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## Low-Cost Tools for Businesses from the Web

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# Low-Cost Tools for Businesses from the Web

## Introduction

### Purpose

There is a wealth of tools and services available to businesses via the web that can provide significant value, in part because they are either free or very low cost. The past few years have seen a HUGE growth in this area. The sheer volume can be bewildering to business owners.

This document provides an overview of many of these tools that might be worthwhile.

During the presentation Tim will provide a fast-paced guided tour of a selected subset of these noteworthy items.

Note that this document is not intended to provide a detailed comparison of options that are available with recommendations regarding which is “best”. It simply provides a list of useful tools that work and that might be helpful to you.

### Biographical Notes

- Tim has been working in the Information Technology sector for 26 years.
- For the last 21 years he has been running a successful consulting company which has been providing services to most of the major businesses in the Sault, as well as many other smaller businesses.
- The services provided by Aberdeen Technical Services Ltd. include project management, business analysis, information systems design and programming, accounting, technical training, etc.
- Tim was the project manager for the project that was awarded “I.T. Project of the Year” in 2006 by the Innovation Centre.
- He has a B. Math from the University of Waterloo, has been a certified I.S.P. (Information Systems Professional) since 1994, and has also held the P.M.P. (Project Management Professional) designation since 2004.
- Tim has been a very well-received guest speaker to college students, at conferences and at other venues.
- Contact – [timkelly@shaw.ca](mailto:timkelly@shaw.ca).

## Basic Web Sites – Local Examples

A small business can create a web site on its own without spending a lot of money. Some have used blogs and/or wikis to do this. However some businesses use a somewhat more conventional approach which provides them with more control over the presentation and content. Here are some examples of businesses that have set up their own very simple web sites for almost no capital cost.

### Personal Fit

**Personal Fit** (<http://www.saultpersonalfit.blogspot.com/>) is a business run by Birgit Kroll. It is a local business that caters healthy meal alternatives to people on a weekly basis, as well as provides food and fitness coaching. Birgit set up a blog to provide the menu of the week which is by nature fairly chronological in nature. She also includes links to related subject matter on other sites, and static information stored in a peanut butter wiki.

Birgit was not strongly computer literate when she set this up. The platform she uses for the blog is Google.

**COST** - \$ 0

### Tausch Motion Systems

**Tausch Motion Systems** (<http://www3.sympatico.ca/haroldtausch/>) is the name of an alternative health practice run by Harold Tausch in Sault Ste. Marie. Harold is a Feldenkrais practitioner. "The Feldenkrais Method® uses a unique combination of gentle exercises and body awareness training to actually improve communication between the brain and the body to restore efficiency and pleasure in movement."

Harold wanted a simple web site to provide an overview of the services he provides.

Harold used a free web site template from <http://www.free-css.com/>. The template provides the structure, you edit the HTML (hyper-text markup language) to put in your own text and pictures. Don't be too daunted by this... it is not particularly complex. There are free references that can be used to learn basic HTML at these locations.

1. <http://www.w3schools.com/html/default.asp>
2. <http://www.goodellgroup.com/tutorial/>
3. <http://www.html.net/>

To get the resulting web site files from his computer to the Sympatico hosted site, he used a free FTP (file transfer protocol) tool called CoreFTP, available here <http://www.coreftp.com/download.html>.

The site is hosted for free by Sympatico because Harold has a personal email account with them. He could pay a fee for additional space, bandwidth, statistics.

**COST:** \$ 0

### The Yoga Door

**The Yoga Door** (<http://theyogadoor.com/>) is a local yoga studio on Queen Street. The owner of The Yoga Door, Dar Charlebois, has done all of the design and set-up of her web site on her own. She was not knowledgeable about computers at all when she started this, but through some hard work on her part she learned how to do this herself.

The site provides graphics, current schedules, contact information and the ability to subscribe to an email list. Dar receives statistics about the number of people who have viewed the site, etc., from Sympatico.

She used the free tools at Web Centre (<http://webcentre.ca/>) to do this. The tools support creating a domain name (i.e. the name of the web site), different hosting options, tools to support selling via the web, etc., with

varying price points depending on what you use. (Another option that you might consider is the Sitebuilder tool from Yahoo, available at <http://smallbusiness.yahoo.com/webhosting/home2.php?>.)

According to Dar, one of the shortcomings of the Web Centre tool is that what you see when designing doesn't always match what you see once you publish your site to the web.

**COST:** Dar pays about \$ 75 per year for hosting the web site via Sympatico.

## **Domain Name Acquisition - DomainsAtCost**

**DomainsAtCost** (<http://www.domainsatcost.ca/>) allows you to search for domain names (i.e. web site addresses) to ensure that the one you want is available, and then purchase it for your own use. They also host web sites for additional fees that vary depending upon features and volumes.

**COST:** \$ 13 to \$ 15 per year for a registered name, depending on the domain (extension... .ca is cheaper than .com, etc.)



## Blogs

**Summary** - A **blog** (short for “web log”) is a website where entries are commonly displayed in reverse chronological order. Think of it as a diary, where each new entry is dated. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. They are easy to use and update.

There are many blogs that are free. These can be useful for businesses in many different ways.

1. A blog can be used to provide a simple-to-use web presence where a chronological presentation is suitable.
2. You can easily provide commentary on subject matter that might be of interest to your employees or customers. Note that you can solicit feedback from them as well.
3. Blogs can be used as a collaborative forum restricted to people you are working with where all can post comments from anywhere in the world. This can be useful if you have a project involving a lot of different people who need to share thoughts.

**Sample blog platform - Blogger from Google** - To create a blog via Google, here is how you get started.

1. Go to [www.google.ca](http://www.google.ca) via your web browser.
2. From the menu, select “More”, then “Even more”.



3. Click “Blogger”.

Communicate, show & share



4. You will be asked to set up a Google account. User name is your email address and you will provide a password. Then click “Create a Blog”, follow instructions and explore.

**Other free blog platforms** - There are other free blog platforms available at:

1. <http://wordpress.com/> - public or private, images, videos, add links to hosted static “web pages”, some ads, templates.
2. <http://www.thoughts.com/> - user-friendly, images stored in folders, videos, podcasts (sound recordings). Does not look as fully-featured from a business-perspective as some of the other free blogs, more suitable for a personal blog.
3. <http://clearblogs.com/> - public or private, multiple authors, images, easy-to-use, sub-folders, templates, some ads on free blogs. \$ 20 per year or \$ 40 per year for no ads, extra space and features.
4. There is a list of 40 sites providing free blogs described here <http://mashable.com/2007/08/06/free-blog-hosts/>.

## Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

**Summary** – CRM is “is a customer-centric business strategy with the goal of maximizing profitability, revenue, and customer satisfaction. Technologies that support this business purpose include the capture, storage and analysis of customer, vendor, partner, and internal process information. Functions that support this business purpose include Sales, Marketing and Customer Service, Training, Professional Development, Performance Management, Human Resource Development and Compensation. Technology to support CRM initiatives must be integrated as part of an overall customer-centric strategy. Many CRM initiatives have failed because implementation was limited to software installation without alignment to a customer-centric strategy.”<sup>1</sup>

A business may choose to use some of the CRM tools that are available via the web for little or no charge, or choose to use full-featured CRM suites at reasonable rates.

**Warning** – Implementing CRM technology in an organization can be a complex and challenging undertaking. There have been many failures, primarily due to rushing in without doing an adequate job of analyzing what you want to do and how the technology can best support your business needs.

### **CRM Suite – Salesforce.com**

**Salesforce.com** (<http://www.salesforce.com/>) – Salesforce.com provides a very full-featured, well-established, hosted, highly-scalable CRM solution. I will not delve into details in this presentation, as there are presenters from Salesforce.com who will do a much better job than me during this seminar.

**COST** – Free 30 day trial, \$ 10 per user per month for the entry-level version (unsure if there is a minimum number of users), higher-end options available.

### **CRM Suite – Sugar CRM**

**Sugar CRM** ([www.sugarcrm.com](http://www.sugarcrm.com)) - This is a full-featured product, and they can host it for you so you do not need a server or I.T. staff (called “Sugar Professional On Demand), for \$ 200 per month (\$ 40/month/user, 5 user minimum, 1 year commitment).

**COST** - \$ 200 per month minimum for the 5-user hosted version, minimum 1 year commitment.

### **CRM Suite – Zoho CRM**

**Zoho CRM** (<http://crm.zoho.com/crm/login.sas>) - This suite of tools provides sales and marketing, inventory management, customer support and service, and reporting functions. Not as full-featured as Sugar CRM or Salesforce.com, but cheaper and simpler to use.

**COST** – 3 users for free. Additional users \$ 12 per month. 100 Megs storage for free, pay per month for extra storage.

### **Contact Management and Rudimentary CRM – High Rise**

**High Rise** (<http://www.highrisehq.com/>) – It enables your employees to share an address book, track contact with leads, clients and customers, manage tasks and reminders, create groups of contacts, keep important email with a given customer visible in one screen, record notes about calls, etc. All of this is shared by your employees. Good 1 minute video on the website.

**COST** – From \$ 12/mo. (3 users, 250M, 500 contacts) to \$ 149/mo (unlimited users, 50G, 50,000 contacts). Pay-as-you-go, change plans any time. 30-day free trial.

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<sup>1</sup> From Wikipedia - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Customer\\_relationship\\_management#\\_note-0](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Customer_relationship_management#_note-0).

## **Customer Feedback – Dear Vivian**

**Dear Vivian** ([www.dearvivian.com](http://www.dearvivian.com) NOT AVAILABLE UNTIL AFTER MARCH 5, 2008) was developed as a service for local businesses who want to build stronger relationships with their customers. The service provides business owners with the information they need to better understand what their customers want and value. It allows customers to provide feedback to a business anonymously or with contact information. The feedback from the customer is not visible to the public, and can only be accessed by the business owner with a username and password. The business can then either respond directly to the customer if there is contact information available, or post a response to the general public in their company profile on the web-site.

This site was developed by local entrepreneur Lou Derrer of Derrer Marketing Ltd., and has Sault Ste. Marie as its focus. He can be reached at (705) 971-2632 or [lou@derrer.ca](mailto:lou@derrer.ca) if you have questions.

**COST** – Free for an initial trial period. After that \$ 275 per year for businesses.

## **Surveys – Survey Monkey**

**Survey Monkey** (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/>) provides tools for electronic surveys. It lets you:

1. Design your survey
2. Collect results via email or blog
3. Send follow-up reminders to those who haven't responded if desired
4. Report on and analyze the results

### **COST –**

1. Free – 100 responses per survey, 10 questions max per survey
2. \$ 20 per month – 1,000 responses per survey, .05 surcharge per response, unlimited questions per survey
3. \$ 200 per year – Unlimited responses per survey, no surcharge per responses, unlimited questions per survey

## Event Promotion

If your business includes delivering events that may be of interest to a selected audience, there are a number of tools available to help with the promotion of these.

### **ConstantContact**

**ConstantContact** (<http://www.constantcontact.com/index.jsp>) provides a number of tools that can be helpful for promoting events. It includes the following features.

1. Email promotions – Includes email marketing templates.
2. Email event invitations.
3. Online surveys.

**COST** - \$ 0 for 60-day trial. \$ 15 per month for email marketing or surveying, up to 500 email addresses. \$ 22.50 per month for both email marketing and surveys. Higher costs for bigger volumes, discounts for prepayment and non-profit organizations.

### **Email**

**Email** is probably the simplest way to promote events to a targeted audience. If you pro-actively talk to people and solicit their email addresses if they might be interested in upcoming events, you can use a distribution list to keep them updated.

Loplops and Panna both promote their events via email distribution and it is quite effective.

**COST** - \$ 0.

### **Social Networking - Facebook**

**Facebook** (<http://www.facebook.com/>) is a social networking site that also supports sending event notifications to people you have established as your “facebook friends”. You sign up with an email address and a password, then search for friends via the tools provided. Once you have set up your network of friends, you can set up the events application and send out event invitations.

**Business Example** - Steven Alexander is one of the owners of “Loplops”, a fine local bar. Last time I checked he has 385 friends he is connected to via Facebook. When he sends out a notification about a music gig at the bar, an email is received by the recipients about the event, and they are asked if they are attending, maybe attending or not attending. This can provide Steve with some feedback about the potential size of the audience.

To set up a Facebook provide, go to [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and follow the steps to create your profile. It does take time to cultivate a collection of friends.

**COST** - \$ 0.

### **Plug-my-event**

**Plug-my-event** (<http://www.plugmyevent.com/>) is a web site that supports event promotion.

It was developed by Brad Madigan of DizzyTree Solutions from the Sault.

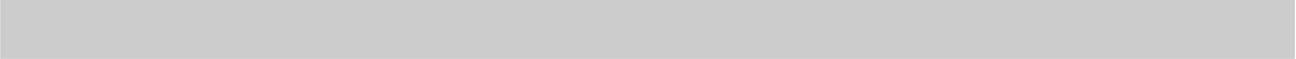
It provides the following features:

1. Allows you to create an event.
2. Send invitations by email. You must have a list of emails that you want to promote the event to.

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3. Create an online ticket system. Recipients can pay for tickets online.
4. Collect RSVP data. Supports establishing policy/terms for the RSVP.

**COST** - Free for free events. \$ 49.95 for each event that you are selling tickets for, any volume.



## Collaboration

There are many situations where collaborating with others is important. You might be collaborating with other companies regarding marketing, etc., where sharing graphics might be warranted. I happen to run projects and the project participants can be anywhere on earth, and being able to meet and communicate effectively is critical to success. There are free tools to help to make that happen.

### Desktop Sharing - Netmeeting

**Netmeeting** is a tool that ships free with Microsoft Windows, and it is particularly easy to use if you are working within a local area network (LAN). It also supports audio, video, whiteboarding and chat. I have introduced this in some of the organizations where I work and it has been an instant hit.

The following instructions are for Windows XP

To install Netmeeting you will need to have Administrator access to your computer. Then:

1. Double-click "my computer", double-click your data drive (usually "c:"), double-click "Program Files", double-click "netmeeting".
2. Then you double-click the file "conf.exe". (If your computer hides extensions it will just show as "conf".) Click Next.
3. Provide first name, last name, email, then Next.
4. If you do not have a directory server (not likely) click Next.
5. Speed is probably "local area network" if you have high-speed internet access. Click Next.
6. Put shortcut on my desktop checked, click Next.
7. Probably will not use the audio component if you use telephones, so just click Next.
8. If you will not be using a microphone, just click Next.
9. Then click Finish.
10. If you get a warning about unblocking Netmeeting, click "unblock".
11. The Netmeeting program should be started, and it looks like this.



- 12. If you are not using the audio or video components, turning them off in the options will minimize using up network bandwidth unnecessarily. To do this, click Tools, Options, Audio tab and uncheck the boxes, Video tab, uncheck the automatic tab, then click OK.
- 13. To call someone you either need their computer name or their I.P. (internet protocol) address. If you are within the same network, as in an office environment, computer name is typically simpler.

a. To find out the computer name, right-click "My Computer", select "properties", click on the "computer name" tab. The computer name from the following screen is "LAPTOP6400".



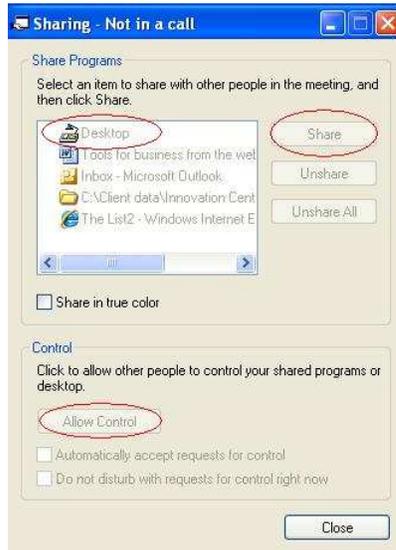
b. To find out the I.P. address, it can be more complex, especially if you have a firewall. Here is a link that can be helpful <http://www.lawrencegoetz.com/programs/ipinfo/>.

- 14. To connect to someone via Netmeeting, both people start netmeeting, and then one person keys in the other person's computer name (or I.P. address) and clicks on the telephone icon. The person receiving the call receives a message and clicks "accept".



- 15. Then, to share desktops, the sharer clicks on the icon in the lower left (the hand holding up a window). A dialogue box is displayed, click "desktop", then "share", and "close". You can enable another to request

control of your desktop if you also select “allow control”... the caller must select “request control” from the menu at the top of the shared desktop window to do this. Then the 2 people can see the same thing (spreadsheet, document, minutes, etc.).



16. There are a number of other tools that might be useful, including white-boarding, chat, etc., that you can explore.

## **Desktop Sharing, Conference Calls - FreeConference**

**FreeConference** (<http://www.freeconference.com/>) provides free telephone conference call support via their long-distance bridge numbers. They provide an access code and your participants use that to join the teleconference.

The thing I really like about this service is that you can set up one of their free scheduled conference meetings, and make use of the desktop sharing tool “SharePlus” for free while it is currently in beta-testing (hopefully this is still the case). I don’t necessarily have to make use of the long-distance call to use SharePlus and share my desktop with the person I am working with, and this works across the internet without I.P. addresses, firewall issues, etc.

**COST** - \$ 0.

## **Desktop Sharing – Zoho Meeting**

**Zoho Meeting** (<http://meeting.zoho.com/>) – I haven’t used this yet, but it supports desktop sharing and chat. I have been pleased with the Zoho tools that I have played with, so would definitely check this one out. Presenter must be on a Windows platform, and participants can use other platforms if needed.

**COST** – Free.

## **Committee and Meeting Management – My Committee**

**My Committee** (<http://www.mycommittee.com/>) - Set up committees with a private web portal, distribute agendas, minutes, committee documents, track action items, track attendance, keep notes, comments and resolutions.

This application was developed by an ex-employee of mine and a business based in Sudbury.

**COST** – Free for a single committee, with only 10M storage space, viewing limited to last 3 meetings. Several upgrade options are available, starting at \$ 300 per year.

## **Project Management – BaseCamp**

**BaseCamp** (<http://www.basecampHQ.com/>) provides a web site devoted to facilitating collaboration from a project management perspective. It has over 1 million users. Notes:

1. Includes a dashboard to display all clients and projects on 1 screen.
2. Can be customized with your business logo and colours.
3. To do lists, file sharing, message boards.
4. Milestones, time tracking, and project overviews.
5. Security is by password for basic access, and SSL (very secure) for higher level accounts.
6. Has an Application Programmer Interface (API) so it can be extended and modified to suit different project management environments.

**COST** – 30 day free trial. \$ 12 / month for maximum of 3 projects, 250 Megs. \$ 24 / month for maximum of 15 projects, 500 Megs. \$ 49 / month for maximum of 35 projects, 3 Gigs, SSL security, time tracking. Higher prices for more projects/storage, additional features.

## **Online Documents**

There are many tools that enable multiple people to access documents online, often at the same time. Some of these are described elsewhere in this document.

1. Google Docs on page 19.
2. Zoho on page 19.

## **Blogs and Wikis**

Blogs and Wikis are described elsewhere in this document, but they can provide an online “space” where multiple people can contribute their input, add comments, etc. A blog is simpler in presentation and use than a wiki.

## Data Storage, Database Hosting

### Web-based File Storage – Box.net

**Box.net** (<http://www.box.net/>) enables you to store files on a server accessible from anywhere with web access securely. This can be useful in a number of ways.

1. If you work from multiple computers (as I do) you can store files in Box and access them from anywhere.
2. If you want to share files with another who you might be working with, you can both access the files in Box. Kind of like a shared folder, but out on the web.
3. When working with larger files, often people are restricted regarding the size of email attachments you can send... with Box you can place the file on the server and just send them a link instead, avoiding hassle and saving local disk space in the process.
4. It can be used as backup for important files.

**COST** – Free for an individual to try for 14 days. Lite – Free, 1 G space, 10 M max file size. Individual - \$ 7.95/month, 5 G space, 1 G max file size. There are other more expensive options with more space, more features.

### Database Hosting – DiscountAsp.Net

**DiscountASP** (<http://www.discountasp.net>) is an award-winning service that supports having a database and a web-site, but without you having to purchase and maintain a server. Purchasing a bare-bones server with Microsoft SQL Server and IIS (i.e. Microsoft Small Business Server), 5 client licenses, router, will cost around \$ 5,000, and count on about \$ 1,000 for set-up and initial configuration, and then ongoing maintenance costs to apply patches, maintain security, etc. If what you need is a place to run a web-based Microsoft database application, DiscountASP is an attractive option to avoid the cost and hassle of running a server.

I know this is pretty technical, but if you are hiring someone to build a data-centric web application for you, you will need a place for it to live, and this option is very well worth knowing about. Features:

1. 1,000 M disk space, 80 G monthly data transfer
2. SQL 2005 or 2000
3. SQL 2005 reporting services (a favourite of mine)
4. Backups
5. Current technical tools, add-ons, security, etc.

**COST** – Most basic service - 3 months free, \$ 10 per month with 1 year commitment, waived set-up fee. Additional features available for additional monthly fees.

### File Transfer Protocol (FTP) Utility – CoreFTP

**CoreFTP** (<http://www.coreftp.com/>) is a free utility that enables you to copy files from your computer to a server out on the web somewhere. This ability is often needed when dealing with things web-centric, and can scare people who are not particularly computer-savvy. It need not be scary. It is essentially a tool that lets you copy files, and it is pretty easy to use. There are a number of free FTP utilities that you can download - CoreFTP is a good one if you need it.

**COST** – Lite version - \$ 0. With email support \$ 24.95. Pro version (additional features) with email support \$ 34.95.

## **Remote Access to Computers – GoToMyPC**

**GoToMyPC** (<https://www.gotomypc.com/entry.tmpl?SessionInfo=286945335:8FF35D42DFA40B3:null>) enables you to access your PC from any web browser on any other computer. It essentially creates a “hole” in any firewalls to connect from your computer to the GoToMyPC server, and then you can connect through the GoToMyPC server via your browser by supplying

**COST** – \$ 0 for 30 day free trial. 1 PC - \$ 24.99 per month, or \$ 224.91 per year. There are Pro and Corporate level accounts if you have to manage multiple users and need some administrative tools.

## Marketing

### **VistaPrint – Marketing Materials**

VistaPrint (<http://www.vistaprint.ca>) provides a broad array of marketing materials such as business cards, logo design services, templates, brochures, etc., at reasonable prices.

**COST** – Varies.

### **Upcoming Courses Sponsored by the Enterprise Centre SSM**

The EDC is hosting a couple of courses that might be helpful to small businesses. They are focused on a business audience as opposed to being strongly technical in nature, and will be held at the Holiday Inn.

Strictly speaking this is not within the scope of the presentation, as this does not come from the web, but I thought the audience might be interested in knowing about these seminars anyway. I consider knowledge a form of tool.

**March 4, 2008: e-Marketing** - Learn common online advertising methods used routinely in the world today and explore which e-marketing strategies will work best with your business's existing approach.

**March 18, 2008: World of eBay** - Learn how to utilize online auction house eBay and how it can provide an opportunity to market and sell products in a competitive way. Learn how to set up an account, search for items and resolve bad debts, amongst other functions.

**COST** – \$ 15 for each course. Register by contacting John Moor at [j.moore@ssmedc.ca](mailto:j.moore@ssmedc.ca) or (705) 541-7329.

## Microsoft Office Replacements

Microsoft Office costs quite a bit (around \$ 600 per computer for the small business edition, and \$ 690 for Pro which includes Microsoft Access database program). When you add to that the cost of regular upgrades every 2 or 3 years and enhanced support packages, the cost to a business can be significant. There are alternatives out there that might be right for you.

### **OpenOffice.org**

**OpenOffice.org** (<http://www.openoffice.org/index.html>) is a free open-source product that was developed to break the monopoly of the Microsoft Office product suite. It emulates the Microsoft Office look and feel where feasible. This is a DIFFERENT product than the one available at [www.openoffice.com](http://www.openoffice.com), so ensure you use the “.org” version. OpenOffice.org can work with Microsoft Office ‘97/2003 file formats. There is a Microsoft Office plug-in that allows it to read OpenOffice.org default format files. It includes the following components.

1. Writer – A word processor similar to Microsoft Word. It also includes the ability to export documents in .pdf format, create and edit web pages and has spreadsheet functions available in its tables.
2. Calc – A spreadsheet similar in power to Microsoft Excel.
3. Impress – This is a presentation program similar to Microsoft Powerpoint. It can export directly to an Adobe Flash format (.swf) so the file can be played on any computer with a Flash player installed, as well as to the Microsoft Powerpoint (.ppt) file format. It is apparently a little weak in ready-made presentation designs, but templates are available on the internet.
4. Base – A database program similar to Microsoft Access.
5. A drawing utility, an equation editor, a macro recorder, and a programming language. Extensions are also available to add functionality.

Because it comes from the open-source community, there is not a dedicated support line to call. However, there is support from the community itself via online forums, etc.

**COST** – Free.

### **StarOffice**

**StarOffice** (<http://www.sun.com/software/star/staroffice/get.jsp>) from Sun Microsystems has been built on top of the OpenOffice.org product, and adds some proprietary features. Some proprietary features of note include additional fonts, templates, file importing tools, clip art and sample documents, etc. OpenOffice actually supports more languages (40 versus 11) and more operating system platforms.<sup>2</sup> The main reason a business might prefer StarOffice over OpenOffice.org, in my opinion, is having a large company such as Sun providing support.

**COST** –

- \$ 70 US per person, includes 3 free support incidents during the first 60 days. Note that the “per person” licensing approach allows 1 person to install the package on multiple computers (up to 5), so you can have one on your desktop at work, your laptop and your home computer.
- You can download it and try it for 90 days free here [http://www.sun.com/software/star/staroffice/get\\_eval.jsp](http://www.sun.com/software/star/staroffice/get_eval.jsp).
- StarOffice is included free as part of the “Google Pack”, a large collection of software that is available for free from Google, but there is some cost for support, etc. I haven’t explored this but you can read about it here <http://pack.google.com/intl/en/about.html?hl=en&gl=us>.

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Staroffice>.

## **Google Docs**

**Google Docs** ([www.docs.google.com](http://www.docs.google.com)) consists of an online word processor, spreadsheet and presentation program. Key features:

1. The key feature to note is that it is available online (i.e. from any computer) and supports collaboration, so you can enable multiple people to work on a single document at one time, or to contribute at different times.
2. You can import and export into a variety of file formats, including Microsoft Office and OpenOffice.org.
3. Files can be saved to your hard drive, and sent via email attachments.
4. There are limitations to file sizes and storage, as the files are typically stored on Google servers. If you use huge spreadsheets or documents you might run into problems.
5. I would not recommend this for documents requiring heavy security (e.g. banking data), although it is reasonably secure.

It is not really a full Microsoft Office replacement, but, depending upon your business, it may be all that you need, and the collaborative features might be attractive enough to make this your main desktop software suite.

**COST** – Free.

## **Zoho**

**Zoho** (<http://www.zoho.com/>) provides a large suite of products for free. They include a word processor, spreadsheet, presentation tool, Wiki, project management software, online database tools, conduct tests online, etc. Zoho has ease of collaboration via a broad and reasonably deep set of online tools as its focus.

1. Zoho Business is the piece that enables an administrator to manage accounts, and users to “see” all of their Zoho applications from a single “dashboard”.
2. Imports and exports Microsoft Office file formats, so you can allow some employees to continue to work offline.
3. Zoho has endeavoured to make documents secure, including from most of their own employees.
4. Risk – Maybe not as fully-entrenched as some of the other options, so you are taking the chance that they will not be around for years and years.

**COST** – Free for individuals. Pricing varies by component needed for businesses.

## Organization

### **HighRise**

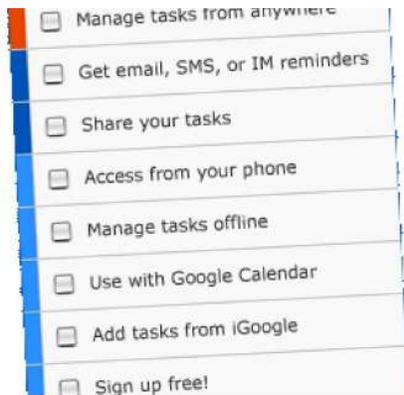
**High Rise** (<http://www.highrisehq.com/>) – It enables your employees to share an address book, track contact with leads, clients and customers, manage tasks and reminders, create groups of contacts, keep important email with a given customer visible in one screen, record notes about calls, etc. All of this is shared by your employees. This is included under “CRM” in this document as well, since it can be considered a CRM tool.

**COST** – From \$ 12/mo. (3 users, 250M, 500 contacts) to \$ 149/mo (unlimited users, 50G, 50,000 contacts). Pay-as-you-go, change plans any time. 30-day free trial.

## Remember The Milk

**Remember the Milk** (<http://www.rememberthemilk.com/>) is an organizing tool that supports making lists, managing tasks, setting reminders that can be sent to all sorts of places (Skype, email, etc.), collaborating regarding tasks. This is a fairly multi-functional online tool that is quite popular. It is kind of hard to describe, so check out this screen shot.

**COST** – \$ 0. \$ 25 per year for priority support.



The best way to manage your tasks.  
Never forget the milk (or anything else) again.

**Signup Now!**

Or, take a tour

for a free account

### Just a few things you can do with Remember The Milk...



**Manage tasks quickly and easily.**  
An intuitive interface makes managing tasks fun. Set due dates easily with *next Friday* or *in 2 weeks*. Extensive keyboard shortcuts make task management quicker than ever.



**Get reminded, anywhere.**  
Receive reminders via email, SMS, and instant messenger (AIM, Gadu-Gadu, Google Talk, ICQ, Jabber, MSN, Skype and Yahoo! are all supported).



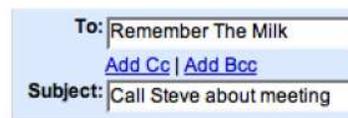
**Organize the way you want to.**  
Are you a list lover? Create as many lists as you need. Into tagging? Use the task cloud to easily see what you have to do. Want to store notes along with your tasks? You can do that too.



**Locate your tasks.**  
Use the map to see where your tasks are located in the real world. See what's nearby or on your way, and plan the best way to get things done.



**Work together to get things done.**  
Share, send and publish tasks and lists with your contacts or the world. Remind your significant other to do their household chores.



**Add tasks wherever you are.**  
Adding tasks is as simple as firing off an email (even from your phone). See an important date on the web? Add it to your list with Quick Add.

[Signup now for a free account](#)

## PDF Creation

There are times when I want to create a PDF (portable document format) document for distribution. For example, my version of Microsoft Project will print but will not export to PDF so I can distribute a schedule via email. There are a number of free tools that you can install that enable you to do this. PDFCreator is a good one that I use often.

### **PDFCreator – From SourceForge.net**

PDFCreator (<http://sourceforge.net/projects/pdfcreator/>) installs a virtual “printer” on your computer that creates a “.pdf” file whenever you print to it.

**COST** – \$ 0.

## Resources

### Learning

The focus of this document is tools that you can use. However, I consider knowledge the ultimate tool, so I included links to many of the great sites that were useful to me in researching for this seminar.

#### Tutor2U Presentations

**Tutor2U** (<http://tutor2u.net/presentations.asp>) provides many free Powerpoint business presentations that might be of great interest to people running businesses.

**COST** – \$ 0.

#### BNet.com

**BNet.com** (<http://www.bnet.com/>) provides thousands of business-related articles, tools, templates, videos and podcasts online.

**COST** – \$ 0.

#### Top 100 Tools for Learning

**Top 100 Tools** (<http://www.c4lpt.co.uk/recommended/top100.html>) presents links to a bunch of useful tools. They took a similar approach to the one taken for this presentation, except their focus was on learning. 97 professionals were asked for their top 10 picks of online tools, and the top 100 were published, ranked, at this site.

**COST** – \$ 0.

### Open Source, Shareware and Freeware

There are many, many places you can look to find free and cheap software that might be helpful to you. Here is but a sampling of sites that are reputable.

#### SourceForge.net – Open Source

**SourceForge.net** (<http://sourceforge.net/>) is the self-proclaimed world's largest open source software development web site. "Open Source" is a set of principles and practices whereby software develop programs that include the source code, are available for free distribution, and modifiable by anyone. There is a LOT of good stuff available, such as OpenOffice.org, and the calibre can rival that of purchased software. Support is spotty, so it may not be the best thing for a business with no technical expertise, but you can find all sorts of free and useful things from this site.

**COST** – \$ 0.

#### Tucows – Shareware and Freeware

**Tucows** (<http://www.tucows.com/>) has been up and running for many years. It has a wide variety of programs that can be very helpful in specific situations, many developed by small-scale programmers. Some are free, others have a nominal charge involved, some you can try indefinitely but are encouraged to pay a registration fee by messages tailored to bug you.

**COST** – \$ 0.

## **Business Networking – Linked In**

**LinkedIn** (<http://www.linkedin.com/>) is a networking site for professionals, that enables people to record a profile and search for and connect with other business professionals from a particular business or school.

**COST** - \$ 0.

## **Outsourcing – Elance**

**Elance.com** (<http://www.elance.com/>) is a site devoted to connecting you with other people offering services such as web and programming, design and multi-media, writing and translation, sales and marketing, finance and management, legal and engineering disciplines. You can search for others to do work for you and get them to bid on the work, test them for a bit, and follow through to payment. You can also offer your own services and bid on tasks to be done. Be careful... shysters abound on the web so check out those who you engage to do work as well as you are able.

**COST** – Doesn't look like there is a fee to register. Probably the site takes a commission based on fees paid, but I haven't investigated further.

## Telephone Alternatives and Enhancements

### **FaxAway – Virtual Fax**

**FaxAway** (<http://www.faxaway.com/>) will provide you with a phone number that people can call to send you faxes, which get converted to attachments to email and sent to you. You can also send faxes via email, to 1 or many recipients. As many as 250 email users can have access to the account.

**COST** – \$ 0 for inbound faxes. \$ 1 per month maintenance fee. There is a fee per minute for outgoing faxes, which varies depending upon the target country.

### **Efax – Virtual Fax**

**Efax** ([http://home.efax.com/s/r/ca\\_home?CMP=OTC-ca](http://home.efax.com/s/r/ca_home?CMP=OTC-ca)) is similar to FaxAway with a slightly different feature set. Faxes can be viewed online, retained for 1 year. 11 million users.

**COST** – 30-day free trial. First month after that is free, then \$ 18 CDN per month. Can receive up to 130 pages per month without charge. There is a fee per minute for outgoing faxes, which varies depending upon the target country.

### **Grand Central – Call Routing**

**Grand Central** (<http://www.grandcentral.com/home>) is a service that provides you with 1 number for all of your calls, it rings all of your phones, keeps all of your voice messages in one place, and provides a bunch of different features. This was recently purchased by Google, so you can anticipate it will be around for awhile. Features include:

1. Screen callers
2. Listen in to find out why someone is calling before taking the call
3. Record calls on the fly
4. Block unwanted callers
5. Receive notification of voicemail by email
6. Ring different phones depending upon who is calling
7. Personalize voice messages by caller or groups
8. Let people call you from a web page without showing your number
- 9.

**COST** – \$ 0 for now. The plan is to add premium features with modest costs in the future.

### **Shaw Digital Phone**

**Shaw Digital Phone** (<http://www.shaw.ca/en-ca/ProductsServices/DigitalPhone/Default.htm>) is newly available in the Sault. It competes with Bell and somewhat with Skype if you call a lot of land-lines. It claims 99% uptime, provides a host of features with the phone, a second line is cheap.

**COST** – \$ 19.95 per month for the Lite version for the first 6 months. \$ 29.95 per month for the first 6 months adds more features, unlimited long-distance in Canada and USA, and 1,000 free minutes per month long-distance to 50 countries.

### **Skype**

**Skype** (<http://www.skype.com/>) provides a service that enables you to talk over the internet. Notes:

1. It is free to talk with others using Skype anywhere in the world, for as long as you want. Multiple people at a time works ok too.
2. Forward calls (for example to your cell-phone or office land-line) and receive text messages when not online.
3. It is cheap to talk with others on land-lines and cell-phones. (\$.24/minute for Canada and USA for land-line, additional connection fee for cell-phones.)
4. Free video calls if you have a web-cam.
5. There are tools to manage Skype credit within a company (e.g. used for paying to connections to land-lines).
6. You need speakers and a microphone, or a headset.
7. Quality can be a little shaky at times, with occasional dropped calls.
8. Well-established company. There were close to 10,000,000 people online via Skype when I last checked.

Business example – If you need to work with people in far-flung geographic locations for extended periods of time, a Skype connection can make it seem like you are in the same room. Add desktop sharing of some sort and you can essentially work as if you were side-by-side sharing the same computer screen.

**COST** – \$ 0 plus fees to connect to land-lines and cell-phones. There is a for-fee bundle you can purchase that adds features/value that might be of interest to businesses that use Skype heavily.

## Wikis

**Summary** - A wiki is software that allows users to create, edit, and link web pages easily. Wikis are often used to create collaborative websites and to power community websites. For example, Wikipedia is an online encyclopaedia that has more than 75,000 contributors from all over the world, and more than 9,000,000 articles in over 250 languages. Wikis are being installed by businesses to provide affordable and effective Intranets and for knowledge management.<sup>3</sup>

They differ from blogs in that they are not based on chronological entries. Rather they can contain a wide variety of content that is linked together with various hyperlinks.

There are many wikis that are free. These can be useful for businesses in many different ways.

1. Information and files can be posted for dissemination to others.
2. If you provide access, other people can contribute to the wiki by adding comments, files, content, and they can also update content. Very useful for collaboration with distant people.
3. RSS feeds can be used to send information to subscribers whenever content changes.
4. There are options to converse with others logged in to the wiki. (I haven't used this so am not sure how well this would work... PB Wiki advertises this as a "walkie-talkie" so I suspect sound quality is not terrific.)
5. Not a good idea for highly sensitive information.

**Sample free wiki platform** – Peanut Butter Wiki (<http://pbwiki.com/>) provides a simple-to-use wiki and the basic level service is free. A sample can be found at <http://timkelly.pbwiki.com/>. It contains the course notes we are looking at so that others can get a copy. (To get your copy, click on "Seminar notes" on "FrontPage", click on the Microsoft Word or PDF file, click "Open", and then File As from the menu, then "Save as" in Word or "Save a copy" from Adobe Reader, and give it a meaningful name in a folder like My Documents where you can find it later.)

To set up your own Peanut Butter Wiki go to <http://pbwiki.com/>, click "Create a Wiki", set up an account and a wiki will be created with the name you specify.

**COST:** \$ 0 for 10 M storage, unlimited pages and updates, secure single-user login, backups to your local computer, but it does include ads. \$ 9.95 per month for 1000 M, ad-free, access to statistics, more features. More expensive options are also available.

**Other low-cost wiki platforms** - There are other free wiki platforms available at:

1. SocialText - <http://www.socialtext.com/> - Start for free, upgrade to more secure hosted solutions as your business needs change and as your use of the wiki expand. Can accommodate larger enterprises with greater security concerns. Free for up to 5 users, 500M. Upgrades are priced by the number of users.
2. Brainkeeper - <http://www.brainkeeper.com/> - Wiki geared towards businesses. Separate workspaces, workflow tools, accessibility controls. Basic service for 3 users \$ 5 per month, 6 month minimum (i.e. \$ 30 total to provide service to 3 users for 6 months). More cost to add more users and features.
3. Samepage - <http://www.same-page.com/> - Focus is project management, document management, online meetings, contact management. Free for 30 days. \$ 50/month for 150M, 1 project. \$ 100/month for 250M, 10+ projects. Other more expensive options available.
4. Wetpaint – <http://www.wetpaint.com/> - Tips available at <http://www.wetpaintcentral.com/> - Free. Appears to me to be most suited to personal wikis, simple to use. Looks like it includes ads.

<sup>3</sup> From Wikipedia, [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com). Entry "Wiki".

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