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Ideas & Everyday Automations

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Airtable or Notion behind a simple automation: tokens, sharing and limits

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Airtable and Notion work well as a **small "database"** that your team sees and edits, and that an automation (n8n, a PHP script, a cron job) reads and writes. Both have an API and both ask the same: a **token** with the smallest permissions possible, and **explicit sharing** of what the automation may touch. Almost every error comes from one of those two.

What each one asks for

	Airtable	Notion
The key	A personal token, for which you choose what it can do and which bases it can see.	An internal integration, which gives a secret token.
Sharing	You grant access to the base when creating the token.	You must connect the integration, page by page or database by database. Without that it sees nothing.
The data	Tables with fields of set types.	Pages and databases with properties.
Requests	An authorisation header with the token.	An authorisation header, and a header with the API version the documentation names.

Setting up the connection

1. **Create the token with the minimum.** Read-only if the automation only reads; write only on the tables it needs. A token with too much power hurts most when it leaks.

2. **Share only what is needed.** In Notion, open the database and connect the integration to it. In Airtable, pick the base when you create the token.

3. **Make a test read request**, for example with the n8n node or with `curl`, and see whether the right rows come back.

4. **Check the field names.** The automation writes by name. If someone renames a column or a property, the automation starts failing.

5. **Keep the token as a credential**, never inside the workflow or the code. See **securing n8n: access, credentials and exposed webhooks**.

6. **Take a copy** of the base from time to time, using each service's export function.

What the errors mean

Reply	Likely cause
401 or 403	Wrong token, expired, or no permission for that operation.
404 in Notion, with the page existing	The integration was not connected to that page or database.
422 or a field error	The field name or type does not match what you sent, for example text in a numeric field.
429	Too many requests in a short time. Space them out or send in batches.

Do not use either as the database of a whole business.
They have limits on requests and on records, which change and depend on the plan you hold with them: see each one's site. For critical data or large volumes, use a proper database on your own server.

Write the date and the source on every row
the automation adds. When something looks odd, you know where it came from and when.

RECOMMENDED

Want a server to run your automations and your own database? See the VPS plans.

See the VPS servers →

SEE ALSO

- Connecting n8n to Google Sheets
- n8n and your database: the MySQL and PostgreSQL nodes
- Getting an API key for an AI model, and keeping it safe
- VPS servers

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