What You're Really Paying For: The Cost of Elasticsearch Security, Line by Line

Anja Glauch · 2026-11-10



What You're Really Paying For: The Cost of Elasticsearch Security, Line by Line

Part 2 of 3 in our series on licensing and cost. Part 1 explained how licensing per cluster works. Part 3 covers how to start for free.

When teams compare security options for Elasticsearch, they usually compare list prices. The list price is rarely what decides the bill. What decides it is how the cost behaves once the cluster is running: when it grows, when someone needs a test environment, when another tool turns out to be necessary.

This article goes through those cost lines one by one. For each, the question is the same: does it grow when your cluster grows?

1. The licence unit: nodes, resources or clusters

Security for Elasticsearch is commonly priced per node or per unit of resources such as memory. That means the licence grows with the cluster.

Search Guard is licensed per production cluster. A cluster with 3 nodes and a cluster with 300 nodes cost the same. There is no node counting and no resource metering.

Does it grow with your cluster? With Search Guard: no.

© 2026 floragunn GmbH · search-guard.com

2. Development, staging and test systems

A production cluster rarely runs alone. Most teams keep at least one staging environment and several development or QA systems. When each of them needs its own licence, the non-production estate can cost as much as production, or the test systems get smaller and less realistic to save money.

Search Guard covers development, staging, QA and test systems under the production licence they support, at no extra cost. Disaster-recovery and other special setups are handled case by case.

Does it grow with your cluster? With Search Guard: no.

3. Tools that sit next to security

Security is seldom the only thing a production cluster needs. Alerting, encryption at rest, index lifecycle management: when each comes as a separate product, each brings its own licence, its own upgrade path and its own support contract.

Search Guard ships these in the same plugin as security. Alerting is included in every edition, including the free Community Edition. One download, one upgrade path, one support contact.

Does it grow with your cluster? With Search Guard: no extra line for it.

4. Renewals and true-ups

Usage-based models need measuring, and measuring leads to true-ups: the renewal arrives, the cluster has grown, and the invoice has grown with it. That is hard to budget, because the number depends on decisions nobody has made yet.

With one licence per production cluster there is nothing to measure. The figure you budget is the figure you pay.

5. Support

When something breaks in production, the question is who answers. Search Guard Enterprise and Compliance include SLA-based support, answered by the engineers who build the product, from Berlin.

What it adds up to

In practice, these lines add up. Compared with Elastic Platinum deployments of the same size, Search Guard typically comes in at a total cost of ownership 50 to 70 percent lower, and the gap widens as clusters grow. The more useful effect for most teams is predictability: capacity planning and licence planning stop being the same conversation.

What to ask before you sign

Whichever option you choose, these four questions show how the cost will behave:

1. Does the price change when we add nodes or memory?
2. Do test and staging systems need their own licences?
3. Are alerting and encryption included, or separate products?

© 2026 floragunn GmbH · search-guard.com

4. What happens at renewal if the cluster has grown?

For Search Guard the answers are: no, no, included, nothing.

See pricing and editions

Get a quote within one business day

Next in this series: start free, pay for production. The Community Edition, the 60-day trial, and the route to a quote.

This article was published on the Search Guard blog: https://search-guard.com/blog/elasticsearch-license-cost-what-you-are-paying-for/
Search Guard is Security and Alerting for Elasticsearch and Kibana — search-guard.com · Start a free trial