



Beyond Microsoft Office

When the only tool you know how to use is a hammer, you solve all problems with a hammer — which is why many use Microsoft Office for everything. This article provides an overview of new software tools for increasing marketing productivity.

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Summary

The applications bundled in Microsoft Office — word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, calendar, and mail — are the only software applications that many marketing professionals have learned.

Not only can these functions be done more efficiently and effectively, Internet enabled applications and services can vastly improve productivity in gathering, organizing and presenting information.

Whether you are an individual contributor in a small startup or a manager in a large firm, these applications will enable you to accomplish more with less time and effort. Examples covered will include more compelling presentations, faster spreadsheets, better looking documents, business networking and contact management, and easy to use survey tools.

Foreword

With its five core applications and 400 million paid users, Microsoft Office is both widely and frequently used, and essential for many peo-

ple's work. The average person spends 2.6 hours each day, using Office.¹

But Office has thousands of features of which most only use 5%. Many users do workarounds to perform a function, when a feature already exists to do that. As a result, Microsoft Office 2007 will be a total rethinking of the user interface to improve its usability and ease of use.

But even with these improvements, there are many applications that provide capabilities far beyond the scope of Office. Some of these applications are more suited towards groups and collaboration, others are focused on individuals that are frequently absent from their offices or on the road.

Motivation

Why learn new software applications?

- Avoid becoming obsolete. Otherwise new entrants to the market have a competitive advantage over you.
- Increase your productivity and hence your value.
- Effectively manage what you do not understand or realize can be done.

But most importantly, “You never get a second chance to make a first impression.”

¹ Jensen Harris, Lead Program Manager, Microsoft Office User Experience, December 13, 2005

Office Alternatives

More Compelling Presentations

Consider a business presentation. Originally we used foils and overhead projectors. Then we used Powerpoint on a laptop with a projector. Subsequently we started adding animation, allowing progressive builds.²

Ironically, many visuals weaken presentations. While flow charts, bar and pie graphs, organization charts and pictures, convey information that can be absorbed at a glance, bullets and phrases are often unnecessary and distracting.³

With webinars and DVDs, we are no longer present in person when doing a presentation. Using video with carefully scripted pictures and voice over enables making presentations in a fast, compelling and entertaining manner.

But the real reason why video can be more effective is that more time and thought has been devoted to its preparation and rehearsal.

Making a video used to be prohibitively expensive, but with the advent of digital camcorders and software such as Apple's Final Cut Pro, it can be done on a modest budget. But the fundamentals of doing good presentations become even more important and essential.

Faster Spreadsheets

Spreadsheets were the first killer applications that enabled PCs to become an essential business tool. They have become programming languages in their own right.

Arguably, Excel is the most powerful of Microsoft Office applications, yet the most underutilized. Frequently, spreadsheets are laboriously assembled, typing the data into each cell. Excel has the ability to automatically make calls to other programs, e.g. a stock trading

system, facilitating implementation sophisticated hedge trading system. Alternatively, a web based plug-in can be used to automatically obtain and updated desired information as well.

Spreadsheets are often used when a database would allow having multiple, concurrent users, better security and privacy, as well as the ability to integrate images. FileMaker is an easy to use database that facilitates converting a spreadsheet into a database.

An alternative way of providing concurrent access are by online spreadsheet products such as iRows and Google Spreadsheets that allow multiple people to view and/or update spreadsheets at the time time. While access security and backup are provided, physical security can no longer be insured.

- www.irows.com
- spreadsheets.google.com

iRow imports Excel and CSV files and does graphing and has been integrated into Salesforce.com.

Better Looking Documents

With Microsoft Word, it is easy to write a standard business letter. But to produce a newsletter, you need an additional layout program like QuarkXpress or InDesign. Or for that matter, to write a book or manual, you need to use Adobe's Frame.

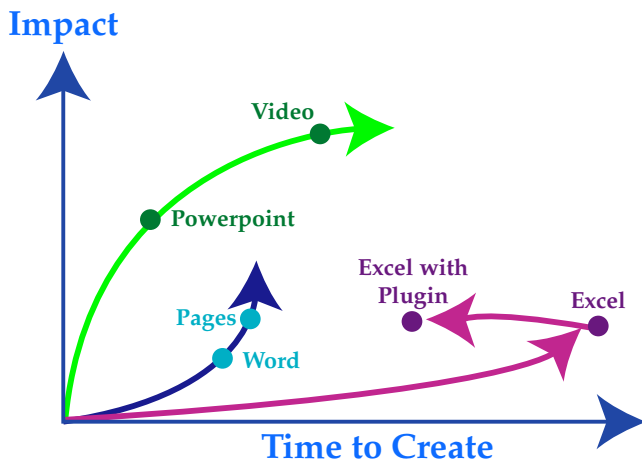
Apple's Pages, with its pre-defined templates, enables easily and quickly integrating photographs and graphs to create a variety of sophisticated and compelling layout with a simple, easy to learn, user interface for everything from a newsletter to a book.

² Apple's Keynote and Serious Magic's Ovation for Powerpoint both enable better looking presentations.

³ *The Contrary Public Speaker ebook*, LeeAundra Temescu, 2003, www.thecontrarypublicspeaker.com and *Beyond Bullet Points*, Cliff Atkinson, 2005, Microsoft Press

Audience Impact vs. Time to Create

Typically, the faster information can be comprehended and absorbed, the greater the time and effort needed to create and format it.



Learning a software package requires investing time — hours, days, or sometimes months — to become proficient. Software that is difficult to use, or requires a steep learning curve, often becomes shelfware, gathering dust on a bookshelf. A high premium should be placed on selecting software that is quick and easy to learn.

Spectacular Graphics

All too often, people use the graphics tools of Powerpoint to create an illustration. But tools like Visio on the PC and OmniGraph for the Mac provide extensive template libraries that allow quickly creating block diagrams, flowcharts and other diagrams.

- office.microsoft.com/visio/
- www.omnigroup.com

For illustrations, Adobe's Illustrator is used extensively by graphics artists. If your artwork is being created using it, knowing Illustrator will facilitate your making last minute artwork tweaks. However, becoming proficient is a non-trivial task.

For photography, Adobe's Photoshop is the gold standard, despite its graphic arts origins. While making full use of its features can be a

daunting task, learning a subset of its capabilities is straightforward. There are a large number of Photoshop plug-ins available that facilitate its use.

- www.adobe.com

While not a replacement for Photoshop, for a total photography workflow solution — allowing tens of thousands of digital photographs to be managed, simply enhanced, backed up, and published as web pages and books — Apple's Aperture has no equal.

Personal Productivity Tools

The cliché is that we're all trying to do too much in too short a time without a plan. David Allen's GTD (Get Things Done)⁴ book provides techniques for using time management software to improve productivity and focus. The key insight of his book is by taking large, unformed tasks, and breaking them down and organizing them into smaller, sequential steps, substantial progress starts to occur.

In thinking about how to improve your productivity with better organization, determine what is the simplest thing that will work. Fancy tools and gadgets are not required to get your life organized. If notes on a few pieces of paper work, use it. Use a computer based solution when paper notebooks become inadequate.

It is not necessary to use a complex software; rather one or more software packages can be used for systematically organizing and processing tasks such as calendars, contacts, emails, and notes.

Merlin Mann's site focuses on personal productivity, life hacks, and simple ways to make your life better.

- www.43folders.com

Danny O'Brien linked together the words "life" and "hacks" and created a phrase that de-

⁴ *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*, by David Allen

scribes any hacks, tips and tricks that get things done quickly by automating, increase productivity and organizing.

- www.lifehack.org

Blogs

A blog can be a powerful, cost-effective alternative to having a website or email newsletter. Good blogs require a commitment to updating them on a regular basis, as well as the talent to provide information of continuing interest.⁵

A popular tool for blogging is Six Apart’s TypePad. It facilitates adding meta descriptions and tooltips to images and headings, making it easier for search engines to index its content appropriately.

- TypePad from Six Apart

Pingoat and ping-o-matic are services that ping or notify other services that keep track of weblogs (blogs) and publish them. By pinging, the services are informed that a blog has been updated, causing them to crawl and index your site.

- www.pingoat.com
- www.pingomatic.com

FeedBurner helps bloggers publicize their content and facilitate people subscribing to it. It optimizes distribution to facilitate a blog being shared, tagged, and linked to. It provides tools for analyzing traffic to a blog to determine how many subscribers a blog has, where they are coming from, and what they liked best.

- www.feedburner.com

The FeedBurner Ad Network allows advertisers to select a particular demographic with an acknowledged interest in a given topic.

Wikis

A wiki is a website that allows users to add and edit content collectively. Wikis are an effective tool for collaborative writing. Edits are made in realtime and appear online immediately. Each wiki page typically contains many links to other pages. PHP, Perl and Python scripting languages are the most common way in which wikis are implemented.

Blog	Wiki
Easy to publish sequential posts	Easy to create and refactor content owned by group
Media to express individual voice	Media to express group voice, deemphasizing identity of individuals
“Post media” (like e-mail), usually with feedback and trackback	“Refactor media”; content may change at any time
Typically hosted service	Usually open source software, installed on own server

While wikis are perceived as being chaotic, having no security or audit trails, they provide an useful tool to insuring that content remains current and is easy to find. Wikis prevent content from becoming static, incomplete, and empower employees to participate and fix content on the spot.

Wikis are available that have access control, version control / audit trails, and allow files to be attached. One example is TWiki⁶, an open source structured wiki written in Perl that is being used by many corporations. Many plug-

⁵ [Ten Ways to Become a Better Blogger](#), by Deb Shinder, 9/29/2006 provides much useful advice on blogging.

⁶ <http://twiki.org/cgi-bin/view/Codev/TWikiPresentation2006x04x05>

ins are available for functions such as calendars, charts, accessing databases, etc.

EditMe is an online wiki service that allows multiple contributors to collaborate in building web sites or blogs while protecting sensitive information.

- EditMe, www.editme.com
- TWiki, www.twiki.org

Web Site Design

Web sites have become the single most important marketing presence for many companies. Even if you outsource their design and implementation, it is to your advantage to better understand them.

The first web sites were written only in HTML and tools such as Adobe's PageMill and Microsoft FrontPage made it easy to create these pages.

As the functionality of the web grew, new web site tools such as GoLive and Dreamweaver facilitated incorporating scripts into sites. JavaScript, PHP, and Perl scripts are incorporated into web pages to check and validate forms, changing images when moused over, opening new windows, and making calls to various web services such as MySQL databases.

Google's AdSense relies upon websites adding JavaScript to each page to enable text, image, and video advertisements on their site. The ads are less intrusive than banner ads, and the ad content tends to be more relevant to the website. Clicks on these ads generate income for both Google and the web site owner.

A move from HTML to CSS (cascading style sheets) began in March 2000 with Internet Explorer 5.0 on the Mac. Today, all four major browsers, Internet Explorer, Firefox, Opera, and Safari, support CSS. Web pages using CSS enable separating the presentation of a web page from its structure.

RapidWeaver is a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) template-based website creation tool with full CSS compliance. Predefined templates are available from many vendors that allow the user to quickly configure the color, font, and style of a given page. Sidebars are included in many of its templates, facilitating adding the JavaScript necessary to implement Google AdSense.

- www.realmacsoftware.com/rapidweaver/

Sitemaps are helpful for instructing the Google and Yahoo search engines what pages to index, and how often they should be crawled.

Web Site Analytics

By adding a line of Java code to each web page on your site that you wish to monitor, tools like Google Analytics and Mint collect statistics that help analyze your web site traffic.

- www.google.com/analytics
- www.haveamint.com

Adding the appropriate keywords to your website's title tag, metatags, alt tags, et cetera, helps provide targeted leads to your web site. Furthermore, these keywords can be used for doing Google AdWord campaigns. Yahoo's Search Marketing⁷ Keyword Selector Tool provides alternate suggestions for keyword searches.

- searchmarketing.yahoo.com

Additional keyword research tools that provide help in choosing appropriate web page keywords and metatags for optimizing qualified traffic to a web site are provided by WordTracker and SEObook:

- www.wordtracker.com
- tools.seobook.com/general/keyword

A great blog on optimizing web sites is Philippe Alexis's Hidden Gems:

- blog.nodiamonds.com

⁷ Formerly Overture Keyword Selector.

Information on how Google crawls and indexes websites, along with tools to diagnosis crawling issues, view statistics on how a site is indexed, and when it was last crawled is provided by the following google site:

www.google.com/webmasters

Quova provides geographic location and demographic information of website visitors in real time, enabling businesses to detect fraud, manage digital rights, target content, conduct site analysis and ensure regulatory compliance. This information can be used dynamically to geo-target end users when ad serving, resulting in increases up to 30% in click-through to dollar spent. Information can also be provided in the appropriate language with relevant products and prices.

• www.quova.com

Marketbright provides a pre-integrated online marketing and web content management platform and delivers it as a hosted on demand solution. This results in a complete view of all customer activities across a website and campaigns.

• www.marketbright.com

Instant Messaging

Instant messaging (IM) can enable better communication and faster decision making. It is used in place of email or voice mail by many, particularly when using phones or mobile devices like the Danger Sidekick. While IM is like email, its usage is more akin to talking on a cell phone.

In a work environment, IMs are used to communicate with colleagues to schedule or coordinate, to quickly get answers and make business decisions, and to interact with clients or customers. It is also used to avoid protracted or difficult in-person conversations.

In a collaborative environment, it is used to discuss a broad range of topics via many rapid

messages each day, with multiple concurrent threads.

While the first IM services were proprietary, e.g. AOL Instant Messenger (AIM), MSN Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, Novell Groupwise and Lotus Sametime; alternatives such as Jabber are becoming available.

Jabber is “the Linux of instant messaging” — an open, secure, ad-free alternative. Jabber consists of a set of streaming XML protocols and technologies that enable any two entities on the Internet to exchange messages, presence, and other structured information in close to real time.

• www.jabber.org

Web Conferencing

Web conferencing or webinars, are increasingly used for remote training, telecommuting, minimizing travel, facilitating communication, online events, enabling collaboration across political and physical boundaries, and workshops.

The three dominant webinar products in terms of functionality and strategy are WebEx Communications, Microsoft Office Live Meeting⁸, and Adobe Macromedia Breeze. Essentially all of these applications handle sharing slides, applications (desktops) and whiteboarding.

Of these vendors, WebEx is the leader in hosted enterprise web conferencing. Adobe’s Breeze is deployed using Macromedia’s Flash Player that is installed on almost all browsers.

Avitage

Avitage is typically used in conjunction with WebEx. It allows archiving presentations, facilitating their viewing on an on-demand basis.

• www.avitage.com

⁸ Microsoft acquired PlaceWare in April 2003 that became the basis for Office Live Meeting.

Useful Web Services

Business Networking

With the proliferation of voice mail and automated telephone equipment, it has become increasingly difficult to identify and reach the appropriate person in a company by simply calling the switchboard.

Services like LinkedIn, Jigsaw, and others can help solve this problem.

- LinkedIn, www.linkedin.com
- Jigsaw Data, www.jigsaw.com
- Plaxo, www.plaxo.com
- Spoke Software, www.spoke.com
- Zoom Information, www.zoominfo.com
- Hoover's, www.hoovers.com
- CI Radar, www.ciradar.com

There are hundreds of web sites that promise to assist you finding someone and/or do background checks, for fees that can quickly add up. Here are two sites that have been mentioned by others:

- www.peoplefinders.com
- www.voompeople.com

Surveys

SurveyMonkey allows creating and publishing custom surveys, collecting the results, and then graphically viewing and analyzing realtime results.

- www.surveymonkey.com

There are many other companies⁹ providing survey capabilities. SurveyMonkey is one of the most economical.

Using online survey tools requires care in order to avoid having questionable survey results.

These tools have been used with the most success for surveying customer service issues following a transaction, and frequently offer an incentive to respond.

Press Releases

PRWeb provides online news and press release distribution service for small and medium-sized businesses and corporate communications.

- www.PRWeb.com

Contract Management

EchoSign is a fail-safe, simple to use, secure web-based tool for sending, signing, tracking and storing documents on the Internet, allowing documents to be accessed from anywhere by a browser.

- www.echosign.com

Using EchoSign, you email an agreement that needs to be signed. They print, sign and fax back to an EchoSign fax number. The signed agreement, as a pdf, is emailed to all parties.

Naming Web Sites

Founded in November 1999, Nameboy is a web service that allows you to enter keywords to find, register, and back-order related available domain names. It does this by using phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics natural language variations to generate possible domain names based on the keywords entered.

- www.nameboy.com

Product Management

Feature Plan improves software product management productivity by automating the collection of feature requests and bug reports from customers, partners, and others from

⁹ Other web sites providing survey capabilities include: Active Websurvey, Apian Software, Cool Surveys, CustomerSat, EZSurvey, Greenfield Online, Hosted Survey, Infopoll, Inquisite, InSite, InstantSurvey, LiveSurveys, Mercator, Object-Planet, Perseus, PollCat, PollPro, SuperSurvey, SurveyView, StatPac, SurveyGold, Survey Select, SurveyCrafter, Survey-Heaven, Survey System, Surveywire, SurveySaid, QuickSense, SumQuest, StatSurvey, SurveySite, SurveyTrends, and Zoomerang™.

sources including CRM systems, Excel spreadsheets, Word documents, and manual entry. It provides a systematic means for developers to provide time, cost and difficulty estimates for each bug and feature. This information enables quickly determining the features, cost and time for a given release.

Currently FeaturePlan is a Microsoft .Net application with optional integrated with Microsoft Outlook. A web-based implementation will be offered in Q3 2006.

- www.featureplan.com

CRM Integration

CRM (customer relationship management) software has become essential to the sales organizations of many companies. Typical ways in which marketing uses CRMs include:

- Win / Loss data
- Enhancement requests / bug systems
- Market research

Salesforce.com is the world's leading Internet CRM application. There are a multitude of applications that integrate to Salesforce for marketing functions such as: data cleaning, demand generation, document management, email marketing, events, market research, channel marketing, programs and promotions, search marketing, and web analytics. Here are three web applications that many marketing organizations use with it:

Salesforce for Google AdWords

In August 2006, Salesforce acquired Kieden, whose application allows placing your Google ads from within Salesforce and then track and report the results. It allows measuring which keywords are generating results, enabling better understanding of the return on advertising spent.

- www.kieden.com

Kieden integrates the process of running and managing search marketing campaigns, with-

out ever leaving Salesforce, tracking every aspect of search marketing.

Eloqua

Eloqua's Conversion Suite combines email, direct mail, chat, and website analytics to drive the entire marketing process from contact to close, while making prospect interest and intent visible at every step.

- www.eloqua.com

Eloqua is able to generate personalized emails based upon the web pages visited, time of last visit, and any other indications of intent or interest captured by Eloqua's engine.

For hundreds of different events and surveys, they can generate custom content, multiple invitations, reminders, notifications and wait lists.

Email marketing campaigns can be executed with personalized landing pages and real-time tracking of prospect activity on your website. Salespeople view prospect activity and interest directly from Salesforce.

Vertical Response

Salesforce doesn't do a good job on mass personalized email blasts. Vertical Response's iBuilder lets you schedule the times at which email blasts are sent. Rudimentary templates can be used for emails. Different types of email bounces are differentiated (invalid address, inbox full).

- www.verticalresponse.com

Suppliers

Vistaprint, iPrint.com, Modern Postcard, and PsPrint are examples of companies that allow you to upload the artwork for business cards, brochures, and other promotional printed materials and have them shipped to you:

- www.vistaprint.com
- www.iprint.com
- www.modernpostcard.com

- www.psprint.com

It can take considerable time and money obtaining copyright permissions for photographs being used in web sites and print media, not to mention trying to find the right photograph. The largest and most cost effective site is istockphoto, but Lucky Oliver is a similar contender. Jupiter Image offers traditional, expensive stock photographs from many sources, and the Cartoon Bank provides New Yorker cartoons at stiff terms.

- www.istockphoto.com (\$)
- www.luckyoliver.com (\$)
- www.jupiterimages.com (\$\$)
- www.cartoonbank.com (\$\$\$)

Summary

There are many excellent software packages that may be optimal for you that have not discussed in this article. But hopefully, this article has provided sufficient insights into new tools and different ways of working that will enable you to accomplish more work, at higher levels of quality, in less time.

Like clothes, everyone will find a different set of tools are most appropriate. And like clothes that never are worn, some software will become shelfware. In selecting a tool, give priority to applications with good user interfaces that can be learned quickly, over those with more powerful capabilities that require substantial investments in training and/or are difficult to use.

Over time, as your tool repertory and expertise increases, so will your overall productivity and value. You'll be better able to manage and direct staff, agencies and contractors performing work. And as a professional, you'll become more competitive in the market.

About the Author

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