

# How I Built This

*A human guide to building a feature-rich website for your own project — no coding experience required. Science libraries, community features, maps integration, database functions, email newsletters, analytics, merchandise, and more. Based on the actual build of SprintingForLife.com. Your project may use some or all of these elements. April 2026.*

## BEFORE YOU START — READ THIS

This document is a reference guide for you. The companion file — `ClaudeHowToInstructions.md` — is a command prompt for Claude. Loading that file in a Cowork session tells Claude the full context of what to build, but it does not trigger any automatic action. Claude will read it, confirm its understanding, and describe what it would build — then wait for your explicit permission before doing anything.

You are in control at every step. Claude will ask before building. You approve or ask questions. Nothing happens without a clear "yes" from you.

## Two Documents. Two Audiences.

One file is for you to read (this one). One file is a prompt for Claude/Cowork.

### THIS FILE · YOU READ IT

#### HumanHowToGuide

The story, the costs, the build overview, and the lessons learned. Read it before you start. Share it with anyone who asks how you did this.

### CLAUDEHOWTOINSTRUCTIONS.MD · CLAUDE READS IT

#### The AI instruction set

20+ pages of technical build instructions for Claude/Cowork. You load this file at the start of a session. Claude reads it so you don't have to explain anything from scratch.

## The Story

In January 2026 I decided to build a real website. Not a landing page. Not a template. A full-featured site with a database, community features, email newsletter, analytics, location maps, and a merchandise channel.

I had zero web development experience. I couldn't register a domain without help. I didn't know what DNS meant.

I used Claude/Cowork — Anthropic's desktop AI tool — as the builder. I made every decision. I provided all the content. I set up every third-party account. Claude wrote every line of code, built every feature, and generated every deployment zip. I dragged zips into Netlify.

SprintingForLife.com went live April 11, 2026. The total active build time was roughly 15–25 hours of Claude/Cowork sessions over 4–6 weeks. My personal time — decisions, content, account setup — was another 10–15 hours.

This guide is what I wish I'd had at the start.

One note: I built this using Claude/Cowork — an Anthropic product. I have no affiliation with Anthropic. Other AI tools may work as well; this reflects my personal experience only.

## How to Get Started

Four steps to begin your own build.

- 1. Download the Claude desktop app.** This is critical — Cowork mode requires the desktop app. The web version at [claude.ai](https://claude.ai) does not have the file access and workspace features you need. Get it at [claude.ai/download](https://claude.ai/download). Minimum plan: \$20/month.
- 2. Connect a workspace folder.** In the desktop app, connect a folder on your computer. This is where Claude reads and writes all your files — your site source, documentation, deployments.
- 3. Load ClaudeHowToInstructions.md.** Place this file in your connected folder. At the start of a session, tell Claude: "I want to build a site like SprintingForLife.com." Claude will read the instruction file, confirm its understanding, and walk you through the build. It will not start building until you give explicit permission.
- 4. Start with what your project needs.** Not every project requires every tool in this guide. The minimum to get a site live is a domain (Namecheap, ~\$12/yr) and a web host (Netlify, \$9/mo). From there, add only what your project actually calls for — database, email, maps, analytics, merch. Claude will walk through the full tool menu with you and help you decide what applies to your specific build.
- 5. Ask Claude everything.** This is the biggest lesson from the entire build: no matter what comes up — a tool problem, a decision, a technical question, an unexpected error — the first and best move is to just ask Claude. Ask why. Ask how. Ask how much. Ask whether there's a better way. Don't accept every recommendation without questioning it. Tell Claude the direction you want to go, and make Claude work with you, not for you. Claude writes the code — you make the decisions.

## What It Costs

Two cost categories: the site infrastructure (ongoing) and the build tool (Claude/Cowork, ongoing while building).

TOOL	PURPOSE	COST
Claude / Cowork	The AI builder — writes all code, manages files, builds zips. Desktop app required (not the web version).	\$20/mo minimum
Namecheap	Domain registrar	~\$12/yr per domain
Netlify	Hosting, DNS, SSL — drag-and-drop deployment	\$9/mo (\$108/yr) (free tier available — viable for low-traffic launches)
Google Workspace	Professional email at your domain	\$14/mo (\$168/yr)
Supabase	Backend database + file storage	Free tier
Beehiiv	Email newsletter platform	Free (up to 2,500 subs)

TOOL	PURPOSE	COST
Google Maps API	Location finder maps + geocoding	Free tier
Google Analytics 4	Site analytics	Free
Printful QuickStore	Merch fulfillment (Printful is seller of record)	Free (margin per sale)
<b>Site infrastructure — fixed annual cost</b>		<b>~\$290/yr</b>

The \$290/yr covers the live site operating costs. Claude/Cowork (\$20/mo+) is the build tool — you use it actively during the build and for ongoing changes, then the site runs on its own.

**On tier upgrades:** Depending on your usage and traffic, you may need to upgrade to paid tiers on some tools. Claude/Anthropic and Netlify were the two that required upgrades during this build.

## The Build — 11 Phases

### PHASE 0

#### Context Files

CLAUDE.md, Action-Items.md, Session-Log.md, Decisions.md. Claude builds these first — they're what retain context across every future session.

### PHASE 1

#### Domain & Hosting

Register domain on Namecheap. Create Netlify account. Switch DNS to Netlify nameservers. SSL provisions automatically.

### PHASE 2

#### Email Infrastructure

Google Workspace setup. Gmail activation (easy to miss). MX records in Netlify DNS. SPF, DMARC. Email aliases.

### PHASE 3

#### Site Architecture & Design

Full CSS design system. Responsive nav. All page templates. Cookie consent. Medical disclaimer.

### PHASE 4

#### Supabase Backend

Database tables, Row Level Security, photo upload flow. Admin review tool (local only, never deployed).

### PHASE 5

#### Google Maps

Location finder, filterable map, pin-drop submission, satellite thumbnails, ratings. Restrict your API key immediately.

### PHASE 6

#### Beehiiv Newsletter

Embed form, custom sending domain, welcome email, CNAME in Netlify DNS. Use Arial — not Google Fonts — in email templates.

### PHASE 7

#### Analytics & Search

Consent-gated GA4. Cookie banner. sitemap.xml. Google Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools.

### PHASE 8

#### Content Build

Science library, Getting Started protocol, founder story, expert cards, FAQ. You provide the content; Claude formats and refines.

### PHASE 9

#### Merch Channel

Printful QuickStore. Design products, order samples, approve physically before linking live. Don't rush this.

### PHASE 10

#### Deployment

Claude builds the zip. You drag it into Netlify. Site deploys in ~10 seconds. Version every zip — never overwrite.

## Key Lessons Learned

### → DNS lives in Netlify after you switch nameservers.

The moment you point your domain to Netlify's nameservers, Namecheap is done. Every record — email MX, Beehiiv CNAME, DMARC — goes in Netlify DNS. Not Namecheap. Many people keep adding records in the wrong place and wonder why email doesn't work.

### → Gmail doesn't activate automatically in Google Workspace.

There's an "Activate Gmail" button in the Admin Console. Click it. If you miss this, your professional email addresses exist but silently don't receive mail.

### → Chrome print is the right way to make a PDF from your site.

Print the web page directly (File → Print → Save as PDF). One source of truth — update the page, reprint the PDF. No separate content to maintain.

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→ **Restrict your Google Maps API key before going live.**

An unrestricted key in public HTML is a billing risk. Takes 30 seconds to restrict in Google Cloud Console. Do it before your first deployment.

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→ **Upgrade Netlify before hosting large files.**

Free tier includes 100GB/month bandwidth. A 2–3MB PDF with real traffic burns through it fast. Upgrade to Pro (\$9/mo) around launch time.

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→ **The Supabase service role key never leaves your computer.**

This key bypasses all security. Never put it in a deployed file. The admin review tool that uses it is a local-only HTML file — it never gets zipped into a deployment.

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→ **Use Arial in Beehiiv email templates — not Google Fonts.**

Google Fonts don't render in Outlook. Arial is a native Windows font and works everywhere.

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→ **Document decisions in real time.**

Write every decision to Decisions.md the moment it's made. Sessions end abruptly and context runs out. If it isn't written when it happens, it may not survive to the next session.

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**See the live site — and download the AI instruction set — at [sprintingforlife.com/resources](https://sprintingforlife.com/resources)**

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