to a web server and a browser-based setup that asks a few questions.

7 **A 2.0 GPA, above 29 of 80**

That is against the other online store builders we grade, on value, the free plan, features, ease of use and platforms.

8 **Keep it**

Zen Cart is free, so making your own would save you nothing.

Zen Cart at a glance

PRICING Free	FREE PLAN It is free
FREE TRIAL None stated	RUNS ON Web
MADE BY Zen Cart	CATEGORY Online Store Builders
OUR GRADE 2.0 GPA, fair	

The report card

Best for self-hosted PHP shops run by someone who likes to tinker

Zen Cart is a free, open-source PHP shopping cart that you install on your own server. It does the basic cart job, but you secure it for PCI yourself, support is forums only, and the project site was behind a bot check when we looked.

TOOLGPA REPORT CARD

Zen Cart

Graded Nov 13, 2026

SUBJECT	GRADE	COMMENT
Value for money	C	Free to download, but only free if you host it, which means paying for a server. That puts it in the middle.
Free plan and trial	B	No cap on the software and no ads, but hosting is on you and there's no hosted trial.
Features	C	A full-function cart with a PCI-certified version on offer. No built-in marketplace, subscriptions or headless side is listed.
Ease of use	D	No rating on record. You install it from a zip on your own server and look after it.
Platforms and integrations	C	Web only, with open code on GitHub. No apps and no integration list.

Grade point average — Fair, out of 4.0 **2.0**

An A is worth 4 points, a B 3, a C 2, a D 1 and an F nothing. The GPA is the average of the five.

Who Zen Cart is for

- ✓ Fits if you're comfortable installing PHP software and want a free cart
- ✓ Works for people who want the source code and don't mind forum support

Who it is not for

- ✗ Skip it if you want a hosted store that someone else keeps patched
- ✗ Not for you if you need paid support, as the pages list only community forums
- ✗ Watch out: the project's own guide tells owners to secure the site for PCI themselves
- ✗ Watch out: version 3.0 is in development, so the current release may differ from what we read

Good to know

Good for

- ✓ Store owners comfortable with PHP hosting who want a no-license-fee cart
- ✓ Developers who want to modify an open-source shopping cart
- ✓ Existing Zen Cart shops staying on a familiar platform

Worth knowing

- ⓘ You provide the web server, and the project's own guide tells owners to secure the site for PCI compliance themselves.
- ⓘ Support is community-driven through forums, with no paid plan listed in the pages we read.
- ⓘ The project's own site was behind a bot check when we read it, so details here come from its GitHub readme.
- ⓘ Version 3.0 is in development, so the current release and upgrade path may differ from the pages we read.

What it costs

Every plan, the free plan, ways to pay less and how prices have moved

Free

No paid plan at all

Zen Cart is free to use.

> **Free to download, but only free if you host it, which means paying for a server.**
>
> From our grade for value for money

ZEN CART

$0

Free and open-source software that you download and install on your own server; hosting is your own cost.

Read from raw.githubusercontent.com on Nov 13, 2026.

What it does

Its main features, where it runs, what it works with and who makes it

1

Place it runs: Web

Free open-source PHP shopping cart you host yourself. Here is what it does, as its own site describes it, and what it covers: open source, self-hostable, online store.

> **A full-function cart with a PCI-certified version on offer.**
>
> From our grade for features

Full-function shopping cart

The project describes Zen Cart as a full-function ecommerce application for a website, with storefront and admin back end.

PA-DSS certified version

The project says version 1.5.4 was PA-DSS certified, and later releases build on it with PHP 8 updates.

Self-installed from a zip

The install is a download, an upload to a web server and a browser-based setup that asks a few questions.

Community support

Free community-driven support runs on the project's forums, with an implementation guide and online documentation.

Open code on GitHub

Source code, issues and pull requests are public, and developers can fork the repository to contribute.

Where it runs

Web

What it works with

Its own pages name no integrations.

Zen Cart is made by Zen Cart.

PART 04 · STANDING

Where it stands

Its grades against its category, and whether to keep it or make your own

29/80

Other online store builders it is graded above

Zen Cart's GPA of 2.0 is higher than 29 of the 80 other online store builders we grade, and level with 13.

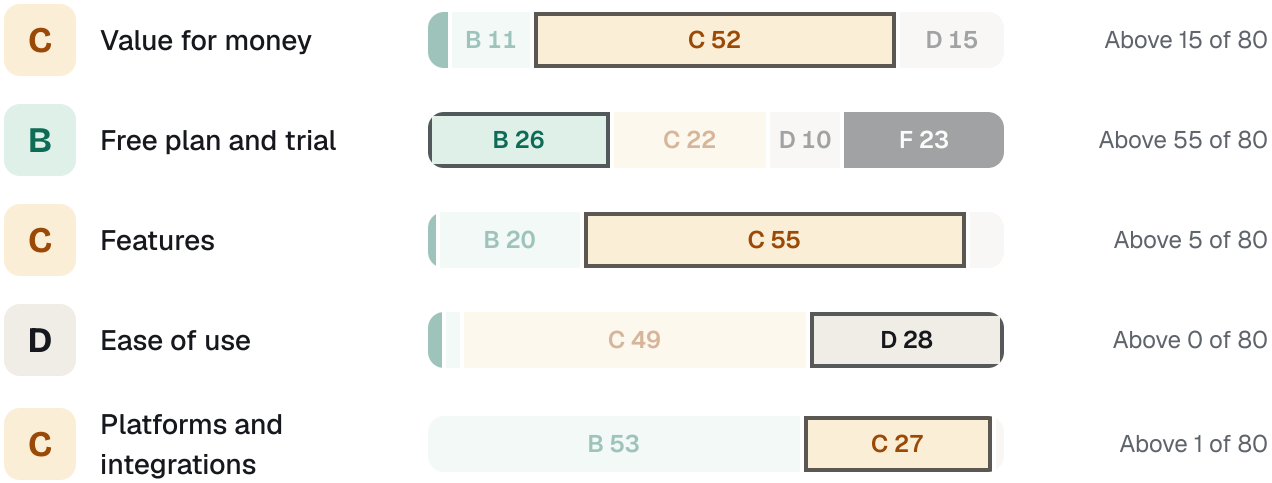
It stands best on free plan and trial (B, above 55 of 80) and worst on ease of use (D, above 0).

Zen Cart has no paid plan.

On features, ease of use and platforms it scores 1.7 out of 4. Nothing scores higher for less, though at least one tool matches that score at a lower price.

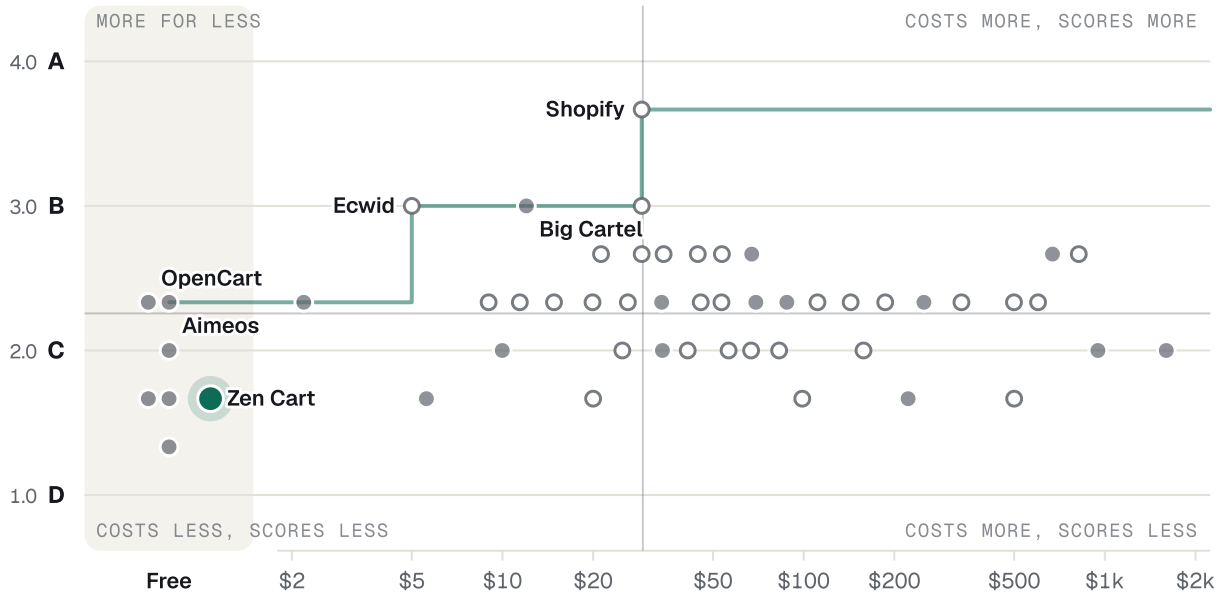
Each grade against the category

Every bar is all 81 online store builders we grade, cut by the letter each got. Zen Cart's own letter is outlined.



Price against what you get

Each dot is one of 52 online store builders. Further left costs less; higher up scores better on features, ease of use and platforms. Zen Cart is the marked dot.



What paid plans start at, a month (each step along is roughly double)

Keep it, or make your own?

Whether this is something you could build for yourself with an AI app builder, and what you would give up.

Keep it

Zen Cart is free, so making your own would save you nothing.

And it is not the kind of software a weekend replaces.

What you could not

- ✕ Checkout, card payments and sales tax handled for you.

What this rests on. Zen Cart's listing: what it does, where it runs, what it plugs into and what it costs. It is a judgement about the kind of software this is. We have not built a replacement for it, and making your own means looking after it too. How we decide, and every tool's verdict.

The alternatives



OpenCart, PrestaShop, WooCommerce, nopCommerce and CS-Cart

The tools it is most often weighed against, side by side

The 5 tools Zen Cart is most often weighed against, with where each one differs from it.

OpenCart

2.4 GPA

Free

Free open-source shopping cart you host yourself.

- OpenCart also covers digital downloads.

Zen Cart and OpenCart compared in full

PrestaShop

2.4 GPA

Free plan · from €24/mo

Open-source ecommerce software, free to self-host or sold hosted.

Zen Cart and PrestaShop compared in full

WooCommerce

2.2 GPA

Free plan

Free, open-source store plugin for WordPress that you host yourself.

- Only WooCommerce lists iOS and Android apps.

Zen Cart and WooCommerce compared in full



2.2
GPA

nopCommerce

Free

Free open-source ASP.NET Core shopping cart.

Zen Cart and nopCommerce compared in full



2.0
GPA

CS-Cart

Free trial · from $725/yr

Self-hosted store and multi-vendor marketplace software.

- Zen Cart has a free plan. CS-Cart does not, though it has a free trial.
- Zen Cart is open source, according to its own site.
- CS-Cart also covers inventory.

Zen Cart and CS-Cart compared in full

Quick answers

The questions people ask about it, each answered in a line or two

11

Questions, each answered in a line or two

The short version of everything above, for when you only need the answer. Each one is told in full in its part of the guide.

Is Zen Cart free?

Yes. Zen Cart is free to use.

How much does Zen Cart cost?

Zen Cart lists one plan. Zen Cart: $0.

What platforms does Zen Cart work on?

Zen Cart is available on Web.

Does Zen Cart have an Android app?

No Android app was listed when its pages were read on Nov 13, 2026. Zen Cart is listed for Web.

Does Zen Cart have an iPhone app?

No iPhone app was listed when its pages were read on Nov 13, 2026. Zen Cart is listed for Web.

Is Zen Cart open source?

Yes. Zen Cart is open source, according to its own site.

Who makes Zen Cart?

Zen Cart is made by a company of the same name.

What are the alternatives to Zen Cart?

The closest alternatives to Zen Cart in our directory are OpenCart, PrestaShop, WooCommerce, nopCommerce and CS-Cart.

How does Zen Cart compare with other online store builders?

Zen Cart's GPA of 2.0 is higher than 29 of the 80 other online store builders we grade, and level with 13.

Is Zen Cart good value for money?

ToolGPA grades Zen Cart C for value for money. Zen Cart has no paid plan.

Could I make my own version of Zen Cart?

Zen Cart is free, so making your own would save you nothing. And it is not the kind of software a weekend replaces.

Where this guide comes from

The prices, plans, platforms and features were read from Zen Cart's own pages on Nov 13, 2026, and the grades were given on Nov 13, 2026. Graded from this listing, whose facts were read from Zen Cart's own pages on 13 November 2026. Not based on using the product, and shorter than our full reviews.

Every tool we list gets five grades, A to F, each with its reason, and a GPA that averages them. How each is decided is at toolgpa.com/grades. This guide is ToolGPA's own work; it is not made, paid for or approved by Zen Cart. Prices change, so check zen-cart.com before you buy.

raw.githubusercontent.com/zencart/zencart/mast… github.com/zencart/zencart

PART 07 · ABOUT

About ToolGPA

Who made this guide, what else is on the site, and how to cite it

7,721

Tools graded, in 95 categories

ToolGPA grades software the way a school report grades a pupil: five subjects, a letter for each with the reason written beside it, and a GPA that averages them. Prices, plans and platforms are read from each maker's own pages and dated, so you always know how fresh a figure is.

Every grade, review and ranking on ToolGPA is our own judgement. No company can pay for a grade or change one. Every tool on the site has a guide like this one, free to download and pass on. It all lives at **toolgpa.com**.

7,721	95	739	579
tools graded	categories	price changes on record	apps priced in 12 countries

What else is on toolgpa.com

Zen Cart, kept up to date

Everything in this guide, with prices and grades as they are today

toolgpa.com/tools/zen-cart

How grades are given

The rules behind every letter and every GPA

toolgpa.com/grades

Value charts

What each tool costs against what it scores, for every category

toolgpa.com/charts

Compare

Any two tools side by side, plan by plan

toolgpa.com/compare

Price changes

Every price rise and cut on record, each with its source

toolgpa.com/price-changes

Prices by country

What apps cost on the App Store in 12 countries

toolgpa.com/prices-by-country

Pay less

Every public discount: yearly billing, students, nonprofits

toolgpa.com/save

Keep or make

Which tools are worth paying for, and which you could build yourself

toolgpa.com/keep-or-make

Scan for the live page

Prices and grades as they are today

Quoting this guide?

Please name ToolGPA and link to the live page, so readers can check the figures for themselves:

```
ToolGPA, "Zen Cart: The Insider's Guide",
checked Nov 13, 2026.
https://toolgpa.com/tools/zen-cart
```

Know someone choosing between online store builders?

Send them this guide:
toolgpa.com/tools/zen-cart/guide

ToolGPA elsewhere: youtube.com/@toolgpa

See our other guides

The best-graded online store builders after Zen Cart, each with an Insider's Guide of its own.

Online Store Builders Insider's Guide

Every one of the 84 online store builders we grade, compared

Big Cartel Insider's Guide

Simple online store for artists, makers and independent sellers

2.8 GPA

Shopify Insider's Guide

Hosted commerce platform for online, in-person and social selling

2.8 GPA

BigCommerce Insider's Guide

Hosted ecommerce platform with plans set by yearly sales

2.6 GPA

ToolGPA

Choosing software? Every tool graded, every price dated.

Compare tools at toolgpa.com ›

Everything in this guide is ToolGPA's own summary of what Zen Cart's pages, its app-store listings and public reviews said on the dates shown. Grades are our judgement under the rules at toolgpa.com/grades. Every grade, review and ranking on ToolGPA is our own judgement. No company can pay for a grade or change one. Zen Cart is a trademark of its owner, and this guide is not made, paid for or approved by Zen Cart. Prices and plans change: check zen-cart.com before you buy.