

*Leading Providers Reviewed and Compared*

# The Server-side Tracking Comparison Guide

- *How to find the right server-side tracking solution for your businesses*
- *Pros and Cons for Google, Adobe, Tealium, and more!*
- *6 popular solutions and platforms analyzed*

 Google

 Adobe

 JENTIS

 TEALIUM

 Freshpaint

 Stape

 Addingwell

Want to know more?  
[jentis.com](https://jentis.com)

## Introduction

Are you considering implementing server-side tracking?

Congratulations! You are taking an essential step toward better data quality and control while reclaiming your data sovereignty.

Now, it's time to select the right tool for your specific requirements.

But how to pick the appropriate system to track server-side? Numerous server-side solutions have emerged in recent years, often making it difficult to differentiate between them.

This paper aims to help you understand the differences and ultimately select the best solution for your use case.

## The Market

Tag managers used to be convenience tools for inserting code on websites quickly and without much hassle. As such, they deployed tracking code from tools like Google Analytics but did not track data on their own.

With server-side tracking, things are different. Instead of simply deploying tracking code from third-party tools, tag managers now track the data themselves and forward it to a

dedicated tracking server. Only there will it be shared with third-party tools that **do not have unchecked access to the users' browsers anymore.**

We call this new technology **server-side tag management**, and it is quickly becoming the new standard for data capture on the web. By excluding third parties from tracking on their own, server-side tag managers capture more and more complete data on websites than traditional client-side tracking.

In consequence, **the server-side tag manager is now the most crucial tracking tool in the marketing technology stack** for companies that want to control their data, achieve higher data quality, and become GDPR-compliant.

When considering a server-side tag manager, it is crucial to understand the available vendors and their products. The market features big tech players that have been around for many years (Google, Adobe, Tealium), new market participants that build on big tech frameworks (e.g. Stape, Addingwell) and independent challengers that leverage their own technology (JENTIS).

Additionally, you have the option to custom-build a server-side tracking solution.



## Selection Criteria

Choosing the right system can be challenging, so we created a comprehensive overview of the available options to help you assess which one is right for you. Note that the overall cost of ownership can include multiple components such as license fees, setup fees, and ongoing maintenance costs.



### Criteria to consider



#### Price

What is the cost, not just of licenses, but also of ownership?



#### Data sovereignty

Do I have full control over my data?  
Can others use my data?



#### Community Support

What resources can you obtain from the community?



#### Tool Dependencies

How much am I bound with one tool provider and their tools?



#### Tool Integration

How many tools are integrated and maintained by the provider?



#### Maintenance

How much effort will you have to invest to run and maintain the system  
(Tool Integrations, Servers, etc.)?



#### User Interface and Usability

How easy is it to use?

*How you weigh these criteria depends on your specific use case, but this should cover most scenarios.*

# Server-side Google Tag Manager (sGTM)

Google Tag Manager Server-Side (sGTM) is the most commonly used server-side tag management system. As an extension of the client-side GTM, it is straightforward to use for experienced tag management system users.

The Tag Manager itself is free, with only server costs to consider, making it the cheapest option on the market. It also benefits from incredible community support, which is especially important as Google does not offer many data connectors. However, there are some downsides. The limited number of connectors means you often depend on the community, which can lead to issues that need close monitoring.

Additionally, you are responsible for server maintenance, which requires 24/7 monitoring and can bind significant internal resources. Server hosting options are limited, which could pose problems, especially with Schrems-II regulations.

Other less positive points include missing persistent storage and no native JavaScript functions in custom code.

Recently, tracking prevention has evolved to track if server-side is being used, potentially leading to cookies being deleted after one day or less.



**Setup & maintenance complexity:**

*Medium*

**Best fit for:**

Companies that are willing and able to provide extra resources to maintain tracking servers 24/7 and accept some data protection risks.

## Pros:



- Largest provider of Tag Manager worldwide
- Good community support
- Refined UI/UX
- Many community tool integrations

## Cons:



- Few out-of-the-box integrations, heavy reliance on community integrations
- Data sovereignty/privacy issues
- High maintenance (server and tools)
- Missing persistent storage
- No native JS functions in custom code
- Limited options for server hosting

## sGTM Broker

Some server-side tracking providers build on the sGTM basis and add additional features.

We call them sGTM Brokers.

Addingwell, Freshpaint, and Stape are the best-known vendors of this category. They handle server maintenance, reducing your maintenance costs, and offer additional connectors and features to enhance the Tag Manager.

However, they share similar issues with sGTM, including limited out-of-the-box tool integrations, no persistent storage, and no custom JavaScript functions.

Companies that want to avoid the Google stack might face issues, particularly with servers. Compared to the free sGTM, these brokers come at a higher price.



Setup & maintenance complexity:

*Low to Medium*

Best fit for:

Companies that are willing and able to provide extra resources to maintain tracking servers 24/7 and accept some data protection risks.

### Pros:



- Improvements on the most popular framework
- Additional hosting service
- Ease of use
- Great community support

### Cons:



- Few out-of-the-box integrations, heavy reliance on community integrations
- Still within the Google stack
- Similar issues with data sovereignty/privacy
- Missing persistent storage and no custom JS functions
- Limited options for server hosting

# JENTIS

JENTIS is a fully independent vendor solution, reducing lock-in effects associated with other tools. It is designed for general and specialist use cases, offering features like out-of-the-box tracking (client- and server-side), ad-blocking circumvention, app tracking, raw data access, and data enrichment.

JENTIS supports over 100 out-of-the-box tool integrations and allows custom connector development if needed. It offers hosting options in the EU (IONOS) or US (MS Azure), ensuring compliance with privacy regulations. It also provides advanced tracking prevention methods.

However, JENTIS has a higher price point than sGTM due to the platform's advanced capabilities and the included hosting and server management, which makes it less suitable for small businesses.

As a new player in the space, community support is still limited. Customer support is handled in-house.



Setup & maintenance complexity:

*Low*

Best fit for:

Medium—and large-sized companies with mature marketing technology stacks that want to avoid data protection risks and dependency on Big Tech.

## Pros:



- Vendor neutrality and high data sovereignty
- Second most tool integrations
- Open toolbox which can be configured
- More data: ad blocker circumvention, Essential Mode (Advanced Consent Mode alternative), Synthetic Data
- Several hosting options
- Open to community and partner development

## Cons:



- Price point less attractive for small businesses
- Limited community support

# Tealium

Tealium started out as a Tag Management System but has shifted focus toward its Customer Data Platform (CDP) product in recent years.

Despite this, it still offers a robust Tag Management system with the largest number of maintained connectors. Tealium is known for its strong app tracking capabilities through SDKs, making it appealing to larger customers.

It also offers obvious advantages if using the Tealium CDP as part of an integrated suite. Additionally, Tealium has an international network of support partners.

However, Tealium's Tag Management system is often sold as a byproduct of its CDP, leading to potential vendor lock-in. As a US-based company, it may face GDPR-related issues in privacy-sensitive markets. Tealium is also one of the more expensive solutions available.



Setup & maintenance complexity:

*Medium*

Best fit for:

Large enterprise with complex marketing technology stacks and some data protection risk tolerance.

## Pros:



- Most out-of-the-box tool integrations
- Direct integration with the Tealium CDP
- Less expensive than Adobe
- Good documentation
- App tracking capabilities

## Cons:



- The CDP is Tealium's main focus
- Limited server hosting possibilities
- Issues with data privacy in sensitive markets

# Adobe Launch

Adobe Launch is part of the Adobe suite and can be appealing for larger companies already using Adobe products.

It offers a compelling and extensive library of connectors and is relatively easy to set up within the Adobe ecosystem. However, Adobe Launch has limited connectors outside the Adobe world, which also may not be fully server-side. Privacy issues could arise in sensitive countries or companies.

The system's complexity requires more resources and time to implement, increasing the overall cost.

Adobe Launch is generally best suited for larger customers using the full suite of Adobe products as it is one of the highest-priced options.



Setup & maintenance complexity:

*High*

Best fit for:

Large enterprises with significant budget resources and some data protection risk tolerance.

## Pros:



- Offers an integrated analytics solution and additional services
- Reduced hosted maintenance costs
- Very powerful tool

## Cons:



- The most expensive tool on the market
- Limited tool integrations available
- Strongly bound within the tool borders (walled garden)
- Issues with data privacy in sensitive markets
- High entry barriers in terms of education and training



## Custom-Built Solutions

Custom-built server-side tag management solutions offer tailored capabilities for specific needs. They can potentially have lower external costs and provide complete control over the system.

However, building a custom solution requires significant expertise in JavaScript, web development, tagging, analytics, and backend systems.

While feasible for simple websites with few connectors or larger corporations with sufficient resources, custom solutions can be burdensome to set up and maintain, limiting their practicality for most companies.

### Setup & maintenance complexity:

*Very high*

### Best fit for:

Large enterprises with significant budget resources and some data protection risk tolerance.

### Pros:



- The most flexibility
- Complete data control
- Tool independence and data quality
- Highest modularity

### Cons:



- Many have tried, few have succeeded
- High hidden costs
- Complexity often underestimated
- Advanced expertise required
- High uncertainty and framework risk due to changing external factors
- Issues with future-proofing and maintenance