

The Cloud Storage Price Index 2026: Cost per Gigabyte and Long-Run Cost of Ownership Across Consumer Providers

Cleanor Labs Research Team

Cleanor Research Labs · Correspondence: hello@cleanor.app

Preprint · <https://cleanor.app/blog/cloud-storage-price-index-2026-what-a-gigabyte-costs>

ABSTRACT

Cloud storage looks almost free: a gigabyte costs about half a cent a month. But you do not buy it, you rent it, forever, and the bill grows every time your photo library does. Storing 2 TB in the cloud for a decade costs about \$1,200 on iCloud or Dropbox. We indexed every major provider's 2026 prices to work out what a gigabyte really costs, where the traps are, and why the cheapest gigabyte is the one you delete.

0.1 Download the full study as a PDF

Prefer a formatted, citable reference? This study is also available as a journal-style PDF, "*The Cloud Storage Price Index 2026*," with the full pricing tables, sources, and the raw dataset as CSV. →

[Download the PDF \(journal format\)](#)

KEYWORDS: cloud storage cost, cloud storage price per gb, icloud vs google one price, cheapest cloud storage, cloud storage price comparison

KEY FINDINGS

- At the mainstream 2 TB tier, storage costs about \$0.005 per GB per month: iCloud+ and Google One at \$9.99, Dropbox and Amazon at \$11.99. They are all within a rounding error of each other.
- It is rent, not a purchase. A 2 TB plan runs about \$120 a year, roughly \$1,000 to \$1,200 over ten years, and you never stop paying.
- Small plans are the real rip-off: iCloud's 50 GB tier costs \$0.0198 per GB, four times the per-GB price of its 2 TB tier.
- The only ways off the treadmill are buying once (pCloud's lifetime 2 TB is a one-time ~\$399, paying for itself against iCloud in about 3.3 years) or unlimited backup (Backblaze, ~\$99/year per computer).
- The cheapest gigabyte is the one you do not store. Since the bill scales with how much you keep, deleting duplicates and junk cuts the cost directly, which is the one lever cloud providers never advertise.

1. The price of a gigabyte



Figure 1. Storing 2 TB in the cloud for 10 years costs about \$1,199 on iCloud or Dropbox and \$1,000 on Google One (annual billing), versus a one-time \$399 for a pCloud lifetime plan or \$990 for unlimited Backblaze backup.

At the 2 TB tier that most people land on for photos, the mainstream providers are nearly identical:

Provider	2 TB price	\$/GB per month	10-year cost
Apple iCloud+	\$9.99/mo	\$0.0050	~\$1,199
Google One	\$9.99/mo (\$99.99/yr)	\$0.0050	~\$1,000
Dropbox Plus	\$11.99/mo (\$119.88/yr)	\$0.0060	~\$1,199
Amazon	\$11.99/mo	\$0.0060	~\$1,200
Microsoft 365 (1 TB)	\$9.99/mo	\$0.0100	~\$1,199 (bundles Office)

Apple and Google set the market rate at exactly \$9.99 for 2 TB. Dropbox and Amazon charge a couple of dollars more per month for the same amount. Microsoft has no consumer 2 TB tier; its \$9.99 Microsoft 365 Personal gives 1 TB but throws in the whole Office suite, so it is not a like-for-like

storage comparison. The headline is that raw price per gigabyte is a solved, commoditized number. Where the money actually leaks is elsewhere.

2. Small plans are a rip-off per gigabyte

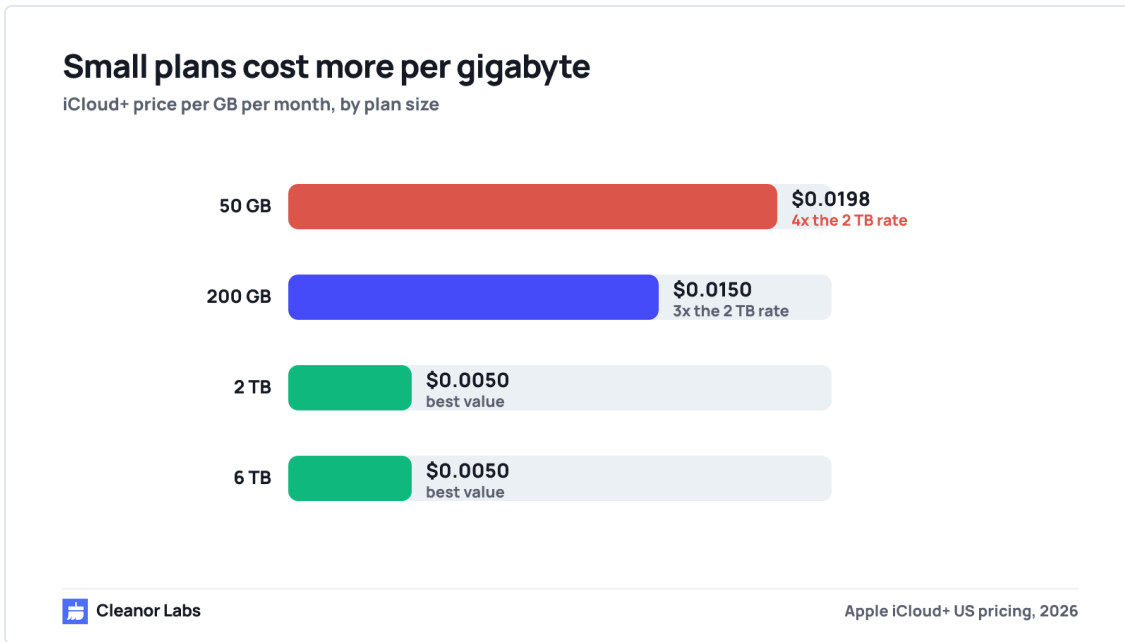


Figure 2. On iCloud+, a 50 GB plan costs \$0.0198 per GB per month, four times the \$0.0050 per GB of the 2 TB plan. Small storage tiers are the worst value per gigabyte.

The per-gigabyte price is not flat, it is worst at the bottom. On iCloud+:

iCloud+ tier	Price	\$/GB per month
50 GB	\$0.99/mo	\$0.0198
200 GB	\$2.99/mo	\$0.0150
2 TB	\$9.99/mo	\$0.0050
6 TB	\$29.99/mo	\$0.0050

The 50 GB plan costs four times as much per gigabyte as the 2 TB plan. This is deliberate: the small tiers are priced to feel cheap in absolute terms (\$0.99) while nudging you toward the "better value" larger plan the moment 50 GB fills, which, with modern photo and video sizes, happens fast.

3. Rent forever, or buy once

Every mainstream option is a subscription, so the meter never stops. Two alternatives break that model:

- **Buy once.** pCloud sells lifetime plans: a one-time payment of about \$199 for 500 GB or \$399 for 2 TB, with no recurring fee. Against iCloud's \$9.99 a month, a 2 TB lifetime plan pays for itself in about 3.3 years and is free after that. The trade-off is a single company holding your data for the long haul.
- **Unlimited backup.** Backblaze Personal Backup is about \$9 a month or \$99 a year for unlimited storage per computer. Its effective per-gigabyte price falls toward zero the more you store, though it is a backup service tied to a machine, not a synced drive.

Over ten years, the spread is stark: about \$1,000 to \$1,200 to rent 2 TB from the big names, versus a one-time \$399 to own it.

4. The free-tier trap

The default free tiers are small on purpose. iCloud gives 5 GB; Google gives 15 GB. A single hour of 4K video is about 7 GB, more than the entire free iCloud allowance, and a few hundred phone photos will fill it. The free tier is not meant to be enough; it is the on-ramp to the \$0.99 plan, which is the on-ramp to \$2.99, and so on. Every full-storage warning is a prompt to start paying.

5. The cheapest gigabyte is the one you delete

Because cloud pricing is a subscription that scales with how much you keep, the most effective way to lower the bill is not switching providers, who are all within a cent of each other, but storing less. Duplicate photos, near-identical burst shots, screenshots, and forgotten large videos are pure recurring cost: you pay to store them every month, forever. Clearing them is the one move that reduces the bill instead of just relocating it, and it is exactly what Cleanor's [storage tools](#) and our study on [what a photo really costs](#) are about. Cloud providers will happily sell you the next tier up; nobody is incentivized to tell you that half of what you are storing is duplicates.

6. Method and sources

Prices are US consumer list prices as of July 2026, in US dollars. Apple iCloud+, Microsoft 365/OneDrive, Box, and Backblaze figures were confirmed on the providers' official pricing pages; Google One, Dropbox, Amazon, pCloud, and Proton prices are the established US list rates (their pages geo-served other currencies or rendered prices via scripts at the time of collection, so re-verify from a US connection). Note that Google is mid-transition, folding Google One into "Google AI" plans in 2026, so its tier names and amounts are the most likely to shift. Cost per GB is monthly price divided by the tier's gigabytes; ten-year cost uses the cheapest available billing (annual where offered). The full per-tier dataset is available as CSV.

7. Frequently asked questions

How much does cloud storage cost per GB? About \$0.005 per GB per month at the mainstream 2 TB tier (\$9.99 for 2 TB on iCloud+ and Google One). Smaller plans cost more per gigabyte, up to about \$0.02 per GB on a 50 GB plan.

References

1. Apple Inc., "iCloud+ plans and pricing." support.apple.com/en-us/108047
2. Google, "Google One plans." one.google.com/about/plans
3. Microsoft, "OneDrive and Microsoft 365 plans and pricing." microsoft.com/microsoft-365/onedrive/compare-onedrive-plans
4. Dropbox, "Dropbox plans." dropbox.com/plans
5. Backblaze, "Cloud backup and B2 storage pricing." backblaze.com/cloud-backup/pricing
6. pCloud, "Cloud storage pricing plans." pcloud.com/cloud-storage-pricing-plans.html
7. Cleanor Labs, "The True Cost of a Photo," 2026. cleanor.app/blog/how-many-photos-fit-in-your-phone-storage-capacity

How to cite: Cleanor Labs Research Team. "The Cloud Storage Price Index 2026: Cost per Gigabyte and Long-Run Cost of Ownership Across Consumer Providers." Cleanor Labs Technical Report, July 2026. <https://cleanor.app/blog/cloud-storage-price-index-2026-what-a-gigabyte-costs>

Which cloud storage is cheapest? For 2 TB, iCloud+ and Google One are tied at \$9.99 a month. If you want to stop paying monthly, pCloud's one-time lifetime 2 TB plan (about \$399) is cheapest over the long run, and Backblaze offers unlimited backup for about \$99 a year per computer.

How much does it cost to store 2 TB in the cloud? About \$120 a year, or roughly \$1,000 to \$1,200 over ten years, on the major subscription services. A one-time pCloud lifetime plan is about \$399.

Is iCloud or Google One cheaper? They are the same price at every comparable tier: \$0.99 for 50/100 GB (iCloud 50, Google 100), \$2.99 for 200 GB, and \$9.99 for 2 TB. Google One additionally offers annual billing, which lowers the 2 TB effective cost slightly.

How can I pay less for cloud storage? Store less. Because the price scales with how much you keep, deleting duplicate photos, screenshots and large old videos cuts the bill directly. Switching providers barely helps, since they all charge about the same per gigabyte.