Start Free, Pay for Production: How to Get Started with Search Guard

Anja Glauch · 2026-11-17



Start Free, Pay for Production: How to Get Started with Search Guard

Part 3 of 3 in our series on licensing and cost. Part 1 explained how licensing per cluster works. Part 2 looked at the cost lines in an Elasticsearch security setup.

Over the last two weeks we have written about how Search Guard is licensed and what that means for a budget. This last part is the practical one: how to get started, what it costs at each step, and when money changes hands.

The short version: you pay when Search Guard protects a production cluster with Enterprise or Compliance features. Everything before that is free.

Option 1: The Community Edition, free for good

The Community Edition is licensed under Apache 2.0. It is free for any use, including commercial production, with no time limit and no node limit.

It covers the essentials: TLS for REST and inter-node traffic, role-based access control on cluster, index and HTTP level, internal users and groups, and Kibana access control. It also includes the full Signals alerting engine, with email, Slack and webhook actions.

For many teams that is enough to stop running Elasticsearch open, and it costs nothing to keep.

© 2026 floragunn GmbH · search-guard.com

Option 2: The 60-day trial, every feature

If you need single sign-on, document- and field-level security, multi-tenancy or audit logging, try them first. Every Enterprise and Compliance feature is free for 60 days.

There is nothing to sign up for. Download Search Guard, install it, and the trial licence activates on its own. No registration, no licence key, no credit card.

The quickest way to look around is our Docker demo. One command starts Elasticsearch and Kibana with Search Guard preconfigured:

```
docker run -it --rm -p 5601:5601 -p 9200:9200 floragunncom/search-guard-flx-demo
```

When the trial ends, nothing breaks. The cluster keeps running, and you decide whether to licence the features you used. If you need more time to evaluate, extensions are usually no problem.

Option 3: A quote, within one business day

Once you know what you need, there is one question to answer: how many production clusters will you run?

Development, staging, QA and test systems are covered by the production licence they support. Node count does not matter. Tell us the number of clusters and the edition, and you will have a quote within one business day. No calls unless you want one.

If you prefer to talk it through first, you can book 30 minutes with an engineer who builds Search Guard.

Before the year closes

If there is budget left for 2026, a quote requested in early December can still be signed this year.

Start the free 60-day trial

Get a quote

Book a demo

That's the series. Part 1: Per cluster, not per node. Part 2: What you're really paying for.

This article was published on the Search Guard blog: https://search-guard.com/blog/search-guard-free-trial-community-edition/

Search Guard is Security and Alerting for Elasticsearch and Kibana — search-guard.com · Start a free trial