

# CDN Services for Global Image Hosting – Low-Cost Comparison

## Introduction

Hosting images for a global audience requires a Content Delivery Network (CDN) that offers good performance worldwide without breaking the bank. This report compares several CDN services suitable for image hosting, emphasizing those with free or low-cost plans that can scale as your traffic grows. We consider factors like pricing (free tiers and pay-as-you-go options), global coverage, image-specific features (like on-the-fly optimization), API access, custom domain support, and caching controls.

## Key Priorities for Low-Budget Image CDN

- **Free or Low-Cost Plans:** Starting small, services that offer free allowances or minimal pay-as-you-go costs help keep initial expenses near zero. Pay-per-use pricing ensures you only pay for what you need.
- **Global Coverage & Performance:** A CDN with a widely distributed network of edge servers (PoPs) across continents ensures fast image load times for users around the world. All services listed have **worldwide CDN** infrastructure.
- **Image Hosting & Optimization:** Some CDNs provide **image-specific features** like automatic resizing, compression, or transformation via URL parameters – useful if you need on-the-fly thumbnails or WebP conversion. Others are “pure” CDNs that simply cache and deliver whatever images you supply.
- **API, Custom Domains, Caching:** Developer-friendly features such as API access (to purge cache or manage resources), support for using a **custom domain** (e.g. `images.yoursite.com`), and fine control over caching (cache TTLs, purging) are considered. These features help maintain branding and control how content is cached.

Below is a comparison table of CDN services, focusing on low-budget suitability and scalability. Pricing highlights (free tiers and notable costs) are given, along with key pros/cons for each service.

## Comparison of CDN Services

CDN Service	Free / Entry-Tier Pricing	Pros	Cons
Cloudflare CDN	<b>Free Plan:</b> \ \$0 – <i>Unlimited</i> bandwidth on free tier <sup>1</sup> .   (Paid plans: Pro \ \$20/mo for extra features)*	<p>- <b>Massive global network</b> (275+ cities in 100+ countries) ensures low latency worldwide <sup>2</sup> . &lt;br&gt; - <b>Completely free CDN</b> with no bandwidth caps <sup>1</sup> (great for very low budgets). &lt;br&gt; - <b>Custom domain support</b> (use your own domain) and <b>API</b> for purging cache, configuring DNS, etc. &lt;br&gt; - Basic caching and SSL included; scalable to high traffic without fees.</p>	<p>- <b>No origin storage:</b> You must host images yourself (Cloudflare will cache from your server/storage). &lt;br&gt; - Advanced image optimizations (e.g. automatic resize or WebP via <i>Polish</i> or <b>Cloudflare Images</b>) are <b>not free</b> – require paid add-on or higher plan. &lt;br&gt; - Caching rules on free plan are somewhat limited (fewer page rules for fine-tuning).</p>
Amazon CloudFront (AWS)	<b>Always Free Tier:</b> Up to <b>1 TB/month</b> data transfer + 10 million requests monthly at no charge <sup>3</sup> .   (After free: <i>pay-as-you-go</i> ~\ \$0.085/GB in US/EU regions)	<p>- <b>Large global coverage</b> (400+ PoPs in ~90 cities <sup>4</sup> ) via AWS network; reliably high performance. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Generous free usage</b> – 1 TB bandwidth every month is free forever <sup>3</sup> , which covers significant traffic for a small site. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Highly scalable:</b> Can handle enterprise traffic, with pay-as-you-grow pricing. Full AWS integration (easy to use with S3 image storage, etc.). &lt;br&gt; - <b>Custom domains and SSL</b> supported (via AWS Certificate Manager) and <b>detailed caching controls</b> (cache behaviors, invalidations).</p>	<p>- <b>Setup complexity:</b> More setup steps (create a distribution, configure origins, etc.) compared to plug-and-play CDNs. AWS knowledge is helpful. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Post-free costs:</b> Bandwidth beyond 1 TB or in pricier regions can incur costs (e.g. ~\\$0.08–\\$0.23/GB depending on region) <sup>5</sup> . Small request fees apply after free tier (e.g. \ \$0.0075 per 10k requests) <sup>6</sup> . &lt;br&gt; - <b>No built-in image processing</b> – CloudFront is a pure CDN, so any image optimization (resizing, format conversion) must be handled separately.</p>

CDN Service	Free / Entry-Tier Pricing	Pros	Cons
Google Cloud CDN	<p><b>Free trial credits</b> ( \ \$300 for 90 days <sup>7</sup> ). No permanent free tier for CDN. &lt;br&gt; <i>Pay-as-you-go</i>: ~\$0.02-\$0.20/GB egress (depending on region) + \ \$0.0075/10k requests <sup>6</sup> .</p>	<p>- <b>Premium global network</b> leveraging Google's infrastructure (same backbone as YouTube) <sup>8</sup> , providing low latency and high throughput. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Good performance</b> and peering – content is served from Google's extensive edge locations worldwide. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Scales seamlessly</b> with traffic; fully managed service once set up via a Google Cloud Load Balancer. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Custom domain &amp; SSL</b> support through Google Cloud's load balancing (no extra cost for SSL).</p>	<p>- <b>No always-free tier</b>: after trial credits, even small usage incurs cost (though rates are reasonable for low usage). &lt;br&gt; - <b>Requires GCP setup</b> – you must configure a Cloud CDN-enabled load balancer or Cloud Storage bucket as origin, which can be complex for beginners. &lt;br&gt; - <b>No native image transforms</b> – purely caches and serves content. Also, <b>custom domain</b> usage is tied to configuring the Google Cloud Load Balancer.</p>

CDN Service	Free / Entry-Tier Pricing	Pros	Cons
Microsoft Azure CDN	<p><b>Free trial</b> (Azure credit for new users). No free CDN tier beyond trial. &lt;br&gt; <i>Pay-as-you-go</i>: e.g. ~\$0.081/GB for first 10 TB in Zone 1 (NA/Europe) <sup>5</sup>, higher in other regions; plus request fees.</p>	<p>- <b>Global reach</b> via multiple CDN providers (Microsoft, Akamai, etc.) – content is delivered from a broad global network of edge nodes. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Integration with Azure services</b> (easy to use with Azure Storage, web apps). Can leverage Azure's security features and monitoring. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Scalable and enterprise-ready</b>, with options for advanced routing and controls (especially on premium tiers). &lt;br&gt; - <b>Custom domains</b> and HTTPS supported on all tiers; caching rules and content purging available (via Azure portal or API).</p>	<p>- <b>No ongoing free tier</b>: costs accrue for any usage (after any initial trial). Pay-go bandwidth rates are on par with AWS/GCP (not the cheapest for large traffic). &lt;br&gt; - <b>Image-specific features lacking</b> – Azure CDN doesn't provide image optimization out-of-the-box (it's a standard CDN). &lt;br&gt; - Azure's CDN offering has <i>multiple tiers</i> (Standard Microsoft, Standard Akamai, etc.) which can be confusing; some advanced features only on higher-cost plans.</p>

CDN Service	Free / Entry-Tier Pricing	Pros	Cons
<b>Bunny CDN (bunny.net)</b>	<p><b>No free plan</b> (14-day free trial available). &lt;br&gt; <i>Pay-as-you-go</i>:</p> <p><b>Very low rates</b> – e.g. \$0.01/GB in NA/EU, \$0.03/GB in Asia, \$0.045 in S. America, \$0.06 in Africa <sup>9</sup> . <b>\\$1/ month minimum</b> usage <sup>10</sup> .</p>	<p>- <b>Excellent price-to-performance</b>: extremely cost-effective for low budgets. Even at small scale, cost will be just cents (with a \$1 minimum) for GBs of delivery. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Global network</b> (100+ PoPs across continents) gives good coverage; performance is reported to be solid for the price. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Supports image hosting</b> easily: you can use your own origin or opt for <b>Bunny Storage</b> (cloud storage at edge) for around \\$0.01/GB, simplifying image hosting. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Developer-friendly</b>: offers an API for purging and managing content, instant cache purging, custom domain support (free SSL), and optional add-ons like <b>image optimization</b> (Bunny Optimizer) for on-the-fly image processing.</p>	<p>- <b>Not entirely free</b> – requires a small monthly spend (minimum \\$1). Also an initial account funding (e.g. \\$10 deposit) is required to start usage. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Fewer advanced features</b> compared to big providers: for example, analytics and configurations are more basic (though improving). Suited for straightforward CDN needs. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Support</b> on basic tier is primarily documentation/ community (direct support might be slower than enterprise CDNs). However, 24/7 support is advertised for all customers.</p>

CDN Service	Free / Entry-Tier Pricing	Pros	Cons
KeyCDN	<p><b>No free plan</b> (offers a 30-day trial with credit).  <i>Pay-as-you-go</i>: <b>\$0.04/GB</b> in NA/Europe (first 10TB) <sup>11</sup>; higher in other regions (up to \$0.10 in SA/Africa <sup>12</sup>).  <b>\$4/month minimum charge</b> <sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup>.</p>	<p>- <b>Transparent low pricing</b>: simple pay-go rates with no request fees (unlimited requests included) <sup>15</sup>.  Good for predictable budgeting. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Decent global network</b>: 40+ PoPs across North America, Europe, Asia, South America, etc. (coverage is global, though network size is smaller than Cloudflare/AWS). &lt;br&gt; - <b>Custom SSL &amp; domain support</b> included. <b>Instant purge</b> and granular cache-control settings available. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Optional image processing</b> feature: can perform on-the-fly image transformations (resize, crop, etc.) at \ \$0.40 per 1,000 operations <sup>16</sup> – useful if you need basic image CDN capabilities without separate infrastructure.</p>	<p>- <b>Requires minimum spend</b> – you'll be billed at least \ \$4 monthly even if actual usage is less <sup>13</sup>.  Also, a minimum <b>account deposit (~\\$49)</b> may be required to start, which is a consideration for shoestring budgets. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Network size</b> and performance are very good for most use cases, but in certain regions (e.g. Africa, South America) latency might be higher compared to larger CDNs with more PoPs. &lt;br&gt; - <b>No free tier</b> means truly zero-cost usage isn't possible after trial; purely pay-as-you-go.</p>

CDN Service	Free / Entry-Tier Pricing	Pros	Cons
Cloudimage (Scaleflex)	<p><b>Free Personal Plan: 25 GB/month</b> CDN traffic + 25 GB image cache storage included <sup>17</sup>. Unlimited transformations &amp; images. <b>\\$0</b> cost. &lt;br&gt; <i>Overage:</i> \\$1 per GB beyond 25GB <sup>18</sup>. (Paid plans start at \\$32/mo for 60GB.)</p>	<p>- <b>Built for images:</b> Cloudimage will fetch from your source, <b>resize/compress/optimize</b> images on-the-fly and serve globally via its CDN. You get <b>unlimited image transformations</b> even on the free plan <sup>19</sup> <sup>20</sup>. Great for automatic responsive images, thumbnails, etc. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Generous free allowance:</b> 25GB traffic each month at no cost <sup>17</sup>, sufficient for low traffic sites. No time limit on the free plan. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Multi-CDN backbone:</b> Cloudimage uses a network of partner CDNs to deliver images (you can bring your own CDN if desired), ensuring good worldwide coverage <sup>21</sup>. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Easy integration:</b> Provides URL-based API for transformations, and supports plugins for CMS platforms. Has an admin dashboard and supports custom caching rules.</p>	<p>- <b>Free tier limits:</b> 25GB is a hard monthly cap; beyond that, overage is <b>\\$1/GB</b> <sup>18</sup> (which is pricier than many pure CDN bandwidth rates). Heavy use will require upgrading to a paid plan for better rates. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Custom domain on higher plans:</b> The free plan delivers images via a Cloudimage domain. Using a CNAME (your own domain) likely requires a paid plan. &lt;br&gt; - For very large deployments, Cloudimage's costs can add up (as it includes processing). It is ideal for small-to-medium projects unless the budget justifies its convenience.</p>

CDN Service	Free / Entry-Tier Pricing	Pros	Cons
Cloudinary	<p><b>Free Plan: 25 credits/month</b> (roughly can cover e.g. 10 GB storage + 10 GB bandwidth + 5,000 transformations) <sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup> . Free forever for limited use.   <b>Paid:</b> Plans start at \ <b>\$89/mo</b> (225 credits) <sup>24</sup> or higher for advanced.</p>	<p>- <b>Feature-rich image platform:</b> Cloudinary offers <b>end-to-end image hosting</b> – you can upload images to Cloudinary and it will handle storage, transformations (resizing, formats, effects), and delivery via a fast CDN.   - <b>Robust free usage</b> for small sites: 25 credits can be flexibly applied (1 credit = 1 GB storage or 1 GB bandwidth or 1,000 image transformations) <sup>23</sup> . This might equate to, for example, 10 GB of images stored and 10 GB delivered per month under the free tier.   - <b>Global CDN coverage:</b> Assets are delivered quickly worldwide (Cloudinary uses multiple CDNs). Even the free tier provides good performance for global audiences <sup>25</sup> .   - <b>Powerful API and tools:</b> Developers can use rich APIs/SDKs to upload images, apply transformations via URL parameters, and manage assets. Includes features like auto-format, quality optimization, etc.</p>	<p>- <b>Scaling cost:</b> After the free allowance, the next plan is \ \$89/month (a big jump) <sup>24</sup> . There isn't a cheap pay-as-you-go option beyond the free tier – it's a tiered plan model. This can be expensive for a budget-conscious user if usage grows slightly over free limits.   - <b>Custom domain not on lower tiers:</b> Free and mid-tier plans require using Cloudinary's domain for asset URLs. Only the higher-tier <i>Advanced</i> plan supports custom domain mapping <sup>26</sup> .   - <b>Complexity:</b> The breadth of features can be overkill if you just need simple CDN delivery. Using Cloudinary primarily for CDN (without needing transformations) may not be cost-effective compared to simpler CDNs.</p>



CDN Service	Free / Entry-Tier Pricing	Pros	Cons
ImageKit.io	<p><b>Free Forever Plan: 25 GB/month</b> bandwidth + 5 GB media storage included <sup>27</sup> <sup>28</sup> . Unlimited transformations and up to 3 users. &lt;br&gt; <b>Paid: \ \$89/mo</b> Premium (includes 225 GB bandwidth &amp; storage) <sup>29</sup> ; enterprise plans for higher needs.</p>	<p>- <b>All-in-one solution:</b> ImageKit combines a <b>media CDN</b> with built-in image (and video) processing. You can store files or pull from your origin, then deliver optimized images (resized, WebP, etc.) via their global CDN. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Free tier is sufficient for small sites:</b> 25 GB delivery per month at no cost <sup>28</sup> , plus a small storage allowance (5 GB). Transformations are unlimited on free, so you can create different variants of images on-the-fly. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Ease of use:</b> It offers a user-friendly DAM (Digital Asset Management) interface and supports direct URL-based transformations. Integration is straightforward (works with S3, etc. as origin if needed). &lt;br&gt; - <b>Global delivery:</b> ImageKit's CDN ensures images load quickly worldwide. Custom domain setup is supported on paid plans, and caching behavior can be controlled (cache invalidation, TTLs via API/UI).</p>	<p>- <b>Upgrade costs:</b> After 25 GB, you need to move to the \ \$89/month plan (which provides 225 GB) <sup>30</sup> . There isn't a smaller paid increment, so there's a cost jump if your usage slightly exceeds free limits. For truly pay-as-you-go growth, this may be a drawback. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Custom domain on paid plans:</b> The free plan delivers from an ImageKit domain; using your own URL (CNAME) for images is only available for paying users <sup>31</sup> . &lt;br&gt; - <b>Primarily for media</b> – if you already have another CDN or just need basic caching, ImageKit might be an added layer of complexity. It shines when you need its transformation and optimization features; otherwise, simpler CDNs could suffice at lower cost.</p>

CDN Service	Free / Entry-Tier Pricing	Pros	Cons
Imgix	<p><b>Free Plan:</b> Supports up to <b>1,000 origin images</b> and <b>100 GB/month</b> bandwidth <sup>32</sup> at no cost. &lt;br&gt; <b>Paid: Basic</b> <b>\$75/mo</b> for 5,000 images &amp; 500 GB bandwidth, <b>Growth</b> <b>\$300/mo</b> for 25k images &amp; 2.5 TB, etc. <sup>32</sup> .</p>	<p>- <b>Advanced image processing:</b> Imgix specializes in real-time image generation. You provide origin images (e.g. on your server or S3), and Imgix delivers them via a <b>global CDN</b> with on-the-fly transformations (resizing, cropping, formatting, etc.). Transformations are unlimited and fast, counted only by unique origin images <sup>33</sup> <sup>32</sup> . &lt;br&gt; - <b>Developer-friendly:</b> Simple URL parameters for all transformations, and a wide range of image ops. They have robust documentation, and integration is easy (just change image URLs to Imgix URLs). &lt;br&gt; - <b>Performance:</b> Imgix uses a worldwide network and routes requests efficiently, ensuring quick image delivery to users. Good for image-heavy, design-centric websites that need many variants of images. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Free tier for testing/dev:</b> The free plan allows trying out Imgix in production on a small scale (1000 images and 100GB is quite generous for a small site) before needing to upgrade <sup>32</sup> .</p>	<p>- <b>Pricing for growth:</b> The jump to \ \$75/month for the Basic plan can be steep for those just slightly exceeding free limits. There is no granular pay-per-GB option; plans are chunked by usage tiers. This could be a con if your usage grows incrementally. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Limits on image count:</b> Pricing is partly based on <b>number of origin images</b> (unique images) as well as bandwidth <sup>33</sup> . Sites with a very large number of distinct images might need higher plans even if each image isn't accessed often. &lt;br&gt; - <b>Custom domain usage:</b> Imgix assigns a domain (e.g. <code>yourcompany.imgix.net</code>). While you can use a CNAME for a custom domain, this may require configuration and possibly certain plan levels. (On the free plan, you are likely using the default Imgix domain.) &lt;br&gt; - As with other specialized services, if you <b>don't need on-the-fly processing</b>, Imgix could be unnecessary cost; a simpler CDN would be cheaper for pure delivery.</p>

*Citations:* The above data is gathered from official pricing pages and documentation of each provider as of 2024-2025, including Cloudflare's statement on free bandwidth <sup>1</sup>, AWS's announcement of the always-free 1 TB CloudFront tier <sup>3</sup>, and pricing details for services like Cloudimage <sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup>, Cloudinary <sup>22</sup>, ImageKit <sup>28</sup>, etc.

## Recommendations for Small Budgets and Future Scaling

**Best for Very Limited Budgets (Near \$0 spend):** If you need a global CDN for images essentially for free, **Cloudflare's free plan** is a top choice – it offers unlimited bandwidth and solid performance without any direct cost <sup>1</sup>. It's ideal if you already have image hosting (origin server) and just need a caching layer. Another excellent free option is **CloudFront's always-free tier** which gives you up to 1 TB/month distribution on AWS's network <sup>3</sup> – great for startups comfortable with AWS. For image-heavy sites that need transformations on a shoestring budget, **Cloudimage** and **Cloudinary** provide free plans that include optimization features; Cloudimage's 25GB free allowance <sup>17</sup> is notable for personal sites, and Cloudinary's free credits <sup>22</sup> support a lot of functionality (just beware of the high jump in cost if you exceed it). **ImageKit** and **Imgix** also offer free tiers sufficient for small-scale usage with advanced image handling. In summary, for a very limited (or zero) budget: - Use *Cloudflare or AWS CloudFront* for pure delivery with no cost at low traffic. - Use *Cloudimage or Cloudinary* if you need on-the-fly image optimization within a free usage envelope (small websites/blogs). - Use *ImageKit or Imgix's free tier* if you plan to evaluate those platforms for future use, but monitor your usage against their limits.

**Scaling to Higher Traffic Sustainably:** As your audience and image bandwidth grow, **pay-as-you-go CDNs** with low rates or higher free thresholds become important. **Amazon CloudFront** is extremely scalable – after the free 1TB, it charges per GB at competitive rates and integrates with AWS for a smooth expansion (plus you can enable more edge locations or features as needed). **BunnyCDN** is an attractive option for scaling: its costs remain very low even at large volumes (e.g. \$0.01–\$0.03 per GB in many regions) and it can handle spikes without big bills, making it financially sustainable for growing sites. **KeyCDN** similarly offers volume discounts and could be cost-effective at scale, though ensure your usage justifies the \$4 minimum.

For enterprise-level scaling or advanced needs, **Cloudflare** can still be used (many large sites run on the free or pro plan), but upgrading to Pro/Business can unlock features like image optimization (*Polish*), better analytics, and SLA support. **Fastly** or **Akamai** could be considered at very high scale, but they lack the low-budget friendliness of the services compared above (often no free tier and higher minimum costs).

If your scaling involves *dynamic image manipulation at runtime*, investing in a paid **Cloudinary** or **Imgix** plan might make sense – these platforms handle massive image catalogs and transformations, but you'll need to budget for their higher costs at scale. Alternatively, you can adopt a hybrid approach: do image processing during upload or build time to avoid expensive runtime transformation, and then serve the static results via a cheaper CDN like CloudFront, BunnyCDN, or Cloudflare.

**In summary:** For pure CDN delivery, you can start free with Cloudflare/CloudFront and smoothly transition into pay-as-you-go costs as traffic increases (AWS, Bunny, etc., will scale cost in proportion to usage). If your project relies heavily on image transformations, leverage the free tiers of specialized services initially, but plan for the significant cost jump – at a certain point, it may even be more economical to handle image optimization yourself and switch to a generic CDN. Each service above is capable of global performance; the choice will boil down to the balance between included features and pricing model that best fits your current budget and future growth trajectory. By mixing and matching these services (for example, using Cloudinary for storage/processing but CloudFront for delivery, or

Cloudflare in front of an S3 bucket), you can also optimize for both cost and functionality. The good news is that all these CDNs can scale to millions of requests – the key is picking one that gives you the most value at your project's current stage, with a clear upgrade path as you grow.

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