

6 Tools That Any Kind of Business Will Find Useful

As a marketing strategy and web design professional I spend quite a bit of time working with a wide variety of tools for content management, customer relationship, email marketing, web design, graphics, social media, and analytics etc. While these are the chief “tools of my trade,” they are not the only ones I use and rely upon. Like all business people I have tools that make my business easier to run. Here are six tools that I love and use just about every day and just about any business will find useful.

1. Snagit

This nifty little program is a powerful combination of screen capture and image editor. Use it to take a picture or screenshot of your computer screen and edit the resulting image in dozens of ways. You can add annotations, highlight text, use arrows to point to parts of the image. The software also allows you to crop, resize or cut and blur sections of an image out. All of these functions make it a great way to show how data needs to be changed, highlight relevant data for a client, or just make simple edits to existing images. Snagit is a great option for those don't have the money to purchase a full editing program like photoshop, time to learn a more complicated program, or just need a more flexible program than your PC's native screen capture/editor. Best of all this program is very inexpensive, it costs just \$49.95. Learn more at: <https://www.techsmith.com/screen-capture.html>.



2. SimpleMind

Simple mind is mind mapping software. I use it all the time to map out processes, project plans, organizational charts, web navigation trees, and more. Creating a chart to demonstrate an idea or project plan can help everyone better understand what is involved and who is responsible for different elements because they make intangible or undeveloped ideas visible. Since maps can be edited and shared in a variety of different formats it



is a snap to create, share and then change a map. There are many mind-mapping tools available and many of them are online. I chose SimpleMind because it is laptop based, not internet-based. I can use it anywhere, any time without worrying about an internet connection. The export/email option makes it extremely easy to share maps. There is a free version from this EU based company (<https://simplemind.eu>) but go ahead and but the full version for your ipad; the app costs only \$7.99. There is also a version for your laptop; it is a bit more expensive at \$25 (Mac) \$35 (PC) but I must admit I have had great luck just using the iPad version.

3. CYFE (Data Consolidation)

I use this web service to create data dashboards that pull together critical statistics from Google Analytcs, Social Media, Adwords campaigns, Search Engine Ranking, and dozens of other internet tools and resources. These dashboards make it easier to look for trends across a variety of internet services and keep track of important keywords. It doesn't replace direct access but it provides a quick snapshot that can show how well an ad campaign did or work that needs to be done. There is a free version, but most will really appreciate the flexibility a membership brings, the cost per month: \$19. Learn more at <https://www.cyfe.com>.



4. Zoho Books

Using an outdated accounting system can cause headaches for you and your clients. I appreciate the simplicity of Zoho books because it allows me to very easily create and track invoices, record payments, track expenses, and more. My subscription also includes a login for my accountant, so he can handle my taxes and make sure that my books are in good shape. This tool is a little more expensive



(\$9/month and up) but if you accounting software is more than a few years old or it drives you crazy, it would be a great investment. Zoho books is part of a large and growing set of business tools that includes CRM (Customer relationship management) email, context-based help and app creator.

5. OfficeTime Keeper Pro (Time Tracking)

If you work as a consultant and/or you bill clients according to the time you spend you need a reliable way to track that time, note it, and then transfer the data to your invoicing system. After trying a bunch of apps for my iPhone I discovered OfficeTime Pro. This app has a great interface and it is easy to use. I can easily add clients, rates for different types of work, track time spent, and write session notes. OfficeTime Keeper's reporting mechanisms allow me to see reports about the time spent per client, money earned, and kinds of work done. I can either export the data or enter it into Zoho books for my monthly invoices. The app, by Productive Monkeys, costs \$7.99, or the desktop version (Mac or PC) costs \$47. Learn more at <http://www.officetime.net>.



I know that many project management and accounting tools, including the ones I use, offer time tracking functionality, but the ease of use and data visualization this software provides keeps me using it.

6. Project Management

Like many small businesses I have a growing number of clients, projects, tasks and due dates. The projects and tasks I am working on are often associated with web-based resources and a variety of documents. Linking handwritten notes, documents, and emails simply doesn't work. Trying to keep track of everything and prioritizing what needs to be done can be difficult unless you can easily visualize all the work. Web-based project management tools make a huge difference by allowing you to see what needs to be done, establish priorities, and add new tasks on the fly.



There are two kinds of online project management tools, hosted and site-based. Most hosted and site-based tools often offer a free version, so you can try the program out, but the functionalities or number of users are so limited that you will need to purchase better access to make full use of them.

Hosted tools are run by a third party like BaseCamp, Trello, or Asana. To use these tools you will pay a monthly subscription for access based on the number of users and projects you need to support. Hosted tools may or may not have an app that allows you to add tasks or projects from your cell phone. If your site is based on a content management system like WordPress you can add a project management tool to your own website by using a plugin such as UpStream and WP Project Manager. Site-based tools have an annual cost to keep the software updated. The cost is probably lower because the price is based on the number of sites on which you install the software, not the number of users or projects. A site-based project management tool may not have an app but the tool should be responsive (like your website) so you can use it on a mobile device.

Either hosted or site-based options will allow you to create projects, milestones and tasks and then assign them to your staff. Most project management tools include space for basic client information, calendars views, and progress information for the tasks or projects created. Some project management tools also provide Gantt Charts that show how a project should progress, permit comments from staff and clients, and provide opportunities for document sharing. When used properly, project management tools create a work hub so people know what to do and when it needs to be done. Using these tools' document and comment sharing can create a more efficient information trail than everything through email.

Selecting a project management tool can also be frustrating. My favorite tool, a hosted solution, stopped being developed as it was swallowed up by Microsoft. Another hosted tool had horrible pricing. In the end I found a project management plugin that is working



pretty well: Upstream. The price is reasonable, its has great features and I can give access to my clients and partners as needed.

If you have any questions about these programs or would like to install a project management tool on your website don't hesitate to contact me. Using the right tools will make your business more efficient allowing

you to focus on growing your business instead of how to get mundane tasks done.

If you have the right tools to support everyday business tasks, do you have right tools for marketing? One of my specialties is developing marketing strategies and tools for businesses who want to grow.

About Link to Visibility, LLC

Our mission is to provide strategic marketing planning and internet design consulting services to businesses and non-profit organizations who understand the value and need for these tools. Planning and execution must go together to ensure your

- target audience is properly identified
- messages are client-relevant and consistent
- corporate identity/brand is presented correctly
- marketing tools are appropriate and trackable

Our clients have great ideas the world needs to hear about, at Link to Visibility we take the time to learn about your company and its products/services. By learning what you do we will be able to select the rights tool to connect with your target audience.

Services we provide directly include:

- Web sites design, review and evolution
- SEO
- Analytics
- database structure and design
- Social media support and advertising
- Print materials design
- Branding development and support
- Marketing plan strategy and execution
- Customer Relationship Management software (CRM)
- Email campaigns
- Software selection
- Strategic Marketing Plans

For related services such as graphic design, multi-media production, and printing, we have selected partners with whom we work.

About Elizabeth Blakely, Founder of Link to Visibility, LLC

I believe in combining technical skills in web development, information organization, and project management with the knowledge of marketing tools, sales cycles and corporate cultures to enable the growth of my clients' businesses. Over the course of my career I have worked with a wide variety of companies in both the profit and non-profit sectors. These organizations have ranged from multinational technology firms to entrepreneurs seeking assistance with finding their way through the marketing and internet wilderness.

I hold a master's degree in Information and Library Sciences from the University of Michigan. This course of study instilled an understanding of the importance of organization information, databases, and usability. My bachelor's degree from the University of Pennsylvania (American History with an Art History minor) provided me a deep appreciation for clarity of thought and design. This combination of education and professional experience allows me to look at companies and projects from a broader perspective instead of focusing on just the technical or design aspects.

If you would like a guide through the wilderness or have any questions, please contact me. My contact Info is:

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