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HyperCard was software Apple put on the Mac so that people who had never written code could build working tools. It went on sale on 11 August 1987 for $49.95, then came free with every new Mac. People built address books, museum kiosks, teaching stacks, and one of the best selling games ever made.

Every few years someone argues we should bring it back, always on grounds of ease. That is the wrong lesson. HyperCard mattered because what you made was a file you held, and because you could open it and see how it worked.

> HyperCard did not lose to the web. It started losing the day the free copy could run a stack but not open one.



A stack you can hold, hand over and reorder. That used to be the default.

1. The lid came off, and that was the point

What people remember: it was simple.

What actually mattered: a stack was one file. You could hand it to someone on a disk, and they could open it, find the script behind a button, and change it. By 1988 at least 300 stacks were on CompuServe for anyone to download and pull apart. JavaScript was inspired by HyperTalk, HyperCard's language. The pointing finger cursor you click links with came from flipping through stacks.

2. It did not lose to the web

Apple moved HyperCard to Claris, a subsidiary that needed revenue from something that had always been free. So the copy that shipped with the Mac came with authoring switched off. You got the Player, which ran other people's stacks. To make or change one, you paid. Users resented paying for what they thought of as part of the Mac, and HyperCard lost ground. The last release was 1998. Jobs pulled the engineers off in 2000. Apple withdrew it in March 2004, six years after anyone had touched the code.

The web did not kill HyperCard. Taking the lid off the box and selling it back did.

3. 2026 is selling the easy half again

The AI builders make the 1987 promise almost word for word. Lovable's docs say you need no coding experience and that the code is yours. But ease was never the part in doubt. Ease is the part that demos well.

4. Read the exit, not the onboarding

Lovable says anyone with edit access can read every line of the generated code, but editing it there and downloading the project as a zip are both paid plans. On Enterprise, admins can restrict who downloads at all. Its database export leaves out stored files, Edge Function code and secrets.

Replit's guide to moving a project off the platform is more honest than most marketing. Secret values never leave the old project, so you retype them by hand. Storage buckets do not move. Agent history and checkpoint rollbacks stay behind. A workspace admin can switch on a setting called Ban source code export. Expect 15 to 60 minutes offline.

None of this is a scandal, and both are better than most. It is the same shape as the Claris years: reading is free, authoring costs, and part of the app is not in the file you leave with.

5. Ask the HyperCard question

Not whether a non-programmer can build it. They can, and they will. Ask: if this tool shut down on Friday, what would the person who built it still have on Monday? If the answer is a live URL and nothing else, they did not build software. They rented it.

CAN YOU	HYPERCARD, 1987	THE PLAYER, AFTER CLARIS	AN AI BUILDER, 2026
Run it	Yes	Yes	Yes
See how it works	Yes	No	Usually yes
Change it	Yes	Pay	Often a paid plan
Hold the whole thing	Yes, one file	Yes, one file	Zip or Git, minus secrets and storage

Four questions before you commit a team to a builder. Can you download the whole project without upgrading? Can you read it and edit it on the same plan? Does the export include your files, your functions and your data? Could someone who did not build it open it and work out how? HyperCard answered all four in 1987.

Checked against

Read on 27 November 2026.

- Wikipedia, HyperCard: released 1987 at $49.95 and then free with every Mac, authoring disabled in the Claris era Player, final release 1998, withdrawn March 2004
- Internet Archive Blogs, HyperCard On The Archive: announced 11 August 1987, thousands of stacks, Myst, discontinued by Apple in 2004
- Lovable documentation FAQ: the code is yours, reading is open to anyone with edit access, editing in the code editor and the zip download are paid plans, and the database export excludes stored files, Edge Function code and secrets
- Replit documentation, Manually copy a project to another workspace: secrets never leave the old project, storage buckets do not move, agent history stays behind, admins can enable Ban source code export, and expect 15 to 60 minutes offline

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