



The Smarter, Cheaper Way to Use OpenClaw for Online Income
(Complete Beginner Step-by-Step Guide)

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Don't Buy a MAC MINI!



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(Complete Beginner Guide)



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Introduction: The Expensive Mistake Most Beginners Make

If you've been researching how to use OpenClaw to make money online, you've probably seen the same advice over and over again:

"Just get a Mac Mini."

At first glance, it sounds reasonable. Macs are known for reliability, clean performance, and ease of use. But here's the truth...

You do NOT need a Mac Mini to run OpenClaw effectively.

In fact, buying one too early is one of the biggest mistakes beginners make. Why?

Because OpenClaw isn't resource-heavy. It's not doing the "thinking" itself. Instead, it acts as a **coordinator**—a lightweight system that connects tools, automates workflows, and sends tasks to AI models through APIs.

That means you can run it on significantly cheaper setups—and still get the same (or better) results.

In this guide, you'll discover three smarter alternatives:

1. The ultra-budget Raspberry Pi setup
2. The powerful (and upgradeable) mini PC route
3. The zero-hardware cloud option

Let's walk through each one step-by-step.

Method 1: The Ultra-Budget King

Raspberry Pi 5 (\$80–\$120)

Why This Works

The Raspberry Pi 5 is one of the most cost-effective ways to run OpenClaw.

Here's the key idea:

OpenClaw doesn't need power—it needs consistency.

Since you'll be using AI APIs (like OpenAI or Anthropic), the heavy lifting happens in the cloud. Your device simply:

- Sends requests
- Receives responses
- Executes instructions

That's incredibly lightweight.

The Raspberry Pi 5 with 8GB RAM can handle this effortlessly—while using less electricity than a light bulb.

What You'll Need

- Raspberry Pi 5 (8GB recommended)
 - NVMe SSD (IMPORTANT – avoid SD cards)
 - USB or NVMe enclosure
 - Power supply + cooling case
 - Internet connection
-

Step-by-Step Setup

Step 1: Assemble Your Hardware

- Install the Raspberry Pi into a case with cooling
 - Connect your NVMe SSD (this prevents lag and crashes)
 - Plug in power, monitor, keyboard (initial setup only)
-

Step 2: Install the Operating System

- Download Raspberry Pi OS (64-bit)
- Use Raspberry Pi Imager to flash it onto your SSD
- Boot up your Pi

Once loaded:

- Update system:
`sudo apt update && sudo apt upgrade -y`
-

Step 3: Install Dependencies

You'll need basic tools:

```
sudo apt install python3 python3-pip git -y
```

Step 4: Install OpenClaw

- Clone the repository:
`git clone (your OpenClaw repo URL)`
`cd openclaw`
 - Install required packages:
`pip3 install -r requirements.txt`
-

Step 5: Connect Your AI API

Since the Pi cannot run models locally, you must connect to an API.

- Get your API key (OpenAI or Anthropic)
 - Add it to your environment:
`export OPENAI_API_KEY="your_key_here"`
-

Step 6: Run OpenClaw

Start the system:

```
python3 main.py
```

Your OpenClaw agent is now live.

Optimization Tips

- Enable SSH for remote control
 - Set up auto-start on reboot
 - Use a lightweight dashboard or Telegram bot for control
-

Pros

- Extremely cheap
- Near-zero electricity cost
- Runs 24/7 reliably

Cons

- No local AI models
- Slightly slower response times

Best For:

Beginners who want the lowest-cost entry point possible

Method 2: The “Better Than Mac” Value

Mini PCs (\$300–\$450)

Why This Is the Sweet Spot

If you want power, flexibility, and future-proofing...

This is the best option.

Mini PCs from brands like:

- Beelink
- GEEKOM
- Minisforum

...often outperform entry-level Mac Minis—at a lower cost.

The Real Advantage

Unlike Macs:

You can upgrade everything.

That means:

- More RAM
- More storage
- Better long-term performance

You’re not locked into Apple’s ecosystem.

Recommended Specs

Look for:

- Ryzen 7 (7000 or 8000 series)
 - Radeon 780M integrated graphics
 - Minimum 16GB RAM (upgrade to 32GB or 64GB)
 - NVMe SSD
-

Why This Matters

With this setup, you can:

- Run OpenClaw
- Use APIs (like the Pi setup)
- OR run smaller AI models locally (like Llama 3)

This gives you **more control over costs**.

Step-by-Step Setup

Step 1: Initial Setup

- Plug in your mini PC
 - Install Windows or Linux (Ubuntu recommended for performance)
-

Step 2: Update System

For Linux:

```
sudo apt update && sudo apt upgrade -y
```

Step 3: Install Core Tools

```
sudo apt install python3 python3-pip git -y
```

Step 4: Install OpenClaw

Same process:

```
git clone (repo URL)
cd openclaw
pip3 install -r requirements.txt
```

Step 5: Choose Your AI Strategy

You now have two options:

Option A: API Mode (Simplest)

- Use OpenAI or Anthropic
 - Add API key
 - Run instantly
-

Option B: Local AI Mode (Advanced)

Install local models like Llama 3 using tools like:

- Ollama
- LM Studio

Example:

```
curl -fsSL https://ollama.com/install.sh | sh  
ollama run llama3
```

Then connect OpenClaw to your local endpoint.

Step 6: Launch OpenClaw

```
python3 main.py
```

Optimization Tips

- Upgrade RAM to 32GB+
 - Use SSD for speed
 - Run multiple agents simultaneously
-

Pros

- Powerful and fast
- Can run local AI (no API cost)
- Upgradeable

Cons

- Higher upfront cost
 - Slightly more setup complexity
-

Best For:

Serious users who want speed, flexibility, and long-term scalability

Method 3: The “No Hardware” Option

VPS (Virtual Private Server) (\$5–\$15/month)

Why This Is the Simplest Option

Don’t want to deal with hardware at all?

This is your solution.

A VPS is basically a computer in the cloud that runs 24/7.

Popular Providers

- Hetzner
 - DigitalOcean
 - Linode
-

Key Benefits

- No physical setup
 - Access from anywhere
 - 100% uptime
 - Scalable instantly
-

Step-by-Step Setup

Step 1: Create an Account

Choose a provider (DigitalOcean is beginner-friendly).

Step 2: Deploy a Server

- Choose Ubuntu (22.04 recommended)
- Select a basic plan (\$6/month is enough)
- Create your server

Step 3: Connect via SSH

From your computer:

```
ssh root@your_server_ip
```

Step 4: Update the System

```
apt update && apt upgrade -y
```

Step 5: Install Dependencies

```
apt install python3 python3-pip git -y
```

Step 6: Install OpenClaw

```
git clone (repo URL)
cd openclaw
pip3 install -r requirements.txt
```

Step 7: Add API Key

```
export OPENAI_API_KEY="your_key_here"
```

Step 8: Run OpenClaw

```
python3 main.py
```

Optional: Remote Control via Phone

You can connect OpenClaw to:

- Telegram bots
- Discord bots

This lets you control your system from anywhere in the world.

Pros

- No hardware needed
- Accessible globally
- Cheap monthly cost

Cons

- Requires internet connection

- Slight learning curve with SSH
-

Best For:

People who want simplicity and remote access

Final Comparison: Which Should You Choose?

Choose Raspberry Pi If:

- You want the cheapest possible setup
 - You're okay using APIs
 - You want low power usage
-

Choose a Mini PC If:

- You want maximum performance
 - You may run local AI models
 - You want upgrade flexibility
-

Choose VPS If:

- You don't want hardware at all
 - You want access from anywhere
 - You prefer a subscription model
-

Final Thoughts: Stop Overspending and Start Earning

The biggest takeaway from this guide is simple:

You don't need expensive hardware to start making money with OpenClaw.

In fact, starting lean is often the smarter move.

Why?

Because your success doesn't come from your machine...

It comes from:

- Your workflows
- Your automation
- Your ability to execute

Whether you spend \$80 or \$800, the outcome depends on how you use the system.

So instead of waiting...

Instead of overthinking...

And instead of buying things you don't need...

Pick one of these setups and start today.

Because the faster you launch, the faster you learn.

And the faster you learn...

The faster you earn.