

Using Technology to Maximize Business Productivity

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There are many products and services available today that can directly and significantly improve your effectiveness and productivity. Many of these are simple, will work even better when used by more than an individual, and are free. The attached presentation covers several of these and the following references will help you find more information.

Allegro is a local firm that directly supports a number of these Open Source (read as “free”) tools for businesses. You can call us for help with those tools so noted.

Doug Lucy maintains a blog on business productivity at

Email

Email servers and clients

Microsoft Exchange and Microsoft Outlook are powerful, popular software with rich-features and broad support.

www.microsoft.com/exchange/

www.microsoft.com/outlook/

Google Mail, better known as *gmail*, is available for individuals and businesses.

www.gmail.com

www.google.com/a/smallbiz/

Creating PDF files

When you send documents to your customers, vendors and staff, you often want to send them in final, ready-to-print versions without the ability to alter them and without the requirement of running the same software as you are running. One option is to “print” your documents so as to yield a PDF, or Adobe Portable Document Format file, and then attach that PDF to an email.

Adobe Acrobat Reader makes it possible for all modern computers to “see” and print PDF documents as they were intended to appear.

www.acrobat.com

Adobe Acrobat Standard is a large, complicated, professional program for creating PDF documents

www.adobe.com/products/acrobatpro/acrobatstd.html

PDF Creator is a free program that acts as a printer driver so you can create PDF documents instead of “printing” them.

<http://sourceforge.net/projects/pdfcreator/>

Calendars

Keeping a calendar is a critical key to managing yourself and your business.

You can use commercial tools like Microsoft Outlook which has broad commercial support and can synchronize with nearly any modern PDA, cell phone or Smartphone.

www.microsoft.com/outlook/

Google offers free calendars for private, group and business use. These can be published on the web, seen and/or updated by more than one person, and offer a limited degree of sync with PDAs and phones.

www.google.com/calendar

Managing meetings

Evite is a way to invite multiple people to your events. You can track who is coming, who isn't and even offer the ability or requirement to pay a fee for a given event.

www.evite.com

MeetUp is a service that helps people with similar interests in a given area "find" each other and organize getting together or meetings.

www.meetup.com

Instant messaging

The ability to send short messages or carry on live conversations with one or more people simultaneously is very powerful. Many services exist to fulfill this need and you can expect to "IM" from your computer, PDA or Smartphone.

AOL Instant Messenger used to be the most popular. Sadly, their IM client broadcasts a lot of advertising and reduces its popularity.

www.aim.com

Pidgin is an Open Source or "free" IM client that works with AOL, MSN, Yahoo, Jabber, IRC and most other IM services.

www.pidgin.im/

Windows Live Messenger is a Microsoft IM client, but it is free and it offers an easy-to-use video conferencing feature.

<http://get.live.com/messenger/overview>

Web conferencing

Sometimes you need to show someone something on your computer screen while you interact with them, but you can't travel to their location. Web conferencing makes it possible for you to "lead" a presentation for multiple people at separate locations where everyone can hear you speak and everyone can see your computer screen.

WebEx is the big provider of this service and charges quite a bit

www.webex.com

GoTo Meeting is a newer service, has similar features, and competitive rates.

www.gotomeeting.com

Screen recording

When you don't have to be present, but you still need someone to see your computer screen and hear your voice during the presentation, you can create a "canned" screen recording by using a product that records everything happening on your screen and your voice narrating the screen.

Camtasia is a commercial product that does this very well

www.techsmith.com/camtasia.asp

Wink is an Open Source product that does most of what Camtasia does, but for free

www.debugmode.com/wink/

Note-taking

Jott is a free service that lets you use your cell phone as a voice recorder. Jott transcribes your voice message into text email and sends it to your email account and/or anyone else you indicate.

www.jott.com

Wiki

A wiki is a website that catalogs information and resources and can be used like an encyclopedia or a library's index card system. You can have your own wiki and allow you and your staff to keep information in a single place and easily update it without lots of red tape, bureaucracy and everyone having a common computer network.

Allegro can help you set up a wiki for your company

<http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/MediaWiki>

Office documents

Everyone needs a word processor and most business people need a spreadsheet program and software to make and display presentations. Microsoft's Office suite is the dominant solution for these needs, but OpenOffice is a commercial alternative and Google Docs give users most of the functionality they need for free.

www.microsoft.com/office

www.openoffice.com

www.google.com/docs

Surveys

Creating, distributing, managing and tabulating a survey can be a lot of work. Don't miss out on the value of a survey just because it can be difficult. SurveyMonkey and others offers simple email-based surveys that you can create, send out and the users complete via the web.

www.surveymonkey.com

Capturing and printing whiteboards

Graphic communication on a whiteboard or even just lists can be easily captured using a regular digital camera and Pixid, a commercial software product. It takes a dingy, out-of-alignment image of a white board and corrects it so the resulting JPG can be printed in any computer printer as a legible copy of the original whiteboard.

www.polyvision.com/products/wbp.asp

Content Management Systems

Your website should be easy to update and you should be able to make the changes yourself. If your business still relies on a programmer or a website firm to make changes for you, then you are missing out on having an up-to-date website that your customers find useful and one that is inexpensive to operate.

Content Management Systems (CMS) are modern websites that allow non-programmers to make changes and provide functionality beyond just "displaying your brochure." Joomla is an excellent Open Source (mostly "free") CMS.

Allegro can help you set up a CMS for your company

www.joomla.org

Virtual Bubblewrap

All the pops, all the time. Enough said.

www.virtual-bubblewrap.com

Thanks much for you time and let us know if this information was helpful for you,

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