

# TOP 99 FREE ONLINE RESOURCES THAT CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE COMPLETELY



THE ESSENTIAL DOWNLOADS TO GET FOR YOUR EVERY NEED

## JIMSON

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NEED

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## INTRODUCTION

Many years ago, I had a brief house-sitting stint after my first year of college. It was for an elderly couple while they were on vacation. I stayed at their place for about a month, keeping myself fed, making sure their garden was watered, looking after the pets, etc. I wasn't being paid a lot for this, but it was the best I could do at the time, so I was adamant I'd spend the least amount of money possible to maximize my earnings, which I'd need to get through my second year of tuition.

They left me with enough free food for, in their words, "a week," but through careful planning and preparation I made it last a month. As a result, I managed to survive those 30 days spending only \$40 in today's money.

Now, although it's tempting to save money through cutting down on electricity, refusing to buy brand-names for food and clothing, and to be as efficient as possible with meal preparation, this isn't always an option. An often-neglected money-saving skill to be aware of in the modern age, I think, is our ability to find and use free software online.

My frugal living habits carried over into my business life when I started creating my own digital marketing agency about 5 years ago. However, I was adamant that the

customer wouldn't be the one to suffer for my lifestyle. This led to me scouring the internet for safe, reliable and *free* software that would let me run my business at a lower cost. \$14.99 per month for an Adobe subscription really adds up, especially when you also need a Microsoft subscription at \$9.99 per month, Norton Antivirus for another \$8.33, and so on. Those three alone add up to about three-quarters of what I survived on during my house sitting!

It also adds up to nearly 400 dollars a year, and by now the problem is apparent; software subscriptions are huge money-sinks that not everyone can comfortably afford, and yet we often feel forced to fork out for them due to the necessity of their functionality in a successful modern business.

So, whether you're a college student trying to stretch their money as far as possible, a professional business person trying to cut back on costs without hurting your consumers, or even just someone who wants to try something new without financial commitments and other hassles, this book is here to help you.

Being charged to use a program that we only need for one project is annoying as hell. Being charged to use a program for either a hobby or a new business idea that we're only just starting out in can be scary and even deterring. And being charged to learn a new skill online or boost our productivity, when we already feel as if we're struggling to get by, can be daunting.

Since piracy is not only highly illegal, but incredibly risky for the health and safety of your other apps and devices, I've taken the liberty to organize a list of useful and, most importantly, *free* software that'll help you get you going with comparatively little risk or anxiety.

When I was first starting my own business, which is already a highly risky venture, being aware and knowing where to find some key choices for free software helped start my company up relatively painlessly, keeping all the important digital tools and functionality I needed without incurring too many costs.

Without knowing about this software, I might not have even started my business in the first place. Marketing, even digitally, is expensive at the best of times. It took a lot of courage and a fair bit of nerve to even dare break into that industry, knowing how easy it is to fail, and how many years I'd need to devote to the practice in order to become truly exceptional at it.

A lot of complex concepts had to be learned. From soft skills such as interpersonal relationship management, company culture and office politics to more technical abilities. For example, how to design a good web-page, how to design an informative and visually appealing ad, AND how to psychologically recover from sinking hours into promoting something only to watch it crash and burn the first few tries.

This was all a lot to take on, and having to pay for all the software I needed to do these jobs well would've been the straw that broke the camel's back, so to speak.

Maybe the fear of wasting money, or the fear of spending more than you'll earn is holding you back too. It doesn't matter if this is for professional or recreational purposes. How many people want to experiment with sounds and music editing, for instance, but are put off from trying due to the minimum \$99.99 entry fee of software such as FruitLoops Studio?

Of course, the creators of software are more than welcome to charge what they feel their code is worth; this book is not

intended as an attack on such skilled and enterprising individuals.

Rather, this book is an acknowledgment that not everyone will be able to afford what is being asked. It is also an affirmation in the ideal that how much money you have should not become a barrier to you accomplishing your goals above-board. Finally, it's an acknowledgment that, while free software does exist, a lot of people are put off using it due to fears of hidden viruses, or the belief that free software is always worse than a premium product. Even those of us who already use free software may have a hard time finding costless programs outside of what we know.

This may be why some of you might be abusing WinRar's lack of enforced post-trial restrictions to open or create .zip files when you could instead be using 7-Zip - a completely free piece of software - for exactly the same function, with none of the guilt or hassles associated with using an app past its trial expiration date.

So, join me now as I introduce to you a torrent of free, yet functional software and websites that can make your life easier. No matter what your interests are - if your interest requires using a computer or internet browser in some way, you've chosen the right book.

I have been using most of these apps and their predecessors on and off for up to the past 5 years, and they have largely served me well. Now, allow me to help them serve you.

## COMPUTER MUST-HAVES

Let's start with the absolute basics. No matter what you're trying to do, absolutely every computer needs an anti-virus (you don't want to leave any of the information on your computer open to hackers after all), a word processor (so you can write basic documents), PDF converters (so you can email your documents without the formatting getting ruined) and at least one piece of software to help with cleaning everything after months of digital build-up.



## ANTIVIRUS

### AVG

- Link: <https://www.avg.com/en-za/free-antivirus-download>
- Free to Download Desktop Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Data protector, versatile malware blocker, and defender against unsafe links and files you might come across online
- Alternative For: Norton, McAfee, Bitdefender, F-Secure, Malwarebytes. Also, much better than the default Windows Defender that some computers have.

Although the premium versions of other anti-virus applications may be better, what makes AVG stand out among them is that its free version is one of the best you can ask for right now. In 2019, the free version of AVG was tested and found to be the best in its category for virus protection, and also does a sterling job against other forms of malware such as Trojans or ransomware, both of which can be deeply detrimental on a business-oriented computer. This software is lab-tested, unlike most free antivirus programs, and that immediately makes it a reliable pick.

Compared to other antivirus programs, AVG is also much less likely to give websites a “false flag;” it can reliably tell the difference between malware and legitimately safe links or files, as well as tell if a site is likely to phish you or not before official databases even know. It’ll also detect potential performance issues your PC is suffering from, and when

running the program will not negatively impact your computer's performance much either.

The only downside to AVG is that while it's a very good anti-virus, it is just that: an anti-virus program. Catching malware isn't the only way to improve web security: strong passwords (as well as tools to help you generate strong passwords), network security analyses, VPN protectors and more are all useful internet security features that AVG simply doesn't have, despite similar features being present in other (admittedly paid-for) anti-virus programs. And, while it can detect performance issues, it won't fix them for you unless you pay. However, if all you need is an anti-virus, then this is one of the reliably superior options you can have, (I hear Avast is also very good, but I personally haven't had much reason to use it) and it won't even cost you a cent.

## OFFICE SOFTWARE

### LibreOffice

- Link: <https://www.libreoffice.org/>
- Free Download and Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Word processing, spreadsheet creation, presentations, vector-based computer graphics, database creation and mathematical formula aids
- Alternative For: Microsoft Office programs

Compatible on Linux, Windows and the Mac, LibreOffice is a versatile and free alternative to the Microsoft Office package. Not only does the LibreOffice suite contain all the important functionality one could need from the Microsoft Office package, most notably the ability to create word documents, spreadsheets, databases and presentations, it is also fully compatible with Microsoft Office documents and file formats. Meaning you can still readily collaborate with Microsoft Office users with relatively little pain. It also means it's very easy to switch from Microsoft Office to LibreOffice, as you won't lose access to any of your documents.

Although a bit more involved, it's also possible to install LibreOffice on your server or cloud storage to create a pseudo-Google Docs (which is why it can also be classed as an Online Tool above).

However, LibreOffice does not have any inherent cloud storage of its own, meaning you'd need to install something like DropBox to fill in that weakness. Furthermore, if you

want more templates beyond what Libre initially provides you with, you'll have to download and install them manually. Overall, however, it is difficult to go wrong with this program, and it'll fulfill most users' office needs quite handily.

## **Open Office**

- Link: <http://openoffice.org>
- Free Download
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Word processing, spreadsheet creation, presentations, vector-based drawing
- Alternative For: Microsoft Office

Compatible on Linux, Windows and the Mac, Open Office offers the basic functionality needed for everyday office work. It's easy to write essays or make basic presentations with this program. It also has some compatibility with Microsoft Office files.

This compatibility, however, is not perfect. There have been many instances where opening a complex PowerPoint presentation or a Word document with lots of graphics would cause all sorts of unintended visual issues when switching from Microsoft to Open Office, meaning it's not the best for collaborating, unless you also both have PDF converters. This is because Open Office cannot save its files in the kind of formats Microsoft works best with.

So, why choose this over LibreOffice? Simply put, Open Office is more modular, allowing you to install just what you want, whereas LibreOffice insists on installing the full suite when you request it. This makes Open Office the preferred choice on computers with highly limited hard drive space, especially if the documents you need to create won't be very

graphically complex, as I've found there to be almost no issue sharing Open Office docs with a Microsoft-using colleague when it's just text involved.

## PDF CONVERTERS

### **PDF995**

- Link: <http://pdf995.com>
- Free Download
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: PDF Conversion, PDF Encryption, Document Combination
- Alternative For: Adobe Acrobat, Nitro Pro, Wondershare PDFelement

PDF995 is an old, but decent, piece of freeware that allows you to convert your documents into a PDF format. It has a variety of other functions too, like letting you combine multiple documents into a single PDF, convert PDFs back into other image formats, provide virtual stamps and encryption, and other features that help you create professional PDF files for your workplace.

Unlike some other free PDF converters, such as PDFelement, PDF995 does not leave watermarks on your work - how your documents would look after being printed is exactly how they'll look when converted into PDF form. However, this does come with the downside of being plagued with a host of nagging ads, each of which urging you to upgrade to PDF995's paid version.

### **PDF to Word Converter**

- Link: <http://pdftoword.com>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version

- Purpose: PDF Conversion
- Alternative For: Adobe Acrobat, Nitro Pro, Wondershare PDFelement

If all you need is a quick, secure and easy way to convert Microsoft Office documents into PDFs and vice versa, then this online tool is perfect for you. Fully able to convert files between PDF and Microsoft Office Word, Excel and PowerPoint documents, this effectively means any .pdf file you have can be reformatted into the latest Word, Excel or PowerPoint file while any .doc, .docx, .xls, .xlw, .xlt, .ppt, .pptx and so forth can be turned into a .pdf. Quick and simple, all you need to do is select whether you're converting FROM or TO PDF, select what other file format you're converting FROM or TO, and then typing in the email you want your converted file to be sent to.

However, this is literally all this converter does, having none of the extra functionality of premium PDF conversion apps or even the functionality of PDF995. Still, this handy converter performs its basic functionality very well, as long as you have an internet connection, and is thus a great way to avoid spending hundreds of dollars on a full program suite when all you wanted was to convert a file to more easily read or edit.

## EMAIL SERVICES

### Thunderbird



- Link: <https://www.thunderbird.net/en-US/>
- Download and Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Electronic Mailing, Sending/Receiving Data
- Alternative For: Gmail

Even though your existing email service may be free, Thunderbird will help you save time and money through its unique features. Compared to Gmail, it has better security; notably, Thunderbird will learn what kind of emails you consider spam and will begin to respond accordingly. As it is made by Mozilla, the same company behind Firefox, it is also much bigger on privacy than Gmail is, and allows you to encrypt and decrypt your messages with much greater ease, and will give you as much warning as possible when dealing with suspicious links or potentially threatening attachments.

One of the biggest advantages of Thunderbird over Gmail, however, is that you do not need to be online in order to interact with its interface, all thanks to Thunderbird keeping

copies of all your emails and settings on your computer itself. This means you can log on to Thunderbird when sitting in the airport during a business flight, and then still be able to write responses to all your messages while you're on the airplane itself. Although you won't be able to send or receive any new messages until you're online again, being able to at least read and write while offline can be a huge time saver in situations where local internet is unreliable. Thunderbird's use of tabs also makes multitasking on emails easier than it would be on other clients.

It'll even help you bypass normal email limitations by hosting any excessively large attachments you wish to send on a built-in Firelink cloud, which the recipient of your message will be able to access through a link provided where the attachment would have been.

The downsides, however, are that setting it up can take a little time compared to other services, especially if you are interested in add-ons and other extra features that you can get through Thunderbird through third-party extensions. Additionally, the UI - while not bad - isn't the sleekest despite its customizability and, finally, Thunderbird can be cumbersome if you want to use one account on multiple devices. If you don't choose to obtain true cloud syncing through a third-party add-on or email server, expect to transfer your emails and profile settings manually when you want to work on a new device.

## FOLDER COMPRESSOR/EXTRACTOR

### 7-Zip

- Link: <http://7-zip.org>
- Free Download
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: File Compression and Unpacking
- Alternative For: WinRAR, Cisdem BetterUnarchiver

7-Zip is a brilliant alternative to WinRAR. If you need to archive vast amounts of data into a more manageable megabyte/gigabyte range without deleting anything from your computer, 7-Zip can compress any folder you choose into a .7z, .XZ, .GZIP, .ZIP, .WIM, .TAR, or .BZIP2 file. 7-Zip can also decompress or unpack a significantly vaster list beyond that, including .RAR files, and I've found that 7-Zip is one of the most reliable applications for this. Notoriously, one group project seemingly had major issues because an important file wouldn't work after being unpacked by WinRAR. Switching to 7-Zip solved the issue, leading to me believing that 7-Zip is overall better at keeping your files intact throughout the extraction and compression processes.

Beyond this, I have found 7-Zip to overall be much smoother and easier to use compared to WinRAR.

Sadly, 7-Zip only really works on Windows. Unlike most of the previous software listed above, 7-Zip has no real chance of working on the Linux or macOS, meaning it's an absolutely brilliant extraction tool if you're using Windows, but if you're into Apple you're unfortunately still better off with WinRAR, although the Cisdem BetterUnarchiver is fully

Mac compatible while keeping much of the good stuff you can expect from 7-Zip.

## COMPUTER CLEAN-UP

### CC-Cleaner

- Link: <http://ccleaner.com>
- Free Download
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Cache Clearing, Digital Clutter Removal
- Alternative For: MyCleanPC, Windows Disk Cleanup Tool

Before we begin explaining what this particular program does well, and where it may be a little weak, I'd like to explain that there are a variety of simple ways to clean your PC already, especially if you are looking to improve speed.

Firstly, delete any internet browser history that you don't plan to use as reference. Secondly, run your PC's in-built disk cleaner or defragger. Thirdly, uninstall any programs you no longer wish to use, and if you notice a lot of applications start automatically when your computer boots up, open up your Activity Monitor or Task Manager and use that to reduce the amount of automatic start-ups you have. Finally, keep your games, files and folders on your computer's local disk (often called a C: Drive or Macintosh HD) instead of on the desktop. If you want to be able to access something from the desktop, perform the Create Shortcut action on whatever folder or application you want easy access to, and keep its shortcut on your desktop instead.

Now that you've done all this, know that CC-Cleaner is essentially a better version of Windows' standard disk cleanup tool. In comparison, CC-Cleaner will search deeper

into your computer, as well as third-party software that Windows typically avoids, and then it'll delete any useless/redundant files it finds, particularly leftover installation setup folders or browser-generated data caches. It's a great way to remove not only your browser history (which you can admittedly do manually), but also all local-side history such as the list of documents you most recently accessed, which can again be great for privacy.

That said, it isn't needed for constant use; rather save it for a clean-up about once a month or so. Beyond that, make sure that its Registry Cleaner is disabled: it's more likely to cause issues than solve them, no matter what the application itself may try to tell you. An issue with computer cleaners overall is that they tend to exaggerate problems, as well as their ability to provide meaningful solutions, in order to sell premium packages; bear this in mind (Hoffman, 2016).

Finally, note that while cleaning a cache may improve PC speed in some select situations, for online data caches this deletion can mean slowing down your internet speed for a while, as your browser has to recollect all the data (like website logos or site images) that it needs to run the web pages you visit.

## TIME SAVERS AND PRODUCTIVITY BOOSTERS

As useful as the internet can be, it also seems determined to drive us to distraction. While this is fine on easy days, there are times when we cannot afford to let our focus shift. The following applications can help you keep on-task with whatever you need doing, cutting out a great deal of digital clutter or diversions.

## INBOX MANAGERS

### Unroll.me

- Link: <https://unroll.me/#>
- Free Download and Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Email Decluttering, Grey Mail Organization

Unroll.me is a handy tool for mass-unsubscription. If you find yourself being constantly bombarded with email overloads, Unroll.me, once downloaded and allowed to scan your email, will quickly compile a list of “gray mail” you’re subscribed to like newsletters, online magazines, competition notifications and the like. It’ll then let you unsubscribe from whichever ones you like from an easy-to-use interface.

If you keep Unroll.me installed, it’ll also compile any remaining subscription notifications into a single email so that your inbox isn’t filled up.

However, I prefer to only use Unroll.me for easy inbox subscription clean-up (sometimes it just gets too daunting to do manually). After that, I uninstall the app for privacy reasons – if left installed, it collects transaction data from any emails it scans and then shares this with third parties. When I need it again, I install it again; it’s free and easy, so why not?

On the flip side, it cannot work on multiple accounts at once: you need to manually register Unroll.me for each account you want it to work on. This can be annoying, but also makes it a very attractive option for long-term use if you keep all

your transaction emails on one account and all your subscriptions, gray mail and social networking information on another, as Unroll.me at least does not collect any information beyond what you spend, and what you spent it on.

## ORGANIZERS

### Evernote

- Link: <https://evernote.com/>
- Free Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Note-taking, Personal Project Management, Screenshot Storage, Personal Organization

The free version of Evernote, known as Evernote Basic, is a cloud-based virtual diary that lets you take electronic notes wherever you go. This cloud can synchronize with two devices, meaning you can have it synced to your PC for when you need to do some focused research, and on your phone or tablet for when inspiration strikes while you're out and about.

What makes note-taking so wonderful with this app is that it lets you tag your notes and compile them into mini-notebooks. You can also clip cropped screenshots off websites or even your own photographs to add to your virtual diary, and you can keep what you choose relevant by adding extra text or visual reminders to point at what drew your attention in the image. You can even highlight image text, if clipping from a website.

The nominal limits of only being able to upload 60 MB worth of notes per month and only having notes as big as 25 MB or under won't be a bother to you unless your notes consist of lots of high-resolution images or unless you take essay-length notes daily.

What may limit you, however, is that it's not the best for direct collaboration (although you should be using Google Docs for that); Evernote is best for personal or small-business work. The next limit is that the interface can feel a little overwhelming at first, but it won't take you too long to get used to.

## **Trello**

- Link: <https://trello.com/>
- Free Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Collaboration, Project Management, Personal Organization

Remember when I said Google Docs was the best for collaboration less than a paragraph ago? Well...kind of. Although G-Docs certainly has its place, Trello is excellent for when you need a combination of easy note-taking, an intuitive and aesthetically pleasing interface, and all the tools you need to define the parameters of whatever project you're working on (like due dates or outlines). You can even prioritize parameters so that everyone stays on track.

It is also supremely easy to invite other people to participate in your notes on Trello, and everything will be easy for them to understand as huge projects can be broken down into smaller boards, lists, cards (which you can also mark out with colors) and then priorities (which you can then order according to urgency). When creating these things, you determine the level of privacy for a project, making sure that only the people you want to see your plans will be able to do so, as long as you select your desired settings for each project, and this is all just the Free Tier version!

That said, Trello lacks built-in reporting or time-tracking features, meaning you and your team will need a degree of self-discipline to get the most out of it.

## PASSWORD MANAGERS

### **Roboform**

- Link: <https://www.roboform.com/>
- Free Download
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Form Autofill, Security Assessment, Password Generation, Storage and Encryption
- Alternative For: Dashlane, Keeper Password Manager

Although not the most user-friendly application with its dated interface, overwhelming manual and even more overwhelming number of options, Roboform is nonetheless one of the best password managers you could ask for, especially considering you can get all its most important password management functionality for free.

Although it struggled with synchronizing between multiple devices the last time I used it, it can still comfortably work individually on mobile and desktop devices with multi-platform support. It also allows you to store a limitless number of passwords, as well as maintain full access to Roboform's Security Center.

Compounding this goodness is the fact that your passwords are protected, organized and encrypted in such a way that Roboform itself never actually sees their true form, meaning that even if the company itself were to be hacked somehow, you're still relatively safe.

### **KeePass**

- Link: <https://keepass.info/>

- Free Download
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Password Assessment, Generation, Storage and Encryption
- Alternative For: Dashlane, Keeper Password Manager

An option for the more technically involved, KeePass officially only works for Windows, unlike Roboform which works on a variety of platforms. Although KeePass does have a variety of OS and platform ports due to it being open source, the quality of these ports do, unfortunately, vary.

However, much like Roboform, it does help you generate stronger passwords, and takes steps to keep your information safe by making sure absolutely everything to do with its management of your passwords is stored locally rather than on a cloud storage.

Unfortunately, it doesn't have the same slew of features that you could expect from Roboform. Roboform's cross-platforming - especially between my PC and my phone - may have given me grief in the past, but at least it could do it in the end, which cannot be said for KeePass, which seems to be allergic to mobile devices. KeePass can be further customized with a variety of plugins due to its open-source nature, although what third-party software you choose to add to your password protector shouldn't be taken lightly.

## TIME MANAGEMENT AND FOCUS

### **RescueTime**

- Link: <https://www.rescuetime.com/signup/solo/lite>
- Free Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Time-Budgeting, Activity Tracking

If you've never tracked your own time before, the free version of RescueTime can provide you with valuable insights into where your hours are disappearing while you're on your devices. A great way to give yourself a wake-up call and gain full awareness into just what you're actually doing on the internet. RescueTime has been great for me personally, as it helped me realize just how much of my time was disappearing onto Facebook and YouTube each day - not ideal when you're trying to start a business.

Seeing the cold, hard facts motivated me to make the changes I needed to succeed.

As it is a time tracker, however, you'll want to read its Privacy Policy very carefully to ensure you're happy with how your data might be used.

### **Toggl**

- Link: <https://toggl.com/>
- Free Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Activity Tracking, Time-Budgeting, Team Management

While RescueTime is best for tracking personal productivity, Toggl is better for accurately billing clients according to the hours you have worked. This is because Toggl can be made to track the time spent on a specific task, along with any apps or websites you use for the sake of research or development while accomplishing this task. It also has an especially pleasing UI and, in addition to working on the Mac, Windows, Linux or Android (which RescueTime also works on), Toggl is further compatible with iOS. It can even integrate with some Organizer and Project Management software, such as Trello or Asana. This app fulfills its function very well, with the only downside being that its premium version is a bit expensive - but you aren't here for the premium version, are you?

## **Moosti**

- Link: <https://www.moosti.com/>
- Free Download and Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Virtual Egg-Timer

Minimalists and Pomodoro enthusiasts will like this one. Moosti is a very simple browser tool for your desktop (or app for your mobile device) that lets you set intentional periods of focus, short breaks and long breaks. You can set how long these periods are within certain limits (focus can be up to 60 minutes, short breaks no longer than 5 minutes, long breaks no longer than 30 minutes). The only rule is that once you start the timer, you cannot stop it, making it a lovely psychological compulsion to help you respect both your work and rest times.

Other than that, it's very bare bones. It's great as a short-term or even habitual timer for personal use, but those who

want true time-tracking tools, especially for long-term and/or multi-person projects, are advised to look elsewhere.

## **Selfcontrol**

- Link: <https://selfcontrolapp.com/>
- Free Download
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Distraction Remover, Self-Nannying App

If you've ever wanted to force a habit on yourself, this app may be the way to do it. Although it works only on the Mac, Selfcontrol is a very simple program that lets you place any other computer programs you want on a blacklist, as well as determine how long these programs will be blacklisted for. Until that timer expires, you will not be able to launch any blacklisted programs at all; even restarting your computer or deleting Selfcontrol itself won't remove the timer. I personally only use this when I want to break out of a dire productivity-sapping vice, as the staunch inflexibility of the blacklist can be a liability when unexpected situations come up (e.g. blacklisting my personal email only to then need it to verify an urgent cash payment, for instance).

## **Cold Turkey**

- Link: <https://getcoldturkey.com/>
- Free Download
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Self-Nannying App, Distraction Remover, Activity Tracking
- Alternative For: SelfControl

Because not everyone uses a Mac, Cold Turkey is there for those who want Selfcontrol's functionality on other

operating systems. Although the Free version misses out on a slew of interesting features, it still performs its core function by blocking websites on a timer, as well as incorporating some time-tracking through building statistics. Finally, while its blacklists are irreversible by default (until the timer runs out, just like Selfcontrol), it does have the option for you to have a “soft lock” instead, meaning you can still get onto sites if you absolutely have to.

This can be a good thing or a bad thing. Generally, the better your planning and yet the lower your willpower, the better it'd be to keep the default hard lock on.

## Noisli

- Link: <https://www.noisli.com/signup>
- Free Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Virtual Egg-Timer, Productivity Booster and Audio-Based Destresser
- Alternative For: YouTube, Moosti

We've all been there. We go onto YouTube with the intention to put on a nice mix of relaxing music to help us focus, but the temptation to watch the latest PewDiePie, Kiwo or MrPaladin video becomes too strong, and we jump onto a marvelous time-sapping roller coaster of a time, while our workday flies off the rails in the meantime.

Noisli fulfills the function of letting you put on some relaxing, easily customizable sounds that help you unwind and get into the zone, working with a steady heartbeat and a clear mind. It also comes with a timer and a text editor, giving you a nice clean space to write. However, for serious writing there are far better ways to put down text (LibreOffice and Evernote both come to mind), so it's best to

use this app simply for its primary function: its phenomenal and meditative ambient sound-mixing.

## **Coffivity**

- Link: <https://coffitivity.com/>
- Free Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Audio-Based Destresser and Focus Tool
- Alternative For: Noisli

While Noisli hosts a wide range of sounds, Coffivity specializes in coffee house ambience. Any device can access Coffivity online, however the downloadable version that lets you play the sounds locally (read: while you're offline) requires a macOS to function. Coffivity provides 3 free tracks for you to listen to: morning coffee shop ambience, a more lively lunchtime rhythm and finally the more serious tones of a college café. A great option for those who absolutely need more coffee house sounds to work to, but for those who want overall variety in ambience Noisli is by far the better choice.



## PROJECT MANAGEMENT

### Workflowy

- Link: <https://workflowy.com/>
- Free Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Note-Taking, Project Management, Collaboration

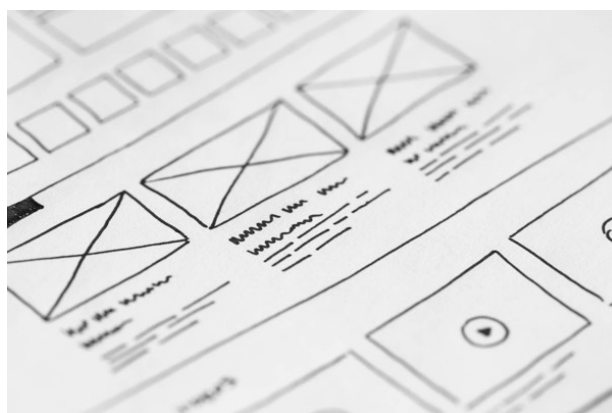
A primarily web-based tool that gives you a single text document to work in. It works on a huge variety of devices - Mac, Windows, Linux, iOS and Android. Although being given only a single text document doesn't sound that great, bear in mind that its note-taking is list-based...and every single item you place in your lists can be expanded upon and become the title of a new, deeper list. For instance, you might have a list called "General Projects" heading your text document, and that list might consist of something like "home repairs, dinner schedule, work management, personal growth and recreation." Although all of those items listed might be part of a list, Workflowy gives you the option to make each item a list in its own right. "Personal growth and recreation," for instance, might contain its own list of "write a new book, learn how to play piano, arrange a date" and then each of *those* items can be expanded into *their* own lists, if you wish.

The end result is a rather intuitive and easy-to-explore "tree" of plans, goals and checklists. It's very easy to expand on topics with this browser tool, and you can even tag your lists to make searching easier. Limitations to bear in mind, however, are that if you want to use the browser tool as an

offline app on your desktop, you'll first need to install Chrome as your browser. Another limitation is that although you can create deep webs of notes and task-lists, you can only view one of these lists at a time; lists automatically collapse if you aren't interacting with them, and while that does keep visual clutter low, it also means you can't view multiple lists side-by-side, which can be inconvenient depending on how you usually like to view your notes.

## Doodle

- Link: <https://doodle.com/free-poll>
- Free to Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Event Scheduling



Although Premium Doodle comes with lots of neat features, all you need to worry about is what it provides at its no-cost core: more efficient meeting scheduling. A lot of time gets wasted at the workplace from day to day due to checking emails, and this can get a lot worse when a message soon turns into a discussion. When you're trying to decide on an ideal meeting day between multiple people, it's therefore no wonder that a lot of time can get lost when planning face-time with a professional group.

Doodle helps you save time by letting you send out an online poll that cuts out all the lengthy debating “oh-and-but-ifs” that can come about when trying to decide on a meeting date, and instead lets you send a single email to an unlimited list of contacts. This email then provides them a link that gives them a whole option of potential days, and allows them to vote on which one suits them best, which one isn’t ideal (but still works), and which date absolutely won’t work for them. The data can then be reviewed by you whenever you wish, letting you make an effective decision without wasting hours nervously checking your email or social media for the next stage of negotiation.

The best part is that, unlike other similar tools, Doodle doesn’t need whoever you’re emailing to have a Doodle account – they can access and vote on the link as long as you included their email when you sent the link out.

Limits to take note of are that you’ll need your own contact list; Doodle doesn’t save your contacts between polls, so you’ll need the emails of whoever you want to include on-hand every time you want to make a new poll. This app also does not replace the need for a calendar, as the free version of Doodle will delete its polls after 3 months of inactivity, meaning you’ll want to note down the results elsewhere, especially for important discussions that are over a quarter of a year away. Finally, you’ll need to make it clear what time-zone you’re sending your poll from if collaborating internationally, but it is otherwise a great online tool.

Android and iOS also have access to a downloadable version, and although Doodle won’t replace your calendar, it can still integrate with most existing calendar software you may have, making deciding on dates for large gatherings – whether between high-level executives or among far-flung family – that much easier.

## NEWS/SOCIAL MEDIA STREAMLINING

### **PaperSpan**

- Link: <https://www.paperspan.com/>
- Free to Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Article Bookmarker and Highlighter, Webpage Categorizer and Declutterer
- Alternative For: Pocket

This application is like Noisli, but for reading. We've all been in that situation where we have a vital, if perhaps a little dull, task that needs doing. However, we come across an interesting article and suddenly, we just have to devour all of it now, unsure that we'll be able to connect to its web page very easily again, whether due to connectivity issues or simple forgetfulness (especially if the title is something obscure or you only happened upon it by chance). Paperspan is a downloadable app for Android and iOS, as well as a web browser tool for any computer with an internet connection, that lets you download any web article you want so that you can read it later, whether you still have an internet connection or not. The interface is incredibly clean, helping reinforce the idea that you're now free from congestion (especially if you're used to saving web content through browser bookmarks - which can very quickly slow things down or cause clutter), and it offers other helpful features such as highlighting text that you really liked, or even more easily sharing web content with your friends or colleagues.

Thanks to its automatic categorization of saved articles PaperSpan is, overall, a great tool that helps you focus by

keeping a very clean, easy-to-navigate list of articles and highlighted text for you to enjoy later, outside of your work-schedule. For those who absolutely need the information present in an article but still want to save time, PaperSpan can even read web content back to you in text-to-speech. Only thing to watch out for is that the app can be a bit battery-intensive for some users.



## The Old Reader

- Link: <https://theoldreader.com/>
- Free Download (mobile) and Free Online Tool (computers)
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Feed Aggregator
- Alternative For: Feedly

Most of us who spend frequent time on the internet end up building a list of frequented websites. After a certain point, one realizes that one has so many beloved blogs, websites and so forth that it is impractical and even detrimental to our ability to work or focus if we insist on checking them all every single day. At the same time, we don't necessarily want to cut any of them out of our lives. This is where The Old Reader comes into play.

The Old Reader is a Rich Site Summary Feed Aggregator. This means that you provide it with a selection of sources (the blogs or websites you wish to subscribe to), and in return it provides you with a comprehensive list of updates from any of those sources. This means, rather than checking a dozen different sites or blogs a day for new content, you just need to check The Old Reader and it'll show you an organized feed that helps you stay in the loop of the content you love. Compared to similar RSS Feed Aggregators, The Old Reader has a huge advantage in that it can use direct URLs as sources for sites that don't support RSS services, making it one of the most convenient and reliable options out there for helping you keep all your feeds neatly wrapped up in one place. It works on just about any device too, which is always a plus!

## WOW YOUR AUDIENCE WITH VIDEOS AND SOUNDS

Sometimes, a PowerPoint file or even Windows Movie Maker just doesn't cut it for making the kind of presentation we want. At the same time, we might not want to fork out for something we might use only once or twice professionally, and then mostly as a hobby, if anything, from that point onwards. For those who are just starting out in the editing profession, the idea of spending money on software may also seem daunting before you feel confident and secure in your own worth as an editor, yet you know that you could become great if given the chance to practice.

Finally, if you're on your way to becoming a dinosaur like me, perhaps you're trying to spruce up the content on your online store, but feel a degree of initial skepticism or some other form of unwillingness to the idea thanks to software costs. This is where the following apps come in.

## AUDIO EDITING

### Waveform Free

- Link: <https://www.tracktion.com/products/waveform-free>
- Free Download
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Audio Mixing, Editing and Production, Composing
- Alternative For: FLStudio, Studio One, Pro Tools

Let's start with something user-friendly: Waveform Free, having been developed from Tracktion 6, is one of the most user-friendly audio editing applications you could ask for. Even if the highly intuitive left-to-right interface still manages to confuse you however (or if the interface gets changed in a very recent update), you can still ease into things and find your flow by making use of the tutorials advertised near the bottom of the link given above. Waveform Free allows you to create a limitless number of tracks and load in as many plugins to help you out as you like. It also has a virtual instrument feature if you want to synthesize your own orchestra off of an intuitive GUI. Overall, an extremely useful mixer that can satisfy the needs of newbies and pros alike, although past a certain point the visuals are arguably not the grandest. Still, you're here to make music, not necessarily look at pretty colors, so it's not the worst downside in the world.

As an added bonus, this software not only works on Windows, Mac and Linux, but also the Raspberry Pi of all things.



## Ocenaudio

- Link: <https://www.ocenaudio.com/>
- Free Download
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Sound Recording, Analysis, Filtering and Editing
- Alternative For: Audacity

An amazingly fast audio editor that lets you cut, move and otherwise arrange both tracks and audio in a matter of seconds, even if the sound file itself has enough data to play for several hours. It contains some of the more useful features of Audacity - like the ability to apply filters, examine your sound files using an in-built spectrogram, and works with various VST plugins so you can broaden your sound variety.

Initially made by a research group that was in dire need of a user-friendly audio editor, it's also a great option for those who wish to become podcasters or home-grown musicians, as both groups will find the ability to easily clean up audio to be a welcome boon. If you're more technically inclined, a downside to bear in mind is that this product, unlike Audacity, is not open source, meaning it's more difficult to customize with your own non-plugin code if there's

something you don't like and wish to edit with the software itself.

## **Audiotool**

- Link: <https://www.audiotool.com/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Beat Mixing, Audio Composing, Production and Collaboration

Once you're used to the interfaces of more intuitive editors, you may wish to move onto software like Audiotool. As it's cloud-based, it's very easy to work collaboratively with other aspiring musicians, composers or sound designers. Like with the previous tools listed, you can choose whether to create your own sounds/music or to import samples or tracks to use as a foundation before you begin mixing or composing. It also allows you to have multiple channels of audio at once playing over each other, which makes it easier to fine-tune the exact kind of sound or effect you want; this can be similar to simply applying filters, but allows you a greater degree of control and creative freedom (and it can still apply regular filters too if you want).

You may need to watch several tutorials on Audiotool's site to help you get started, however, as while the interface isn't bad, it certainly can feel overwhelming if you're just getting used to working with audio software. Although a large computer screen is always helpful when working with applications like this, this is especially true for Audiotool so you have more room to space everything in a way that doesn't clutter your mind or hurt your eyes. Another thing to bear in mind is that, while it can work on almost any laptop or desktop device with an internet connection, Audiotool will

only work in your browser if you're using Chrome and requires a strong internet connection to run smoothly.

### **Acoustica Basic Edition 6.0 (build 19)**

- Link: <https://acondigital.com/downloads/> (under "Old and Discontinued Products")
- Free to Download
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Track Editing, Amateur Recording Production

Not to be confused with the audio-smithing company known as Acoustica, this old software still holds up even today. Although not as technically advanced as Ocenaudio or Audiotool (e.g. Acoustica can't do multi-track layering, and it has a fairly limited effects pool before plugins are factored in), it is at least as intuitive to use as Waveform Free, if not even more so, meaning it's one of the best choices if you aren't a professional musician, podcaster or audiobook narrator.

In other words, if you want something a little more powerful/useful than an MP3 cutter, but don't want to spend ages learning the ins and outs normally associated with using an audio editor, this application is for you. It has an extremely user-friendly editing feature. What makes it stand out is that there is no limit on how far you can "undo" or "redo" a project even after saving, allowing you to be far bolder in your editing, safe in the knowledge that it's very easy to go back to what you had before if you don't end up liking the results of your experimentation. Basic effects that it does include are things like echo, reverb and fades, so it's definitely worth picking up for relatively simple tasks such as making a speech more impactful, or adding a metallic trill

behind the voice of characters in a cyberpunk video you might be making.

## VISUAL RENDERING AND VIDEO EDITING

### **Olive Video Editor**

- Link: <https://www.olivevideoeditor.org/>
- Free to Download
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Video Cutting, Video Mixing and Video Arrangement
- Alternative For: Adobe Premiere Pro

I wish to invite you to be a little experimental with me now. Although technically still in the alpha stage, and therefore not what you should be relying on for professional work, this relatively new video-editing software is already bustling with promise. Although stability is not yet the greatest, and there may be a few bugs for now, this tool is constantly being tested and updated with improvements. Even now it can be praised as being very simple to use. It is powerful, yet lightweight, and in many ways currently acts like a stripped-down Adobe Premiere Pro, and works comfortably (for an alpha) on Windows, Mac and Linux. Features it's currently strong with include Picture-in-Picture (great for YouTubers who want to overlay a recording of themselves on top of recorded content in post-production), as well as strong intro/outro sequences and cutting tools.

All in all, right now this software fulfills for video what Acoustica fulfills for audio: a handy and powerful tool that's better than the default Movie Maker some operating systems come with WITHOUT being much more complicated. While being in Alpha does mean the software isn't perfect, it also means you can engage with the Olive Video Editor

community in order to give your feedback directly to the developers, which could have a profound impact on the software's development in the long run.

The ambitious end-goal of this software is to become a free download that can compete with current premium video editors in features and versatility.

## **Videopad**

- Link: <https://www.nchsoftware.com/videopad/index.html>
- Free to Download
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Non-Commercial Video Recording, Editing and Rendering

A useful tool for Windows and Mac, Videopad gives you a host of useful video editing features completely for free...as long as it's for non-commercial use. You might want to check what your local laws are for defining commercial and non-commercial use, but I like to use this software as a matter of personal interest. Making fun, non-monetized videos on social media is fun and perfectly fine, as is making a presentation that helps educate students. Most teachers aren't paid based on whether their students pass or fail, meaning you can use this software free to create stunning and compelling visual presentations that help learners engage with their actual coursework.

Effects and transitions are about on par with what you'd expect from a video-editing product costing \$100, and comes with a built-in recording system that works as long as your device has some sort of camera. Finally, the website comes with a host of useful guides and tutorials to help you get the most out of your software's effects, transitions and

rendering. The rendering is versatile too; you can save your video as a .mp4, a disk file or any number of formats optimized for platforms such as YouTube, Google Drive or Facebook.

The only complaint I have is that trying to copy and paste files (as opposed to initially dragging them onto the editing interface) can lead to some odd behavior on the part of the program.

## **Bforartists**

- Link: <https://www.bforartists.de/download/>
- Free to Download
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: 3D Animation and Video Content Creation
- Alternative For: Blender

Now, let's go on to something a bit more advanced. This software is primarily for Windows users. Although Bforartists technically works on Linux and Mac too, the Linux version receives updates at a much later date, and the Mac version is still in alpha. But what is Bforartists exactly? Well, if you're into 3D animation or video creation (outside of some very specific niches like Valve SFM) then you've likely heard of Blender, an amazingly powerful tool for both video editing and animation.

Despite this, you may have been put off or discouraged by its UI. Don't worry, even some professionals find Blender's UI atrocious (Kraft, 2018). This is where the Bforartists program comes in. It provides all of the delicious features of Blender (namely, its ability to let you carry a concept from a mental image to a fully realized and functional post-processed animation all on its own) but aims to organize it all behind a more easy-to-understand UI, making one's

entry into advanced editing and animation feel less overwhelming. Thanks to its ability to let you model your own 3D environments, this application can also be used for video game development, or even let you make entire short films limited only by your commitment to making your imagination come alive.

Obviously, something to bear in mind is that Blender and Bforartists are mostly developed independently of one another, which can lead to situations where Blender is briefly better in terms of UI, but this only lasts until Bforartists gets their next update out. A great way to make your virtual 3D creative dreams more accessible.

Blender's biggest downside has always been how overwhelming or inaccessible it could feel for the uninitiated, and Bforartists resolves that. A great tool if you haven't done 3D modeling before, or if you're only used to more basic 3D modeling software, but veteran Blender users may be more comfortable just sticking with their current setup.

## **OpenShot**

- Link: <https://www.openshot.org/download/>
- Free to Download
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Video Editing and Rendering
- Alternative For: Lightworks, Adobe Premiere

Although not the most CPU-friendly editor you could ask for, and while not as powerful as software like Blender, OpenShot has a nice niche in that it works wonderfully on Windows, Linux and Mac; and unlike Olive, it is well out of its alpha stage. OpenShot comes with a broad host of useful editing effects such as removing the background from video footage,

layering footage over one another, cutting out unwanted footage entirely and even giving you the ability to add cool effects such as snow or lens flare or even engaging, fully animated titles. The UI is very quick to learn and understand; even with no tutorial at all it shouldn't take more than a few hours of tinkering to figure out how things work (and if you do decide to look for tutorials, then that time would go from hours to merely minutes).

If you want something that allows you easy access to your video tracks while giving you loads of options to fine-tune them, then this is the software for you. However, its resource-intensive nature can come back to bite you at inconvenient times. For huge projects, or for ones that have lots of effects, saving or exporting a video can take ages, and one could perhaps argue that it doesn't have as many presets or plugins as premium software. For freeware, however, this is one of the best multi-platform video editors you could ask for.

## PROFESSIONAL DESIGN SANS FEES

**A**lthough *Visual Rendering and Video Editing* might seem to cover professional design at first - and indeed, with a little patience, it usually can - it helps to have software specifically to make non-animated ads, web layouts, or photographs feel more compelling.

## PHOTO EDITING AND DESIGN TEMPLATES

### Canva

- Link: <https://www.canva.com/pricing/>
- Free to Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Easy Infographic Creation, Advert Creation, Visual Interest Generator for Social Media and Presentations
- Alternative For: Adobe Fireworks, Photoshop

Canva is another easy-to-use tool that nonetheless can save you thousands of hours making neat, professional-looking graphic designs. It's perfect for situations where you need to create something that lands the right impression, yet do not wish to go through the trouble of hiring a professional designer. Canva has been able to work on Windows, the Mac and most browsers for a long time, but has recently received an update that also allows it to run on mobile devices. Although the mobile version works, it's not the most efficient - you're definitely much better off working on your laptop or desktop.

The free version of Canva starts you off with a staggering 8000 templates to help you get your designs going and up to 1000 megabytes of storage for images and other assets you might want to use in your design. Canva is also a cloud-based tool, and the free version lets you have up to 10 people working on a design with you at once. You're also given 2 folders to keep your designs in, and are allowed to upload your own images to ensure that you can give your templates a personal touch. Overall, a great solution for creating the

right feel in a business event or when reaching out with your business on social media.

Something to bear in mind, however, is that Canva templates are sized according to the printing companies that they outsource to. This means there might be issues if you choose to print outside of Canva's services, but a guide to printing things you create on Canva at home or at the workplace can be found here:

<https://support.canva.com/publish/printing/print-design-canva/>.

Finally, while the interface is very easy to use, note that it works by dragging and dropping shapes, rather than by drawing directly. This is very easy to get used to, but it can throw some users off at first, so a fair warning feels apt.

## COLORS

### Color Cop

- Link: <http://colorcop.net/download/>
- Free to Download
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Color Picker
- Alternative For: Adobe Color Wheel

A handy web design tool made explicitly for Windows, Color Cop is an extremely simple, lightweight color-picking tool (Mac users will be fine using their OS's integrated Digital Color Meter).

To use Color Cop, simply download, install and launch the application. The little window that pops up will overlay any websites you visit unless minimized, and you'll see a host of useful tools in its window. The most important one is the little pipette/eye dropper. To use it, hold down the left mouse button on it, then drag it onto the color you wish to capture. When a color is captured, it is converted into hexadecimal code which Color Cop then saves automatically. Up to 7 different colors can be saved at once, more than enough for any single project, and there's also an option to let you create your own custom colors - useful if you want a nice shade of red that still stands out from other companies that like crimson.

The next tool is a magnifying glass, which works much like the pipette but instead of capturing colors it lets you zoom in more on a specific image or part of a web page. Once you've zoomed in enough, you can then use the pipette to capture

the color of a specific pixel. All of this together conspires to create a highly useful application for web designers, as color pickers help maintain color consistency when you wish to make a new web page in the style of one of your older ones, and likewise the magnifying glass and custom color creator are instrumental in helping you find novel colors when you want a change of palette.

The only downside is that it is Windows-only, and while the Mac does have a built-in picker as stated earlier, this does mean you're out of luck when using your mobile device. As most professionals don't do all their serious work off their mobile, however, you should be fine.

## PHOTOS

### **Picjumbo**

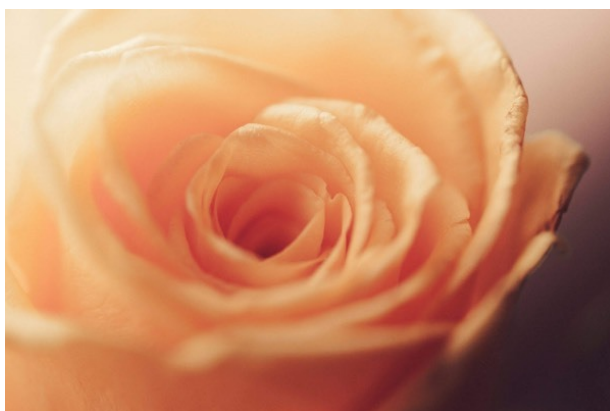
- Link: <https://picjumbo.com/?darkmode>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: High-Quality Stock Image Database
- Alternative For: Shutterstock

Sometimes, when creating online content it is not enough to simply have words. This goes for business blogs, articles or even event notifications. Sometimes it is best to use Canva along with self-taken photographs to make your own graphics, but other times the project is so small, or the visual side so non-pivotal, that it'll suffice to simply use a stock image.

Even in these situations, however, you don't want your stock images to look too generic or even worse, watermarked. Picjumbo, luckily, arrives to the rescue. First things first, this site immediately sets itself apart from the others by including a very easy-to-access dark mode, making browsing the site's photo collections an absolute pleasure. The photos themselves are also amazing; despite being stock and free to download, you have a reasonably diverse selection to choose from, and all the photos I've seen so far are high-resolution, multi-megabyte images that look and feel professional. Downloading these images for free does NOT come with annoying or visually disruptive watermarks, and the site is even kind enough to provide you with limited access to its premium collections without you having to spend a dime. Don't let the word "limited" fool you, though.

Even if you ignore the site's premium collections entirely, you are far and away spoiled for choice on a wide array of topics. To help further demonstrate Picjumbo's quality, I've taken the liberty of including images from its site in this book.

The only negatives I can think of, aside from being a little lacking when it comes to wildlife, occupations and abstract ideas, are that it does like showing you ads. It also has a penchant for showing off its premium collections, but it isn't done in a way that's meaningfully disruptive to one's workflow. Make sure you have a reliable internet connection, however, as previewing all those high-resolution images does require strong download capabilities.



## **Pexels**

- Link: <https://www.pexels.com/>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version (sponsored photos)
- Purpose: High-Quality Stock Image Database

Now, as useful as Picjumbo is, however, there will occasionally be times when it isn't enough. For instance, maybe I want stock photos to use in my latest infographic

promoting a traveling circus but, alas, Picjumbo has no free images of clowns!

I've found it's therefore good practice to have multiple stock photo databases to draw upon so that if one doesn't have what I'm looking for, the other will. In the case of Pexels, it actually did have some rather lovely free images of clowns, so there you go.

Pexels is quite similar to Picjumbo aside from the easy-to-access dark mode; the photos are high-quality, you have a large selection of free images to choose from which you can then happily put to commercial use, and the images themselves are supplied by a passionate cohort of volunteers from around the world. Curiously, Pexels even receives stock images from another database, known as Pixabay, giving it a surprising variety that leads to it totally outclassing Picjumbo in terms of quantity, especially when it comes to more specific or esoteric subject matter.

Use this in conjunction with Picjumbo for your stock-image needs, but know where to draw the line on over-use. Obviously, you won't be the only person using sites like these, meaning that it's always a good idea to challenge yourself to find images that look novel or unusual to you, rather than just downloading the first thing you see. For projects that you really want to stand out, don't be afraid to run the stock image through Canva in order to make it something truly unique for your website or media post.



## BACKGROUNDS AND TEXTURES

### Subtle Patterns

- Link: <https://www.toptal.com/designers/subtlepatterns/>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Tileable Pattern Database

Once again, sometimes creating a complex animation or custom image simply isn't necessary. If you want to quickly add some pleasant, unintrusive visual interest to your website or other project, Subtle Patterns contains hundreds of free downloads. Each pattern downloaded arrives in the form of a .zip file ( see 7-Zip) which contains README files, as well as versions of the pattern that work on Windows and Mac.

As all the patterns you can download are completely free to use (and receives vetted updates from volunteers), the "paid" aspect only comes into play if you choose to hire a designer to create something especially for you. If you're happy with the patterns already present, however, then you don't have to pay a cent. All you need to do is credit the pattern properly, which the website's FAQ describes with clarity. The FAQ also gives you a useful tutorial on how to use the patterns you download for your website if you aren't already familiar with the process, making it great if you're a web-design newbie like me.

The patterns themselves are very clean and professionally drawn, creating pleasing visual rhythms without causing

feelings of visual clutter. Patterns tend to be stylized and based on shapes like bubbles, leaves, letters, dots, snow, suns, chevrons and much, much more.

The only downside is that, because the list is only about 500 entries long at the time of writing, the search engine the website uses isn't terribly useful as you're unlikely to find what you want if you choose to be too specific. I found the best way to use this site is to simply browse its list until I find something I like - there are plenty of pleasant patterns that will surprise you.

## SYMBOLS AND ICONS

### **iconmonstr**

- Link: <https://iconmonstr.com/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Free Icon Database
- Alternative For: Flaticon, Endless Icons

When designing a web-page, you'll inevitably want icons for visual shorthand and signposting to help users navigate your site. However, drawing icons can be tedious, and creating nice, clean lines and designs from scratch can be harder than it looks.

Therefore, you'll likely want to find an icon database rather than hire a designer to draw some up for you. After all, usually you just want icons to neatly display common or easily understood symbols, like a little house to represent a link to your website's homepage, or a social media icon to visually display a "Share" link so others can more easily show content from your site to their friends. I've tried a few databases in my time, and iconmonstr is my favorite. It has far fewer hassles attached than Flaticon, and ironically has a much bigger selection than Endless Icons.

Not only do you have such a large selection of icons free for commercial use (with proper attribution, of course), the website is highly optimized, making it a joy to surf through, and you get a lot of control over an icon before you download it. You can seamlessly alter the thickness of the icon line, change its color and even fill in the white spaces with

another color of your choice. You can key in the colors you want via hexadecimal code, too, meaning colors you've saved on Color Cop can be transferred onto your icon before you download it from iconmonstr.

The only downside is that all icons are done in the same style. It is a crisp and professional style, nonetheless, but if you wanted textured icons then you're out of luck. A flat icon can still look great against a textured background if you apply some basic color theory however, and you'll be hard pressed to find a free site with this many high-quality flat icons.

## FONTS

### Font Squirrel

- Link: <https://www.fontsquirrel.com/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Free Font Database

While creatively combining patterns, icons and images is all well and good, an often-overlooked way of making your content stand out is the font. However, finding free fonts is normally a risky endeavor that inevitably leads to malware and other unpleasantness. Font Squirrel helps you bypass that by having already done all the monotonous searching and safety checks you'd otherwise need to do yourself. Although, for liability reasons, the site doesn't guarantee that its fonts are all safe and clean (a site that provides such a huge amount of content for free probably couldn't afford to hold itself liable, after all), the website owners are careful enough that it practically is. I've been using Font Squirrel for ages and have not had any issues in terms of computer safety.

It's not uncommon for a computer's antivirus to falsely flag a downloaded font, but in my experience all those false flags are just that - false. The site owners are very receptive to new information, such as potential security or legal issues that might inhibit your enjoyment of the fonts, and they go about rectifying the issues as quickly as they can.

The result is one of the safest, most reliable and most extensive font databases I've ever seen. Their FAQ is also

super-helpful, especially for first-timers who might not know how to install fonts on web pages themselves just yet.

To help select and pair fonts, consider using Canva's website for font combinations (a feature that wasn't relevant in the context of photo design, but is relevant here), which can help you quickly decide on an array of multiple fonts that might go well together on a single web page.

## USER INTERFACE

### **Bootflat**

- Link: <https://bootflat.github.io/>
- Free to Download
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Open-Source UI Kit

Although a UI Kit won't make a website on its own (see Chapter 6), it's a great way to quickly create a user-friendly interface. Note that a UI Kit is not a theme, nor is it a preset; UI kits tend to contain a great degree of customizability, even to the extent that you can finely control how much of a UI kit you implement on your website.

However, you likely will want to implement much of it so that you are not bogged down endlessly designing things like progress bars, shortcuts, widgets, checkboxes, navigation tabs, and so on. It can take one quite some time to settle on a UI kit that they really love, as each one has their own nuances and trends that make it more conducive to a certain kind of design. For me, I prefer Bootflat, and would heartily recommend it to anyone looking to start up their first web page. The reason for this is that it is designed to be lightweight and mobile-friendly. A great deal of internet surfing is done via mobile devices, and very few people will linger on websites that take long to load or respond poorly to user input, so Bootflat's emphasis on being responsive and compatible with a wide range of screens are welcome boons for me.

In addition to making websites, Bootflat's elegant design makes it ideal for mobile apps too, increasing your potential reach. It even has its own mini color-picker if you weren't sold on Color Cop for whatever reason. Runs on and supports Bootstrap 3.3.0.

## PROMOTING YOUR BUSINESS ON THE CHEAP

The previous two chapters gave you tools to help your content pop and wow your audience, but how do you even know who your audience is? How do you make sure your content gets to them in the first place? And, once your visuals have drawn them in, how do you ensure your message sticks with them? The tools in this chapter all center around dealing with these questions, and other Search Engine Optimization-related matters.

## FINDING IDEAS

### **Right Relevance**

- Link: <https://www.rightrelevance.com/>
- Free to Download (for iOS) and Free Online Tool (for Web)
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Niche Exploration, Bridge-Building,
- Alternative For: BuzzSumo

One of the best ways to generate ideas or find inspiration is to speak to those who have already succeeded. Another good way to generate ideas is to be aware of what has already been done, and what is currently existing in popular consciousness.

Right Relevance helps you get into the loop on both counts. Simply by typing in a few keywords (e.g. the field or industry you're working in), this amazing tool will show you the top "influencers" or most socially influential people in that field. You're provided with a host of other data, such as what city they live in (which can be relevant if you're willing to approach them for a professional meeting face-to-face), as well as the kind of conversations they're having on Twitter, and you can join in if you have a Twitter account of your own. This data can quickly give you an insight into their minds, while knowing their rough location helps you spot contexts or biases that you might otherwise miss.

From here, you can gain a good idea of which locations are hotbeds for your field, and which might not be. These searches also link you to a host of popular articles - 10 at a

time, by default ordered according to recency - each of which is relevant to your keyword or field. If you aren't happy, you can load even more articles and keep looking. This essentially makes Right Relevance a narrower search engine that helps you zero in more steadily on useful information. Compared to simply Googling for ideas, Right Relevance gives you a much better connection to potential contacts who could help you in your goals, as well as find topic-relevant articles more easily.

Although I'll still use other media like Reddit, Google Trends or TED Talks to find inspiration to launch an idea, Right Relevance makes finding current content generated by living, breathing individuals so much easier, and paying attention to field or profession-relevant influencers is always helpful in generating ideas sensitively so that you yourself can remain relevant in your industry. The only downside is that it doesn't spoon-feed content insights to you (meaning you'll need to spend a little time figuring out what the most popular/relevant articles have in common), and while it has filtering, it is fairly basic compared to Premium BuzzSumo.

## KEYWORD RESEARCH

### Ubersuggest

- Link: <https://neilpatel.com/ubersuggest/>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Keyword Suggestion and Generation

Although Ubersuggest has a slew of features, we'll be ignoring most of those as they require a paid subscription. The free version, however, is a neat little tool that helps you out by showing the relevancy of any keywords you type in compared with how competitive those words are: essentially, you're given a rough (though not perfectly accurate) idea of how often people type in a certain set of words similar to yours, and in turn are also shown how many other high-profile or powerful sites are already using similar keywords. You're also shown the volume of searches on both mobile and desktop devices, to give you an idea on how best to optimize your site, and are further given demographic data in terms of age ranges, further helping you decide on things like how your web design should feel - what kind of generation do your key ideas appeal to most?

On the left-hand side of the web page there is a taskbar that opens up to further neat features, such as a helpful list of suggestions to aid you in adding to your keyword chains and make them stand out, as well as showing you some examples of content that has used similar keywords.

However, as useful as all this is, no single Keyword Research tool can provide a complete picture, especially if it's free. I

personally like to use this app alongside free tools such as Google Keyword Planner, Google Trends, Google Autocomplete and Small SEO Tools in order to create a clear and comprehensive analysis of the keywords in my site in order to achieve the best results.



## EDITING/QUALITY CONTROL

### Small SEO Tools

- Link: <https://smallseotools.com/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Plagiarism, Spelling and Grammar Checking, Image Editing, Keyword Suggestion and Generation, General Search Engine Optimization, Password Management, PDF Converter, Unit Converter, Website Management, Backlinking.
- Alternative For: Scribbr, Copyscape

Although this tool does have some overlap with Ubersuggest (which you can use for cross-referencing if you like), as well as with software from previous chapters due to its overwhelming slew of completely free features, the reason we've listed this under Editing/Quality Control is because Small SEO Tools is most valuable for its plagiarism checker, and it is this aspect that I'll be focusing on now.

Why is plagiarism important for you, you might ask? After all, it's not as if you are copying or stealing content from others, so why would you need such a thing? Firstly, it's a great way to check the work done by freelancers. Secondly, if you think outside the box a little a plagiarism check becomes a brilliant way to raise the quality of your content. Let me explain.

While your content will likely have certain keywords embedded in it for the sake of views and traffic for your content, you do not want that content to come across as

bland or unoriginal – even unintentionally. Small SEO Tools helps by showing you where your text is unoriginal, and where it feels unique. You can then use this report to edit your “unoriginal” text into something more novel. Small SEO Tools even has a Paraphrasing Tool to help you do that if you’ve got writer’s block on a deadline. Note that the more novel your content is, the more it’ll pop out and grab your audience, and the more likely they are to remember it or find it interesting. Plagiarism checks, then, become a great form of quality control even if you already know that none of the content in a work was taken from elsewhere.

Unfortunately, while Small SEO Tools has one of the best free plagiarism scanning tools on the internet, it still pales in thoroughness compared to most paid services, and its restriction on scanning only 1000 words at a time means its ideal for making specific segments of text pop more, but isn’t ideal for huge amounts of content.

Use this to help raise interest in areas of text you consider important, and then switch over to a paid service like Scribbr once you start going big. In the meantime, it’ll get the job done for basic marketing and help you stand out.

I haven’t used the other tools provided by this site that much, but they can come in handy if you need to cross-check the results of other software you’re using (such as Ubersuggest). Two brains are better than one, even when it comes to web AI.

## **Hemingway**

- Link: <http://www.hemingwayapp.com/>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Spelling and Grammar Check

- Alternative For: Grammarly

Speaking of two brains being better than one, Hemingway provides a pivotal service in making your writing bolder and easier to understand. Note that I'm not suggesting it as a general grammar checker, but am rather recommending it specifically for helping you make the best use out of your text to *promote your business*. This is because Hemingway excels at editing your content down into something clean and punchy, which is exactly what you need when trying to promote yourself or when you absolutely need to convey your work as concisely as possible. Compared to Grammarly, it won't correct your errors for you at the touch of a button, but what it will do is highlight exactly where your hard-to-read sentences and abuse of passive voice lie - something that Grammarly doesn't do for free. This isn't necessarily the best tool for technical, narrative, descriptive or discursive writing (especially if you're a fan of Tolkien or Tarkovsky), but it can help tremendously when penning persuasive, condensely impactful or argumentative text.

This is not surprising, as the online tool is named after the late Ernest Hemingway, who was famous in life for the lucidity of his prose. To make the best use out of this program, rather do all your writing in a separate document, and then copy/paste it into Hemingway. I find it's always better to let your creative juices flow and then adjust them later rather than second-guessing them every step of the way.

## EMAIL MARKETING

### **Sendinblue**

- Link: <https://www.sendinblue.com/pricing/>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Customer Relationship Management, Email and SMS Marketing, Newsletter Delivery, Transactional Email Improvement

As you begin building up a following, or some other kind of audience, you'll want some way of keeping in touch with at least some of them. Part of this is through the content you create but, to add more of a personal touch, consider writing emails to the people who are helping your business grow. Sendinblue helps you in this endeavor. The free version allows you to have limitless contacts, and to send up to 300 emails a day using its service. Once you add a contact to this service via email, with extra mapping for names, surnames and SMS, you'll need to check a box confirming that your contacts are consenting to the kind of emailing that Sendinblue enables (it can border on spam in the eyes of those who didn't ask for it). From there, you can create an email campaign where you can define your marketing efforts' name, subject and recipients. You can then design the way you wish for your emails to appear through links, attachments, embedded images and more.

In addition to texts or transactional emails, you can even create newsletters through this process without much difficulty, as the creation process is fairly simple and responsive.

You can then automate the sending process with Sendinblue able to fill in a generic field with the recipient's name. Sadly, fields for gender or birthdays aren't included by default and must be done manually through creating your own field types (e.g. a text field for gender or a date field for birthdays), which does make the tool feel more cumbersome than it otherwise would at first, but it becomes easier from there. You can also segregate your subscribers by certain criteria so that they don't all get the same mail, allowing you to keep your newsletters and the like feeling personal despite the automation you can use.

## A/B TESTING

### **GuessTheTest**

- Link: <https://guessthetest.com/archived-tests/>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Site Optimization Insight-Provider, Split-Testing Educational Tool

A/B testing is a very simple yet important method of gathering data and learning more about potential customers. The premise is simple - two different versions of an ad, product, web design, or email campaign are created. Normally, the two different versions will be virtually identical except for one seemingly minor difference (e.g. the color of a web page). You then expose both to a test group, and then implement the version that performed better. Sounds simple, right? These two different versions can be exposed at the same time, or one after the other, depending on how you're measuring success. In order to help you learn the finer points of effective A/B testing, however, you'll want to use GuessTheTest.

GuessTheTest is a site you can sign onto for free, and in return you'll be sent an A/B test case study every fortnight or so. This A/B test case study not only serves as a good example of what an A/B test should be, but also has you guess at which way the majority voted on any given A/B trial. GuessTheTest arranges its tests in a fun, almost gamified, format, and is designed to teach you not only about how A/B tests should be constructed (helping you design A/B tests of your own), but also where your opinions or beliefs differ

from both recent and past consumer bases when it comes to things like web design (letting you use the data already gathered by past A/B tests to your advantage).

For marketing purposes, the more recent data will be the most valuable. Note that while the archived A/B test case studies are, by their nature, at least somewhat dated, the case study you receive every other week will be enough to help you keep current, especially if you apply what you learn from them to make more A/B tests for yourself.

## COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT

### Hootsuite

- Link: <https://hootsuite.com/plans>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Social Media Post Streamliner

This web tool is similar in principle to resources like PaperSpan or The Old Reader, but rather than streamlining the media info coming *in*, it instead helps you streamline the content that you wish to *put out*. The free version of Hootsuite allows you to link 3 social media platforms together. These platforms include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WordPress or LinkedIn. When you sign in, you are given a dashboard, with tabs that let you link a media account to said dashboard. From there, you can send a post to multiple platforms at once just by posting on your dashboard. When you're just starting out with your business or creative endeavor, it's recommended that you pick 3 social media outlets that you want your creative energy/business presence to be strongest on, and then link those to your Hootsuite account.

Under these conditions, this can cut the time you spend posting on social media for business/creative purposes down by 2 thirds, which can be an immense productivity booster that greatly improves the viability and efficiency of your use of media platforms for marketing purposes.

HELP

## V7N

- Link: <http://www.v7n.com/forums/getting-started-v7n/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Digital Marketing Learning Community

Marketing is a fluid discipline, where strategies must constantly adapt in the face of ever-changing circumstances and evolving demographics. For this reason, one might not want to rely on apps alone to handle all your digital marketing needs. You need the human touch. You need a way to get in contact with people and learn from their experience. V7N is a community forum dedicated to helping one another out with Search Engine Optimization and internet marketing. If you ever feel stuck or need advice in an ever-shifting digital marketing landscape, this is a great place to stop by and ask a question.

There are many other similar forums, but I find that this one tends to go unnoticed or unmentioned despite the great deal of SEO value that one can glean from its members. You might be wondering why a site full of SEO masters might be going largely unnoticed, and this is because the advice they give tends to be rather advanced, meaning they likely do not wish to receive lots of potentially inexperienced users. Still, they are included here regardless because less advanced or more beginner-friendly SEO advice can be readily found on blogs and YouTube videos with a good Google search. This forum is when you still feel stuck after all of that.

# WEBSITES YOU CAN MAKE YOURSELF

## WEBSITE BUILDER

# W eebly

- Link: <https://www.weebly.com/signup>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Intuitive, User-Friendly Website Constructor
- Alternative For: Wix, WordPress (and Content Management Systems in general)

This web builder is one of my favorites for two reasons. Firstly, it is extremely intuitive - its construction process operates mostly through a drag-and-drop editing feature combined with a small but serviceable and diverse array of themes that you can choose from.

These themes are also highly responsive, meaning they'll work well on mobile devices and load quickly on desktops and the like. Using Weebly with Bootflat leads to a visually pleasing yet lightweight site that can draw the user in without putting them off with slow load times. Even images you choose to upload get compressed to keep load times low. Weebly also makes adding depth of navigation to your site easy; you can add loads of menus and submenus painlessly through this website builder, and even a menu having four levels of sub-menus isn't too complex for the site, which will handle such formatting elegantly while maintaining a clean look.

Secondly, Weebly takes its web security seriously, meaning you can be confident your site is safe even when using the free version. Finally, the builder also contains a host of

helpful tools like image galleries, music players, video players and more, with plugins available if you need further options. A great tool for setting up blogs, article pages or even online stores.

Downsides? Aside from the standard downsides of using a free web builder (such as not being given your own domain - you're given a Weebly subdomain instead), the free version of Weebly has an advert at the foot of your web page, saying "Powered by Weebly." It's mostly innocuous, and certainly less egregious than the ads forced on you by certain other free web-builders, so it's not that bad.

The worst downside, however, is that for some users Weebly feels overly structured. Although newer and less technically experienced users will love its structure and interface, once you have a lot of practice under your belt or wish to hire a professional web designer, you might find the site's set up a little restrictive. When you need to set up a site yourself at no cost and little-to-no experience however, you cannot ask for better. Even if you do somehow get stuck using this simple program, there are plenty of tutorials and help boards run by Weebly to help you get off on the right foot and explain how intuitive it all really is.

If you do have the time or passion to learn a bit of coding, however, or if having your own domain is absolutely vital for visibility purposes, you may wish to stick with the more commonly known WordPress or other similar and well-known CMSes. The Weebly Web Builder is simply intended to help you overcome the anxiety of technical or coding blocks to get your first sites up with minimal fuss.

It is, in other words, your perfect answer for building an impressive-looking website when you have little-to-no coding knowledge at hand.

## HTML EDITOR

### **Atom Editor**

- Link: <https://atom.io/>
- Free to Download
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Text Editing, Web Development

Now, despite all the positives of Weebly, perhaps you'll still decide to use a well-known Content Management System like WordPress. Maybe you feel that subdomains don't look professional, or don't leave the right impression for your business (Weebly's subdomains are very neat however, so perhaps such negative feelings are unfounded). Or maybe you like the idea of using a CMS to build your website closer to a specific vision. Perhaps you may even have issues unrelated to direct web design that can nonetheless be resolved through coding. For this, I cannot recommend Atom highly enough.

It is like a grammar checker and formatting tool, but for code, helping you cut down on errors and, through this, eliminate bugs before they can even happen (which can mean the difference between your website launching successfully or being falsely flagged as malicious). Compared to other HTML Editors, Atom has a low skill floor and a high skill ceiling, meaning coders of novice and master skill levels alike can use it without too much trouble. It is also highly customizable, coming built-in with an array of settings and options to help you define your experience with this program. Works very well on Windows 7 and later, as well as Linux and Macs.

Its power and ease of use come with a (metaphorical) price, unfortunately. Although not an issue for most users with modern PCs, this device can be notoriously slow if you have less than 2 Gigabytes of RAM installed via hardware on your machine. With 4 Gigabytes, you might have the occasional hang-up. 6 GB or more should ensure a smooth experience, however.

## CSS GENERATORS

### **CSS3 Generator**

- Link: <http://css3generator.com/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Web-page Formatting

When coding your own website, an HTML editor alone won't cut it. This is because HTML editors are great for describing what kind of content is on your web page, defining paragraphs, titles and the like, but it tends to create a jumbled mess when you try to format. This is where CSS generators come in, and the aptly named CSS3 Generator is one of the better choices you could ask for, allowing you to save yourself work when you wish to write code for shadows (like shadow behind a widget or behind text), transitions, gradients and colors. Simply choose a category you want to work with, enter the parameters you want and, once all the fields have been filled, the generator will return with a line of CSS code ready for you to copy, paste and save into an external .css file of your choice, which can in turn be used to define the style of your website.

Although simple to use, however, it does require you to know what you want, and does not do previews, meaning you'll need to be willing to play around with measurements a bit, as well as understand a little about pixel length and RGBA coloring beforehand.

## W3CSchools' Pixels to Ems Conversion

- Link: [https://www.w3schools.com/TAGS/ref\\_pxtoemconversion.asp](https://www.w3schools.com/TAGS/ref_pxtoemconversion.asp)
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Pixel to Em Conversion, Website Coding Education

In the last resource, we mentioned how some prior CSS knowledge could be useful. Although the link above will take you to a pixel-to-em converter, this converter is on a comprehensive and highly well-organized website that gives free lessons and explanations on all sorts of tags in both HTML and CSS coding, containing and imparting enough knowledge to fill a book in its own right at no cost. If you insist on making your own website and do not wish to hire a professional web designer to do it, then this resource will be invaluable in helping you figure out what's what.

As for the pixels-to-ems converter specifically, this is a highly useful tool because while it is easier to work in pixels when first laying out your website, ems are typically a more user-friendly metric to work in. This is because when a font is defined by ems, with those ems being based off a single parent pixel size, that font is far more likely to remain visually consistent between browsers and devices, which is pivotal if you want to ensure all your site's visitors have the visual experience you intended. Relying solely on pixels can lead to really ugly font resizing, making your content harder to read and thus easier to ignore (Cousins, 2019).

There may be converters with more bells and whistles out there, but this one should be enough for your purposes, and the host of knowledge it's attached to will be useful for users who want to teach themselves some coding.

## DEVELOPER TOOLS

### **Yeoman**



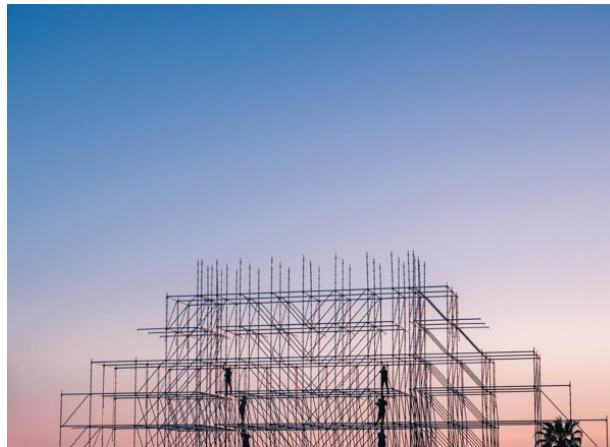
- Link: <https://yeoman.io/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Project Scaffolding

If none of what you've read has appealed to your web-generation needs so far, or if you like the ideas but feel overwhelmed and don't know where to start, consider visiting Yeoman. Yeoman helps your web-designing mission

fall into a structured workflow. The resources and tips on their site will help you build the skeleton or scaffolding for a future website or application, and the site provides crystal-clear instructions to help you set up your very first project scaffolding.

The generators Yeoman then provides you from that point can help you make a variety of yes/no decisions very quickly (such as whether or not you want your web page or application to have Twitter Bootstrap) as well as help you automate a variety of tasks such as page deployment and updates, testing and file compression.

It's not the best for back-end projects or relatively minor projects, but when you're working front-end or are trying to get a whole web page set up yourself for the first time, it can dramatically lighten the burden on your shoulders.



## WEBSITE REVIEW

### **Down for Everyone or Just Me**

- Link: <https://downforeveryoneorjustme.com/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Website Connectivity Assessment and Troubleshooting

When building a web-page, whether with Weebly or with elbow grease, one of the most disheartening things that can happen is when you try to log onto your site only to fail establishing connectivity. The immediate question to run through our minds in that situation then tends to be “Is the site really borked, or is it just me?”

Although you likely will have a few issues when creating your very first site, it always pays to eliminate other potential causes of issues. For instance, maybe your website is actually fine and it is simply your ISP that is struggling today. Maybe you’re battling to log on due to an overly zealous firewall or antivirus. Maybe the issue is caused by a recent OS update. When in doubt, simply insert your website’s URL into the tab shown to you when you visit the above link, and it’ll tell you in seconds whether your website is completely down or if it is simply an issue on your end/in your local area.

While this is a very simple and minimal device, being able to answer that question alone can greatly narrow down what needs to be done. For instance, if it says it’s down for everyone then you know there’s some deeper error in the

code. However, if it says it's down for just you then you can move onto other tests, like seeing if your site works on other browsers, checking your computer security and network settings, and so forth.

## PERFORMANCE

### **Pingdom Website Speed Test**

- Link: <https://tools.pingdom.com/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: International Web Page Speed Testing and Advice

As we've stated many times before, one of the most important factors of a website is how quickly it loads and responds according to user input. While the tools provided to you are aimed around keeping your speeds reasonable, especially if you use Weebly, this tool linked above will help you see just how well your web-page stands up to speed tests. You can run these tests from Europe, South America, the US and Australia, helping you see how viewers from all over the world will experience your site in terms of speed.

Sadly, these international options are somewhat Euro-Centric, having two options for Europe and the US each while having no options for Africa and only one option each for the other continents.

Still, what's there should be enough to help you optimize, especially since the site will pinpoint the causes of your web-page's sluggishness, ergo signposting where you should try to optimize your site next.

## FILE TRANSFER

### Cyberduck

- Link: <https://cyberduck.io/>
- Free to Download and Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Secure File Sharing



A cloud-based File Transfer Protocol tool, Cyberduck allows you to use its services as a cloud storage browser to help move your data from one computer to another, or even allow teammates to access this stored data as needed. Cyberduck is best used for SFTP file transfer, as this method is encrypted and highly secure, but it also has support for other cloud-based services such as Google Drive or Dropbox, allowing you to streamline your file transfers, especially between colleagues or clients.

Notable features include correct character transference, so German letters like the Umlaut or the Scharfes S won't get lost in translation, nor will Chinese characters or Cyrillic text, making it friendly for use even on an international level. The only downside is that it works just for Windows and the Mac

- there is yet to be a version that works with Linux or any mobile devices.

## FRAMEWORKS, TEMPLATES AND CODEPACKS

### **Bootstrap**

- Link: <https://getbootstrap.com/docs/versions/>
- Free to Download and Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Streamlining and Simplifying Web Design, Front-End Web Developer
- Alternative For: Genesis

Not to be confused with its cousin from Chapter 4, Bootflat (nor with its non-free distant relative, Bootstrap Studio), Bootstrap is not limited simply to widgets and tabs. While Bootflat is ideal for those who already have a website and just want to add a little more to it, Bootstrap is for those who want to more easily build their own website and themes from scratch.

Bootstrap can be used by anyone with some CSS and HTML knowledge, and thus becomes a handy complement to WordPress if you have a little bit of technical aptitude.

Compared to paid frameworks such as Genesis, it can feel slower and it does take more learning to use well, but you already have Weebly as your free and super-painless web design option. Bootstrap is simply there to help manual design feel less painful and intimidating.

## ENTERTAIN YOURSELF FOR FREE

**O**f course, there are plenty of ways to entertain oneself for free, whether that involves reading in a library, drawing with water or charcoal, or freeloading with some friends. However, this chapter is specifically geared towards helping you get your hands on entertaining software for free.

## MUSIC STREAMING

### **LiveXLive**

- Link: <https://www.livexlive.com/>
- Free to Download and Free Online Too
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Music Streaming and Radio Station Emulation

Most of you have likely already heard of Spotify or YouTube Music. Some might not even bother with YouTube Music, and simply listen to songs via regular YouTube. However, LiveXLive provides enough unique services to make it stand out even among other free services.

You can access LiveXLive either through your browser or through a downloadable app for smartphones and Over-The-Top devices. Once logged in, you are given a station which you can customize by telling it to fill itself with music similar to a particular artist or song. The resulting playlist tends to be excellently curated, and you can always choose the “ban” option on a song or artist you don’t like, preventing them from coming back up on your station. You can also mark other songs as favorites, increasing the frequency with which they play. This lack of control compared to YouTube may feel off-putting, but it’s also an excellent way to introduce yourself to more bands and artists along your tastes, expanding your awareness of music.

Speaking of which, LiveXLive also has some live, radio-like stations that you can tune into, such as Sample City or Artist DNA, both of which take deeper dives into the history and

context behind music. The Sample City station examines musical snippets and their role in building hit songs, while Artist DNA is hosted by musical experts who play tunes that influenced the world's greatest musicians. Together, they form a welcome boon for those who like to reflect on the entire creative process of music, from conception to realization, rather than just the end product, and I haven't seen any other music streaming service do anything like that.

There's also a non-musical station in Slacker Stories, which is full of entertaining pop-cultural anecdotes. The downsides of the free version, in addition to the constant ads, is a lack of on-demand playback as well as the ability to skip only six songs an hour. While this normally isn't an issue (especially given the curation quality as stated earlier), it can feel annoying if you're yearning for a particular song rather than a particular emotion.

## MOVIE STREAMING

### **Plex**

- Link: <https://www.plex.tv/watch-free/>
- Free to Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Movie/Show Screening
- Alternative For: Netflix

What sets Plex apart for me is how reliable it is. Most free movie streaming services battle outside of countries like Australia or the US, which can be a mighty inconvenience for an overwhelming percentage of the world's population, especially for those who like to travel when they can.

For these people, Plex is a boon in that it offers a huge and ever-expanding list of films, news, shows and podcasts that you can watch from almost any device, whether desktop, laptop or mobile. It even has a dedicated app for the Amazon Fire TV. Top films you can expect to find on this service are the likes of Inception, Fight Club, Basic Instinct, Alien, The Devil's Advocate, Apocalypse Now, The Adventures of Tintin and The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo.

In addition to this, you also gain access to all the films present on Crackle, another streaming service, leading to a total of thousands of films and shows across many genres from documentary to fantasy. The only downside? It's ad-driven. That said, this won't bother you much if you're used to all the egregious commercials that came with cable TV.

### **The Internet Archive**

- Link: [https://archive.org/details/moviesandfilms?&sort=-downloads&and%5B%5D=collection%3A%22feature\\_films%22](https://archive.org/details/moviesandfilms?&sort=-downloads&and%5B%5D=collection%3A%22feature_films%22)
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Public Domain Media Retention

The Internet Archive is a public database for all free and public domain media. Although this does mean its selection of movies is incredibly old, it also makes it a great place to pick up some last-century classics, such as the comedy works of Charlie Chaplin (with *The Great Dictator* being a special favorite of mine) as well as the mystical and science-fiction films of Andrei Tarkovsky (of which *Stalker* and *Solaris* are my favorites).

Hundreds of films are available on this site, many of them coming in multiple languages or with subtitles, and you have the choice of either watching the film on-site or legally downloading it and watching it on your PC. The fact that you do not need to download what you want to watch, however, means you can happily browse and use The Internet Archive's media even on mobile devices.

Finally, if you do choose to get out of the Movies section, you will find a host of software and books to choose from as well, although I personally haven't used this component of the website much other than picking up old science fiction books and the occasional spiritual work.



## GAMES

### Steam



- Link: <https://store.steampowered.com/>
- Free Download and Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Online Game Platform

Although not all the games on Steam are free, Steam itself is completely free to use. In addition to the games it sells, it also hosts thousands of Free-to-Play and Indie games that you can download and enjoy at no cost to yourself. The genres are wide - my favorite for team-based shooting, for instance, would be Valve's classic *Team Fortress 2*, while a favorite from the Mass Online Battle Arena genre would be *DOTA 2*. For an MMORPG, try *Spiral Knights*. If you like Diablo-type games, Steam offers a free and compelling alternative in *Path of Exile*. For surreal puzzles and problem-solving, try the soon-to-be-released *Superliminal*. All of these titles can readily be found on Steam through its search function.

Whether you consider yourself a casual gamer or hardcore, or whether you're into fun puzzles, composed strategy or intense virtual combat, Steam likely has a free game in its library to meet your needs.

The platform is also well-known for occasionally giving ludicrously high discounts on its paid games as well, sometimes allowing you to snap a title up for 25% of its regular cost. Any game you download from Steam - whether free or purchased - becomes yours to play for life, and is stored in Steam's cloud. This allows you to download and play any of your games with all of your progress and achievements intact from any computer you wish so long as it can run Steam.

There are only two downsides: firstly, that it focuses its support on Windows, with comparatively few games and more bugs for Mac or Linux users. Secondly, the quality of its games varies tremendously. It can be difficult to wade through the chaff to get to the good stuff, especially in the Free-to-Play category, which is why I've picked out some of the nicer titles for you in the first paragraph.

Don't let that discourage you, though! It's very easy for gems to get lost in the rough, so who knows what you'll find if you go digging?

## **Epic Games**

- Link: <https://www.epicgames.com/store/en-US/download>
- Free Download and Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Online Gaming Platform

Epic Games is very similar to Steam in purpose and function, but with some key differences. Firstly, it has far less variety in games in exchange for greater consistency in quality. In other words, Epic Games has fewer gems compared to Steam, but also much less chaff hiding those gems. Secondly, its UI focuses more on being clean and minimal. This can mean having access to fewer features, or features being somewhat hidden away compared to Steam, but it also means a much less cluttered interface if that's the sort of thing you care about.

The main draw of Epic Games, however, is that its unique business model allows it to advertise and give away premium, high-quality games for free for limited periods of time. Should you choose to download such a game from Epic Games during its free period, that game will become yours to play forever even once the free period is over. Much like Steam, Epic Games will also keep that game in its cloud so that you can access it along with your progress on any machine where you can log in with your Epic Games account.

Notable titles that Epic Games has given away for free in the past include quality action/looter games like *Borderlands: The Handsome Collection* or *Torchlight*, family co-op games such as *Overcooked*, innovative and eye-opening puzzle and survival games such as *The Witness*, *Subnautica*, *This War of Mine* and the *Talos Principle*, RPGs such as *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*, Strategy Games like *Civilization VI* and more. None of those games are in their free period at the time of writing, of course, but they stand as an example of the quality that Epic Games isn't afraid to give to you if you stick around with it long enough.

**Good Old Games (GOG)**

- Link: <https://www.gog.com/games?page=1&sort=bestselling&price=free>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Online Game Store

GOG is different from the previous 2 entries in that it is just an online game store, with no cloud services and relatively limited online community features. It also has a significantly more limited selection of games, although some of the free games have surprisingly large amounts of content, while paid games tend to be exceptionally good value for money if you're into classics.

This site isn't called "Good Old Games" for nothing, a fact that is reflected in its curation; almost all its options are single-player classic RPG or Adventure games, most of which look like they're from the early 2000s or even 1990s. As GOG knows how much of a headache it can be trying to run old but classic games on a modern PC, its site owners do the best they can to ensure all the games they host have been updated and modified to run on modern PCs. Much of their selection can happily run on Windows, Linux and the macOS too.

While the lack of cloud services might seem like a downside, it can actually become a boon with a little forethought. Unlike Steam or Epic Games, GOG does not use DRM to protect its games, meaning you could potentially copy a game after you buy it so that you can install on any PC you wish to play your game on.

Don't expect much mainstream appeal from this platform compared to Steam or Epic Games, but if you're like me and get nostalgic over how games were made and played in the "good old days," where passion came before money, this site

is for you. In some cases, GOG can even rescue games for you. In the footer on its website there is a small bit of text reading “Reclaim Your Game.” For instance, I bought *S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Shadow of Chernobyl* from GSC not long after it came out (around 2008), but the disc got a lot of scratches over the years until it eventually became unusable (it was a chaotic period of my life). Luckily, GOG allowed me to keep playing the game anyway, thanks to accepting my GSC installation key, which promptly made it let me download another copy of *Shadow of Chernobyl* for free.

## VIRTUAL TOURS



### 10 Museums You Can Explore Right Here, Right Now

- Link: <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/igKSKBBnEBSGKg?hl=en>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Virtual Space Preservation and Exploration

A handy web tool made by Google Arts & Culture, this site allows you to indulge in virtual exploration of 10 of the world's top museums from the comfort of your browser at home.

The beginning of the page also has links to take you to scores of additional spaces you can virtually explore. This browser tool is perfect for truly understanding the space and scale of an artwork or installation. However, if this site has any built-in tools that label or explain the works, they do not appear for me. If you wish to read more about the name or context of a work, you'd need to note the museum you're currently exploring, then search its name in your browser in order to try find its exhibition catalog which, if written well,

will explain more of the history behind everything you're looking at.

Another limitation is that you cannot walk around the entire building, as only a certain percentage of each one seems to have been mapped for virtual exploration. Due to the scale of the project, you also need a solid internet connection to enjoy it. If you do have decent connectivity however, then you'll love this tool.

### **Virtual Yosemite**

- Link: <https://www.virtualyosemite.org/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: National Park Exploration

Although there are many exquisitely beautiful national parks around the world, few capture me like the verdant forests and pale peaks of temperate Yosemite. Unlike the museum tours listed above, the virtual tour for Yosemite does not simulate walking, but it does let you pan, zoom and tilt, giving you the best angle possible on beautiful vistas.

It also provides location names and some contextual insights to help you appreciate the areas you are virtually visiting. Has some of the same issues as the previous virtual tour entry, where a strong, consistent internet connection is needed for the best possible experience.

## ENHANCING TEAMWORK

## COMMUNICATION

### Slack

- Link: <https://slack.com/intl/en-za/downloads/windows>
- Free Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Cross-Platform Instant Messaging, Collaboration
- Alternative For: Emails, SMS, WhatsApp Messaging

Although the link above will take you to a download for Windows, Slack is fully compatible with both Linux and the Mac too, and even has a dedicated mobile app. All installations of slack that you may have will sync together provided you log into each of your devices with the same account, which gives you a limited form of file transfer that you can use in a pinch for small or temporary stuff that Cyberduck might seem overkill for.

The main boon however is that the free version gives you a highly secure platform from which you can quickly and easily communicate with colleagues. When setting up your own slack page, you can invite others to it, and they'll be able to access it anytime from there. That said, you still are in full control, as you can set channel definitions and permissions. A channel you create on your Slack page can be visible to all invited users, visible only to you, or visible only to a select group.

This can allow you to define a channel quietly before opening it up for general use, and allows you to give different parts of

your team private spaces to discuss things and public spaces to collaborate.

Another cool feature to note is that of threaded conversations. When someone writes a message, you can choose to “Reply in Thread,” which helps keep the chat feed uncluttered and helps multiple conversations within a channel run without stepping on each others’ toes.

Limits to be aware of when using the free version are that conversations get deleted after about 14 days, and you cannot store more than 5 GB of files on the site at once. This means it is great for working in the moment, but you’ll need to be vigilant in saving any important data or conversations that come up on that site elsewhere, lest you lose it.

## **Discord**

- Link: <https://discord.com/new/download>
- Free Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Cross-Platform Instant Messaging, Collaboration, Real-Time Communication
- Alternative For: Emails, SMS, WhatsApp Messaging

Although Discord might not be the best way to interface directly with clients due to its stigma as a gaming platform, it nonetheless has a slew of useful features that can aid in any collaborative process. Much like Slack, Discord has a version for almost any device and while it has a Dark Mode enabled by default to be easier on the eyes, you can switch to Light Mode for a more stark feel that’s more in line with a virtual office environment.

It should be noted that Discord doesn’t have threaded conversations like Slack does, meaning it’s easy to lose track

of queries when many people are active on a channel at once. On the plus side, Discord does have a message search function to let you easily filter for past messages and, unlike Slack, you can search for messages on a Discord server even after *years* have passed. The biggest advantage of Discord, however, lies in the ease with which you can create persistent voice-chat channels that can be joined at any time by people with the correct permissions. Webcams and share-screening are both possible by default in voice channels (which can also host up to 25 people at a time *per channel*), allowing easy face-time between colleagues.

You may be wondering, then, what the paid version of Discord has. Aside from more room for custom emotes, nothing. You get all the functionality that makes Discord so good for free. The only downside is that the security isn't as tight as Slack's by default, but if you're concerned, then you can easily enable two-step authentication for new members and even create a custom role that must be assigned before new users on your server can have basic permissions for extra security.

This will help ensure no one can operate on your Discord server unless you trust them fully. Speaking of roles, you can create practically endless custom channels and roles on your server, giving you great customizability in how your community runs. Despite being shunned by many professionals due to its stigma, plenty of passionate and dedicated coders and modmakers use Discord all the time to manage their team and their fan base in the same place.

This works out very well since channel visibility can be defined by roles and permissions and all roles and permissions are defined by the server's creator, meaning channels intended for staff or team members only cannot be

interrupted or otherwise invaded by overzealous followers even if both groups are on the same server.

## Zoom

- Link: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us>
- Free Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Web-Conferencing
- Alternative For: Skype

If Discord is the voice and text platform for everyone, and Slack is the text platform for professionals, Zoom is the voice platform for professionals. Zoom is much better optimized than Skype, but what advantages does it have over Discord? Discord is also very well optimized (its call system was designed to run smoothly alongside programs that need 16 gigabytes of RAM or more to run, after all), and while Zoom has end-to-end encryption in its voice chat, so does Discord. What sets Zoom apart is that it allows up to 100 people to be part of a meeting at once. The free version allows a meeting to last for 40 minutes and comes with a built-in feature that records your meeting for later review. Up to 1 GB of recordings can be stored by Zoom.

Although 40-minute meetings might sound like a downside, it's very easy to structure around as there's no limit to how many times you can hold meetings. There's also nothing stopping you from refreshing a meeting so that you don't even need to send out a new link to continue. Normally, what I like to do is state beforehand that everyone takes a 5-10 minute break after the timer ends so everyone can freshen up, and then I just restart the meeting and encourage everyone to pick up where we left off on our agenda. This is a great way to handle large meetings, and built-in host

functionality like mass-muting or disabling of non-host screen sharing can ensure that no one talks over each other when it'd be inappropriate.

Like Discord, however, you should definitely buff up your call's security for professional use. On Zoom, this means sending the meeting link directly to all intended participants through direct messages (and not through public social media, as anyone with the meeting link can join) and then, for an extra layer of protection, log into your Zoom account (if you're going to host the meeting), go into Account Management, then Account Settings, then Meeting and then finally Waiting Room. Once you've navigated to the Waiting Room options, choose to enable your Waiting Room. This means even if someone unintended does manage to get hold of your meeting link, they still won't be able to join without your approval. Finally, enable "Lock Meeting" once you've given everyone a fair grace period to join. This will prevent gate-crashers from worming their way in.

Ultimately, a good way to hold video conferences, especially if you suspect that giving people Discord might tempt them to check out gaming servers on the sly at work. When using Zoom, be sure to take advantage of the program's ability to customize backgrounds and as well as do demonstration drawings for your audience on-screen if needed.

## FILE SHARING AND STORAGE

### **MyAirBridge**



- Link: <https://www.myairbridge.com/en/>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Large File Transfer, Bulk File Sharing

A handy tool that lets you store and send files up to 20 GB large to other people. In the free version, you can store as many files as you like, as long as no individual file is bigger than 20 GB and you do not try to transfer more than 100 GB in a month (200 GB in a month if you sign up for a free MyAirBridge account), but there's two important caveats to take note of.

First, you can only transfer 100 GB of data every 30 days. This number does, however, double to 200 GB if you're logged into your MyAirBridge account.

Second, even though you are storing these files, MyAirBridge won't consider these files to truly be "in storage" unless you're using a paid plan. This means any file you upload to

MyAirBridge will be deleted after 2 days (3 days if you uploaded your file while logged in).

The best way to use this, then, is to reserve it for file transfers larger than 25 MB (which Gmail can handle just fine), and then have whoever needs those files download them within 2-3 days after you upload. Uploaded files generate a link that you can share with anyone or email to a specific person (although a link might lead to a 20 GB file, the link itself is only a few KB and thus can be emailed with no issue). The recipient can then click on your link to complete the file transfer without them needing a MyAirBridge account of their own; only the sender needs to consider getting one.

To get the most mileage out of this online tool, be sure to tell your recipient the link is only valid for 2-3 days, and on your end consider using 7-Zip (see Chapter 1) to compress any file you wish to transfer before uploading it. Compressing files will mean you can send more before you reach your monthly data transfer limit, which can be vital if you expect to have lots of recipients in need of large files.

MyAirBridge can also work very well alongside Cyberduck, especially in the sending of files too large for other transfer services.

## **Sync.com**

- Link: [https://www.sync.com/?\\_\\_m=3kl&sscid=.71k4\\_lmhgv](https://www.sync.com/?__m=3kl&sscid=.71k4_lmhgv)
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Secure Cloud Storage and File Sharing

Most of you already use Google Drive, which gives you 15 GB of free cloud-based storage with syncing. If you need a little more than that however, you can sign up for another 5 GB of storage. There are plenty of cloud storage systems out there, but what makes this one such a lovely complement to existing services like Google Drive or Cyberduck is its high respect for privacy, fast file syncing and its ability to let you share its contents with anyone, even those who do not use Sync.com at all.

A great boon to bear in mind is that Sync.com has great versioning. It automatically saves old versions of any files you update in your cloud without counting towards your storage limit, giving you a great safety net against bad edits or even ransomware attacks. A major downside however is that it doesn't work directly with Google Docs, meaning it's best used as extra storage rather than as a real-time platform for collaborating inside a document. As always, consider compressing documents before you upload them so you get the most mileage out of your storage as possible.

### **MEGA.nz**

- Link: <https://mega.nz/#startpage/aff=Z7n5H7UpuNM>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Secure Cloud Storage and File Sharing

Just in case you need yet more space for cloud storage, MEGA.nz is a cloud storage solution popular with modmakers and other collaborators. When you sign on, you gain a free trial period where you have access to 50 GB of storage space, although this soon gets cut down to 15 GB of space after your trial ends. Still, 15 GB is like having another Google Drive except fully dedicated to storage and not any of

the other space-taking features that Google tends to have (e.g. your emails in Gmail take up space on Google Drive).

A strong point for MEGA.nz is its high security as well as its ability to integrate with Thunderbird (see Chapter 1). It is also easy to use, and it is fully possible to set a file to be downloadable even by those who do not have a MEGA.nz account, similar to Sync.com. The UI is highly intuitive and easy to get the hang of, meaning you'll soon be able to use it with ease to store and send yet more files for your business. When used alongside Google Drive and Sync.com you effectively have 35 GB of cloud storage space between all 3 tools, which is likely far more than you'll ever need to have on a permanent basis. MEGA.nz works on both desktop and mobile devices, including the usual selection of Windows, Mac, Linux, iOS and Android. The downside, however, is that it can be quite slow, especially when dealing with large files.

## EDUCATION WITHOUT TUITION

**E**ducation is one of the most powerful tools one can have in bringing success into our lives. Despite this, it is all too common to hear scare stories where students have sunk thousands of dollars into a course only to have indebted themselves without having learned anything that'll help them in ever-changing market conditions.

Remove the anxiety of student loans and the fear of indebting yourself forever and take on education as it was meant to be; a source of empowerment open to those with the thirst to seek additional knowledge.



## UNIVERSITY-LEVEL CLASSES

### **Coursera**

- Link: [www.coursera.org](http://www.coursera.org)
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version (classes are free, but certificates need a fee)
- Purpose: Online Learning

Now, let us be plain: Coursera won't earn you a degree on its own. What it will do, however, is give you vast access to a wealth of knowledge from diverse subjects. There are nearly a thousand courses to choose from, most of which are in English and a still significant amount in Chinese. There is very little or no support for other languages however. Course categories include the Arts, Design, Humanities, Tech and Software Engineering and are provided by universities such as Princeton, Yale and the University of Michigan.

Courses come in two forms; self-paced (known as “on-demand” on Coursera) and timed, meaning you can choose to learn either with a class or go entirely under your own steam. This gives you a lot of flexibility to learn according to your needs, but does presume a level of passion, discipline and interest concerning what you wish to study.

Sadly, while the learning resources you have access to are great, you'll have very little contact with your teachers or professors, meaning you'll need to be ready to self-study and autodidact your way to victory using the texts and videos you're provided. Knowing whether you've met victory or not

is difficult to assess however, as Coursera's assessment system is not terribly challenging, for the most part.

Fortunately, there is a communication system built-in to courses where you can ask and answer questions in a "class" with your fellow students, which can lead to some valuable group-learning through sharing insights and perspectives. However, the quality of this obviously varies tremendously as online classes can be made up of any number of all kinds of people.

Ultimately, this program is best if you wish to acquire more knowledge in a particular field, or wish to undergo an advanced tutorial on a subject before deciding whether or not it's dedicating your time (or possibly money) to. You receive no recognition for course completion unless you fork over for one as stated by the bullet points above. Even then, what you get is a certificate that you can post on LinkedIn, but can't use to progress yourself closer to a degree directly.

Don't knock this service however - its resources could be a major benefit for you when undertaking a university course for real, as the texts and videos provided to you are indeed university-tier, at least if you're an undergraduate. Not the best resource if you wish to study further as a post-graduate in your particular field.

## **Modern States**

- Link: <https://modernstates.org/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version (although it does provide links to some paid tutoring services)
- Purpose: Online Learning, Tutoring and Mentoring, CLEP Accreditation

Filling in some of the gaps left by Coursera, however, is Modern States. The first thing to note is that Modern States offers community-based learning, tutors and papers for study *outside* the context of a particular course. Although some of the tutoring services are paid, this is not true for all of them, and you should be able to find a helpful online mentor free of charge with a bit of browsing through Modern States' resources.

Courses are offered by institutions such as MITx, NYU and George Washington University. The courses themselves are also even more varied than Coursera in terms of type, ranging from topics such as Genetics to Calculus to French and Spanish. Whether you like literature, language, physics or psychology, you will find a quality course covering the topic here. There is also a mobile app if you wish to study on the go.

The true game changer of this platform, however, is that its courses count toward your CLEP score, which students who wish to study in the USA can use in order to gain accreditation and fulfill requirements in participating universities. Depending on the university chosen and the course taken, you could even fulfill your first year requirements completely free of charge, giving you a massive head start in your studies without having to spend a dime...provided you live comfortably in the US. If you aren't living in the US, then you better hope you're part of the US military, otherwise you sadly won't be able to take full advantage of Modern States' CLEP feature without undergoing major upheavals in your life.

Still, even without bothering with CLEP the resources themselves are helpful, if a tad US-centric, and both left and right-brained individuals will find courses to appreciate on this platform.

## Khan Academy

- Link: <https://www.khanacademy.org/signup>
- Free to Download and Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Online Learning

Khan Academy is a completely free service. No paid plan, no ads. You don't even need an account to start using it, although getting one is recommended to help keep track of your progress. Unlike Modern States or Coursera, Khan Academy is available in a wide variety of common global and national languages, although at the moment this only changes text and gives subtitles, and will not alter audio or visuals (e.g. a presentation recorded in English will still have English text and sound English, but will at least have a transcript in your chosen language). Its teaching system is elegant and simple; at your own pace, learn through a combination of short 10-minute lectures combined with machine-graded assessments that test your knowledge.

Useful courses include coding lessons if you ever want to create a website without a Web Builder or CMS. Although Khan Academy does have a reputation for being a tool for home-schooled children (and its gamified presentation doesn't do much to dispel that stigma), there are plenty of college-level courses and lessons for adults such as partnered content from NASA (for astronomers) or MoMA (for Art Historians), as well as Khan-generated courses in Economics, Calculus, Statistics, Computer Science, Chemistry, Physics and Biology. Sadly there isn't much for those who want to study Literature or Philosophy beyond a high school level, nor is there much for those who want to study Politics, Civics and History outside of a USA context.

Similarly to Coursera, there is also no college or university credit awarded to participants, even though the education is still college-level and can help you gain the practical skills you need for your endeavors, which is vital for any entrepreneur. This is especially true given how thorough the assessment process is; your knowledge truly will be tested, and mistakes will kindly be pointed out to you if you get things wrong.

When using this tool, note that only laptop and desktop versions offer the full service. The mobile version only lets you watch Khan's educational videos, most of which can already be accessed via YouTube.

### **Academic Earth**

- Link: <https://academicearth.org/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Online Learning, Degree Research Tool

Academic Earth has a similar mission to Khan Academy in that it is invested in providing free college-level education to interested academics worldwide. There are over 60 different languages for you to choose from when you begin learning.

Much like Khan Academy, instruction is carried out through videos in order to cover everything from lecturing to test preparation. The lectures themselves can be organized by playlist or by lecturer, and the subject list is exhaustive, containing significantly more college-level subjects to study than Khan (especially in the Humanities section, where Khan is notably lacking). Where it falls down compared to Khan is the lack of assessment and relatively dry presentation - it is all videos, and it doesn't have any gamification elements to hook the user. This means you'll need extra self-discipline

as well as an alternate means of testing yourself. Where it blows previously listed learning platforms out of the water, however, is in helping you get credit for your studies.

Now, Academic Earth does not credit you directly, so don't get too excited. What it does do, however, is give you a built-in program locator tool to help you find the best tertiary institution for your field of interest. Most of the free online courses hosted by Academic Earth will also have a little section showing you possible grants you might be able to earn if you can demonstrate sufficient ability with the subject matter, and a big enough grant could pay for your tuition, effectively (albeit indirectly) letting you turn your knowledge into credit for free. Only Modern States comes close to this, but Academic Earth pulls ahead by not relying on CLEP as its only means of helping students accredit themselves after studying online.

## **Udacity**

- Link: <https://www.udacity.com/>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Online Tech Education

Specializing in the education of tech company employees, Udacity offers 198 free courses covering topics such as algorithms, computer program design, artificial intelligence, differentials, software debugging and more.

Naturally, it's also a good place to learn about creating user-interactive graphics as well as the basics of programming languages if previously listed software and tools didn't quite hook you earlier. Although the courses are relatively niche compared to those of the previously listed online learning platforms, and come in relatively fewer numbers in its free

version, each course is absolutely jam-packed with information in a high-quality and engaging package.

While courses on some of the other platforms could be finished in days or maybe a week or two, it is not uncommon to see courses on Udacity have a projected time to complete of two months or more. The downside is that you have very little service support and practically no interaction with others while using this tool, not even students, which can be an issue if you have technical difficulties or if you liked the inter-student dialogue present in tools like Coursera.

### **Harvard (and edX)**

- Link: <https://online-learning.harvard.edu/catalog/free>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Online Learning

At the beginning of this book, I said I'd tell you how you can attend classes at Harvard, from the comfort of your home, for free. You may have been expecting some complex or well-hidden secret that gives you special access, but no.

At the time of writing, Harvard has over 88 online month-long courses available that are completely free. Harvard runs these courses by hosting them through edX, a rather self-explanatory online learning platform. Don't worry about finding edX however, as you'll automatically get the prompt and link to register with them when you select a free Harvard course. Most courses are self-paced, but require a weekly time-commitment to be fulfilled to ensure you stay on track.

Free courses cover topics from Programming to Medicine to Religion. Like Coursera, these courses are free to audit, and

even have the bonus of letting you get free Honor Code Certificates as proof of your enrollment thanks to its collaboration with edX, but you'll need to pay if you want to obtain a certificate to verify your credentials. It might seem difficult to believe that such a vaunted and prestigious institution has made part of its world-class tuition so accessible, but it just goes to show that one should never assume something to be hard to get just because it's of high quality and value.

While it is true that its course selection is rather limited on its own, and even with edX you might find gaps in selection choice, you can learn confidently knowing that you're taking in material given by some of the best-renowned US tertiary institutions in the world. Note that Harvard courses are open on a very temporary basis; a course on Buddhist Scripture, for instance, is going to be taken down in September 2020, so hurry on to the Harvard website to catch the course you want while it's still open, as there's no guarantee that the course replacing it will be up your alley.

## ONLINE COURSES

### Codecademy

- Link: <https://www.codecademy.com/catalog/all>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Online Tech Education

One of the best ways of dipping your toes into code. Although the W3CSchool from Chapter 6 is more exhaustive and even Udacity is better if you need some courses yet still feel self-sufficient enough, Codecademy is best for those who feel lost and intimidated by the idea of AI and coding and just need a nice relaxed place to test themselves and learn new things.

Codecademy offers free trials in areas such as Web Development and Design, Game Development, Computer Science, Machine Learning and more. One of its biggest strengths, especially in contrast to Udacity, is that each and every lesson has a message board dedicated to it, meaning you'll often be able to get into contact with other students at the same learning point that you are, giving you both opportunities to learn collaboration in tech and troubleshoot common issues together.

The variety of coding languages available for you to learn is astounding, and the free version gives basic courses to help you decide if the path you're on is truly right for you or not before you commit to spending money or going back to previous resources with fresh eyes. One thing to bear in mind is that, while the website graphics on Codecademy are indeed pretty, the courses themselves are entirely text-based. There

are no videos to give you lectures or teach you concepts through audio-visual means, so this resource is best for those who enjoy reading and don't care too much for visual stimulation.

The courses themselves consist of a series of lessons and challenges, the latter of which acts as a sort of assessment to ensure you're absorbing and understanding the information given to you.

## **Skillshare**

- Link: <https://www.skillshare.com/browse/?sort=rating&time=all&enrollmentType=free&seeAll=1>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Online Arts, Design, Creativity and Entrepreneurship Education

Many of you have likely heard of Skillshare, but likely only through advertisements and mentions of subscriptions. As such, you might not know that you can use Skillshare for free. Although the free version naturally doesn't allow full access to all of this platform's lessons and resources, you'll still be able to make use of hundreds of courses that'll teach you plenty of creativity-centered lessons.

This can range from how to chop food like a professional chef to how to make the perfect cup of coffee. It can include the fundamentals of art and design, how to present yourself the best way possible when looking for a job, how to market yourself and increase productivity through simple habits as well as all sorts of strategies to help you thrive on an E-Commercial market.

Skillshare even has free lessons to help you get the most out of the software I've mentioned earlier in this book, such as Trello or Evernote, as well as additional resources to improve your Search Engine Optimization in web design.

At the time of writing, it is also possible for you to get 14 days of Premium Skillshare completely for free, essentially giving you a 2-week trial period where you can digest as much of Skillshare's content as you like.

Course quality is generally great, and is video-based, and many extra teachers will go the extra step to create worksheets and the like to aid in absorbing information.

A great resource for entrepreneurial types, or those who want to effectively harness their creativity, but those who were hoping for more traditional or academic subjects will feel a little disappointed. On the plus side, courses that include project components also have a space where you can share your work and gain feedback from your peers; although in my experiences the learner feedback on Skillshare tends to be much less helpful than on Coursera, with comments usually ranging from "Ooh! That's nice," to "eh," without taking the time to explain why they feel as they do, and what could be done better.

## **Rocketship.fm**

- Link: <https://rocketship.fm/>
- Free to Download and Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Entrepreneurial Discourse

Not really a course per se, but rather an exceptionally high-quality podcast with over 300 episodes that covers socio-economic issues in the tech industry to abridged biographies

of CEOs, products and businesses who rose up from the most unlikely of places only to take a twist in an even more unexpected way. Overall, Rocketship.fm is one of the best podcasts in Management as it covers not only the business side of things but also a range of issues that one might realistically expect to face from the people you need to manage or work with.

The podcasts do occasionally have a slightly left-leaning political undertone to them, which may not be to everyone's liking, but the insights provided on issues in countries that are still experiencing growing pains in working out practical diversity or workplace equality are worth a listen and might just give you the insight needed to resolve socio-economic disputes in the workplace in a way that helps everyone leave satisfied.



## POWERING UP YOUR START-UP

**F**or when your next business idea needs just a bit more oomph than what previous chapters have already given you.

## FINDING CO-FOUNDERS

[OBJ]

### Founder2be

- Link: <https://www.founder2be.com/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Rapid Co-Founder Location

With a community in the tens of thousands, Founder2be is a brilliant place to quickly meet people who share ideas, visions, goals or general interests similar to yours. When seeking investment in your new business idea, it looks good when you have co-founders to support you, and even better if you all genuinely get along well. Users from across the globe have been able to get good utility out of this tool, although there's a few caveats to take note of.

While Founder2be has a lot of “givers” (people who are willing to roll along with your idea and help you out) it still has a large proportion of idea-men who have done very little market research or preparation, but insist that their way is the way to go. To find someone who suits you, then, you'll need to employ a healthy degree of humility and be willing to make compromises in your original goal for the sake of practicality. You'll also need to be able to trust your own experiences and discuss them maturely with potential partners. Essentially, it's like a “Lonely Hearts” site but for aspiring founders. It's good for getting yourself introduced

to others, but it won't guarantee a real relationship unless you put effort into it.

## **FoundersNation**

- Link: <https://founders-nation.com/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Founder/Co-Founder Location

Although a little lesser known than Founders2Be, and thus with fewer people in it, FoundersNation nonetheless is an appealing option by virtue of having a far more pleasing UI as well as a far more precise search engine. People are also pre-categorized into “wants to be a founder” and “wants to join as a co-founder,” and you can search by this role alongside location AND skill set, which helps you zero in on prospective profiles far more easily.

When you create your own profile, it becomes visible to others too, meaning you might just be fortunate enough to have the person you need find you. I highly recommend running this tool alongside Founder2be for the sake of exposing yourself to more people at once. As both tools are browser-based and free there is no reason not to use both; although, once again, you'll need to put time and commitment into a person once you feel like they may be the one for you and your business.

## BUSINESS NAME GENERATORS

### Wordoid

- Link: <https://wordoid.com/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Name Inspiration, Wordoid Generation for Websites, Products and Companies

The Wordoid online tool is aptly named, as it specializes in generating wordoids. What is a wordoid? A wordoid is something like Hammerly, Troutiny or Townswords - words that technically don't exist in your language, but have been coined in order to try to describe a new concept. For instance, maybe Hammerly is the name of your new metal works company that specializes in proofing and improving on existing craftsmanship (much like how Grammarly improves on existing text).

Maybe Troutiny is the name of your small, new family fishing business. Meanwhile, Townswords could be a theatrical company specializing in medieval re-enactment. All three of these names were generated effortlessly by Wordoid.

Wordoid generates its content by letting you key in some parameters, like what language you want your wordoid to derive from. You can choose English, Spanish, French, Italian and German. You can choose to derive your wordoid from a single language, or from multiple languages at once (combining English, Italian and German together got me wonderful results like Rinnoch and Indicembra). You can

gain some control over the results by writing a word that must appear in the wordoid generated, and you can also determine wordoid length and quality. Higher quality wordoids sound more natural, while lower will sound more robotic. Either can work depending on the aesthetic you're looking for. Wordoid even checks .com domain names to make sure yours is truly unique!

The only "downsides" are that your words must be in lowercase; trying to use caps will make Wordoid freak out a bit (but there's nothing stopping you from taking that name into a word processor or graphic design tool and using it with caps there). Finally, you can sign in in order to save your favorite wordoids, but that's a bit redundant since you can just copy+paste your favorites with little trouble.

## **Namelix**

- Link: <https://namelix.com/>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Name Inspiration, Name and Logo Generation for Businesses

A brilliant alternative to Wordoid, Namelix works by asking you for a few keywords, asking you the desired name length (short, medium or long, which together cover words as short as three letters or longer than 12). You're then allowed to choose between eight naming styles, which is what distinguishes it from Wordoid. Wordoid will ask you what languages you want to base your name on. Namelix will ask you if you want things like rhyming syllables, or would rather your name be based on human names, be based on stylish misspellings, abridged compound words, full compound words and the like.

This allows you to intuitively approximate the naming styles of many successful brands (Flickr is a stylish misspelling for instance, and Instagram is an abridged compound word). Namelix even generates a font or minimal logo to go with your brand name, but the best designs are premium, and you'll only be given the design if you register the suggested name with a domain.

## ACCOUNTING AND INVOICING

### **Slimvoice**

- Link: <https://slimvoice.co/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version (although you do pay about 1% of your money received as a fee when accepting payments by card)
- Purpose: Invoice Manager

Slimvoice, in addition to being an excellent example of the good a name generator can do for you, is an excellent and frightfully simple tool that allows you to create, handle, transfer and send an unlimited number of invoices. In addition to this, Slimvoice can track your payments and help you streamline the invoice drafting process so that requesting payment from clients has never been smoother or easier.

To get the most out of this tool, it's best to also create a Stripe account and link it to your Slimvoice; this gets rid of all the annoying and unprofessional-looking watermarks that Slimvoice places over your invoices by default. Stripe is free to register, and only charges a small percentage of the money you receive when accepting card transactions (in this case about 2.9% + 30 US cents when working directly through Stripe instead of Slimvoice). The link to Stripe can be found here: <https://dashboard.stripe.com/register>.

Finally, Slimvoice shows you your invoicing data over a period of the past two years. All its features are available for free (except card payments as stated above), and it all comes

together in one lightweight package. Aside from its watermarks if you refuse to use Stripe, as well as its minimal card fees, Slimvoice utterly succeeds at being an online invoice manager. Like most of the apps designated as a “Free Online Tool” without a download component, it should work well on most platforms that have an internet browser, especially if you’re using a desktop for interface purposes.

## Wave

- Link: <https://www.waveapps.com/>
- Free Download and Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version (but does charge a small fee for online bank and credit card payments)
- Purpose: Invoice Management and Accounting for Small Businesses
- Alternative For: Zoho, Quickbooks



Although Wave does offer payroll services for paid users (which means they don’t offer them to freemium users), what they give as a free baseline is phenomenal. In addition to handling your invoicing, it gives you limitless sales, expense and sales tax tracking, limitless contacts, easy-to-digest financial reports and other vital accounting features that make Wave a great 2-in-1 browser tool. There’s even a rather potent feature in receipt scanning, which lets you

digitize all those paper receipts you might accrue from a shopping trip and turn your cluttered drawers of crumpled paper into a neat log of e-notes showing your expenses.

If you wish, you can also download a mobile app version for iOS and Android, and it doesn't have the same annoying watermarks that we see in Slimvoice. However, it still has the downside of charging for online payments, and unlike Slimvoice it will charge an online payment even if it is somehow cardless (in addition to charging more). A great tool for organizing your accounts, but may not be the best for accepting and sending payments unless you're willing to settle it with cash or check.

## SALES

### Owler

- Link: <https://corp.owler.com/pricing>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Business and Sales Intelligence

Owler aids small businesses in establishing sales by allowing you to see potential competitors, track the daily news of up to five companies and see the data of 10 other businesses per month. Out of all the features, the daily tracking is the most useful as it lets you know key changes in a company such as recent acquisitions or pivotal changes in its management. This kind of knowledge can provide you with the opening needed to get a second chance at making a great first impression, and help you gauge how much a business might need you. The data you can access on the free version is quite basic, however, and you cannot see the data of competitors without a premium plan, which does limit usefulness somewhat.

### HubSpot

- Link: <https://www.hubspot.com/products/crm>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Customer Relationship Management

While Owler is better if you wish to make sales to other businesses, HubSpot is best when trying to connect with

individuals, especially through e-commerce as many of HubSpot's features synergize well with the data and analytics collected through your websites. Comes with some simple marketing and sales tools that should be adequate for small businesses, but it doesn't have much in terms of automation without taking on the premium plans. Nonetheless, it gives you the means to measure employee performance, business productivity and sales frequency in an intuitive and deeply user-friendly interface.

Where this tool excels is that it doesn't just let you keep a handle on your contacts and how you interact with them, it also provides suggestions based on your business metrics to help your entire sales game improve.

HR

## **OrangeHRM Open Source**

- Link: <https://www.orangehrm.com/services/>
- Free to Download
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Open-Source HRM for Small Businesses

Although the cloud-based version of OrangeHRM is rather pricey, and thus unfortunately means you'll need to back up and transfer all your HR data manually as needed, the free version of OrangeHRM is nonetheless loaded with useful tools to aid in employee management. It works on Windows and Linux, and one of its greatest strengths is its recruiting tool, which will aid you in the hiring process from start to finish.

In addition to streamlining hiring from the "Job Vacancy Open" stage to the "Your Offer is Accepted" stage, OrangeHRM also streamlines the management of changes in your organization. It is very easy for you to log dynamic shifts such as promotions, transfers (even between departments) and shifts in leadership and management. Where it suffers is in issuing payroll, which you'll still need to do manually.



## **Rise Lite**

- Link: <https://risepeople.com/small-business/>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Payroll for Small Businesses

Filling in the gap left open by OrangeHRM is Rise Lite, which allows businesses of 20 employees or less to access their payroll services for free. To get the best use out of this tool, be sure to make use of its free webinar upon registering; it will walk you through setting yourself up on its site, turning potential confusion into an enjoyable user experience. Sadly, they only offer limited demos for the rest of their HR suite, but don't worry - that's where OrangeHRM comes in!



# MONEY MANAGEMENT

## BUDGETING AND MONEY TRACKER

### Gnu Cash

- Link: <https://gnucash.org/>
- Free to Download
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Income, Investment and Retirement Tracking for Small Businesses
- Alternative For: Quicken

A completely free budgeting tool. Although it does have very strong accounting elements, its slew of other free features make it a great budgeting and general money-tracking app. Although it isn't cloud-based (like Personal Capital below), it is a highly optimized client-side tool that lets you input vast amounts of information without fear of causing a crash and losing it all, and its downloadable software is fully functional on Mac, Windows and Linux.

Note that, as it is not cloud-based, it works best if only one person in your household or company needs to be keeping track of the books, as there's obviously no automatic data syncing between devices. Still, this application will easily help you keep track of your income and expenses as well as the creation of yearly budgets.

The interface is a tad dated, and configuring things to your liking can be time-consuming when you first start out, but I've personally found this application has grown on me. I haven't found another quite like it in terms of quality and quantity of features at absolutely zero cost. The fact it

doesn't require me to give any personal data to others is a great plus too.

## **Personal Capital**

- Link: <https://www.personalcapital.com/>
- Free to Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Finance and Investment Tracking
- Alternative For: Quicken

Although the premium version has a high entry bar of a \$100 000 investment, you can still make good use out of this tool's free features. A user-friendly interface directs you to a dashboard from where you can manage your wealth. You can link as many of your accounts as you wish to Personal Capital, which in turn furnishes you with some basic but helpful information on how to make the best of your current financial situation. This is done through letting you see the big overall picture, letting you take a virtual step back and examine your finances overall.

Personal Capital's security is high-end to ensure that your financial details are in safe hands. Its host of features allow you to easily determine your net worth, check up on your investments, ensure that all your transactions are valid, that your credit isn't being pushed too far, as well as whether you're receiving the income you should.

Getting access to all this does require a somewhat painful registration process thanks to the huge amount of personal information you are required to give almost immediately, on top of the darn thing trying to schedule a call with one of its advisors (which you can cancel, which I did since I didn't want to pay consultation fees), but it is well worth putting up with that birthing pain for what you get in return.

Personal Capital's biggest strength is that all its advice is centered around retirement; tell it what age you'd like to retire at, and roughly how much you intend to spend while retired, and Personal Capital will do all it can to help you get as close as possible to that goal. Too bad that this tool's very best advice (e.g. from dedicated financial advisors instead of an app) comes at heavy investment premiums.

## SAVINGS AND DEBT

### Undebt.it

- Link: <https://undebt.it/>
- Free to Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Debt Management and Reduction
- Alternative For: Quicken

Sporting a sleek UI and over 7 different debt-reduction methods, Undebt.it has your back as surely as its interface will have your attention. The two most popular methods for reducing debt are the Debt Snowball (repaying your debts with the lowest amounts first) and the Debt Avalanche (repaying your highest-interest debts first), but these are hardly your only options. You are invited to provide only the data absolutely necessary to help you come up with a solid debt-reduction plan. You are not required to link your bank account. You are not required to even create an Undebt.it account at all, although I recommend doing so for the sake of convenience as the site obviously cannot save your data if you do not keep it under an account. Its best features, such as automatic payments, amortization, payment reminders and calendar planners are sadly locked behind an admittedly modest \$12/year subscription.

Regardless, the free version is more than sufficient for getting most out of debt through its provision of pre-made plans combined with the ability for you to tailor a financially sound plan according to your personal debt goals.

### SmartyPig

- Link: <https://www.smartypig.com/>
- Free to Download and Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Microsavings
- Alternative For: Digit

Essentially, this is a virtual online piggy bank designed to help you get what you want without going into debt. Unlike Personal Capital, which covers extremely long-term goals like retirement, SmartyPig helps you set money aside for shorter-term goals such as holidays, new tools, emergency funds, gifts and more. All you need to use this service is an existing savings or checking account as well as US citizenship or a Green Card, as the money you deposit into SmartyPig is technically held by Sally Mae Bank until you withdraw it (at which point it returns to your linked savings/checking account).

The advantage of using SmartyPig over a traditional bank, however, is that you are not charged for establishing sales goals, nor are you charged for withdrawal. It is all completely free while still being interest-bearing! I understand not all who read this will be US citizens, but this tool is just so useful for those who are that it cannot be left out.

### **The Dobot App**

- Link: <https://www.thedobotapp.com/>
- Free to Download and Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Microsavings
- Alternative For: Digit

For those who cannot use SmartyPig, The Dobot App comes to the rescue. The biggest difference between the two is that

savings that Dobot sets aside for you do not accumulate interest, but you do not need US citizenship or a Green Card to use its services. Otherwise, it largely works on the same principles; set an amount of money you wish to save, set a date for when you'd want that amount to be ready, and The Dobot App will calculate how much it can withdraw and set aside for you to get closer towards that goal. When running these calculations, it also takes into account the possibility of overdraft and will do its best to avoid this outcome.

In the case that the algorithm fails and The Dobot App overdraws anyway, its creators promised in their FAQ to reimburse you for any banking fines such a calamity might accrue if you contact them about it. So, overall a useful and considerate app. You can use it as a desktop web-browsing tool or you can download it as a mobile app for Android or iOS. The app's security is what you'd expect from most banking apps, at least as far as encryption goes, so you can be extra-sure that your data is safe.

An extremely neat feature that not very many micro saving accounts have is that you're in complete control; you have three different options to choose from when it comes to how or when Dobot withdraws money, and you can pause its services indefinitely at any time. This, combined with the app's built-in ability to let text and receive texts from Dobot regarding your savings at any time gives things a highly personal feel that I will never tire of.

## CREDIT

### **AnnualCreditReport.com**

- Link: <https://www.annualcreditreport.com/requestReport/landingPage.action>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Reliable Credit Report Generation

Experian, Equifax and TransUnion are among the largest multinational credit reporting agencies, and AnnualCreditReport.com allows you to - you guessed it - access credit reports from each agency. You are normally entitled to one free credit report per company each year, although exceptions have recently been made at the time of writing that allow additional reports.

The reason AnnualCreditReport.com is such a wonderful tool is because it makes obtaining credit reports so much easier. Normally, one would have to pay your credit reporting agency only to then wait around a fortnight before finally getting the information you requested. When using this online tool, however, you can receive your report completely for free, and the report itself will arrive at your computer as fast as your download speed allows (you don't download AnnualCreditReport.com itself, but you do download the reports it sends you).

This online tool is completely compliant with US Federal Law, and as such the reports will list information such as the extended credit associated with your name and reputation, as well as a list of all people who have recently seen copies of

consumer reports pertaining to you (most commonly people who have made a formal or registered loan to you).

Obviously, while useful for finding discrepancies in your credit and for discovering how others see you when checking your credit, the 12-month cool-down period isn't ideal if circumstances drastically change for you within a year, and while getting a general extended credit report is free, your actual credit score isn't included by default and needs to be paid for.

### **Credit Karma**

- Link: <https://www.creditkarma.com/>
- Free to Download and Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Credit Score Estimation

The world of credit scoring is not smooth. With two different scoring systems and three agencies with differing score data, it can be difficult to keep track of our credit rating manually. This is where Credit Karma comes in. Credit Karma is capable of determining your credit score with about 20-25 points of deviation from your FICO score. This gives you an imperfect, but helpful, view of where your credibility stands in the eyes of most banks, employers or landlords. For banks especially, a good credit score will give you more leeway and better deals on loans.

Credit Karma not only gives you a practical estimation of your score, it also shows you the best deals you can get with it so that you aren't short-changed too badly through interest when you apply for your next loan. It'll even provide you with suggestions to help improve your score, believing that past financial mistakes shouldn't impact you for life.

The only downside is that you'll need to put up with many, many intrusive ads for paid financial services from other companies, but the potential benefits of this tool for those who need money far outweigh the inconvenience. Works as a browser tool for desktops, and a downloadable app for mobile devices.

## INVESTING

### Trading 212

- Link: <https://www.trading212.com/>
- Free to Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Trading and Investment Platform

Trading 212 is a useful investment app that provides you with a basic, risk-free demo to show you the ropes before you sign in. Once you register, it'll ask for your ID and Proof of Address to comply with anti-laundering and anti-terrorism laws, and will sit you through 10-15 minutes of questions that the platform uses to gauge your experience as a trader and investor. In extreme cases it might reject your application if you're considered high-risk, but otherwise you'll be let through.

You'll be shown a sleek UI that lets you engage in commission-free trading, meaning the only money you pay is for the stock you want. In terms of downsides, the first to be aware of is that you WILL be charged if you go 180 days in a row without activity, so make sure to avoid this tool unless you plan to use it at least twice a year. Secondly, this tool doesn't allow short-selling, although that shouldn't be a problem considering such strategies are unsafe for new investors anyway. Contains useful information and advice to help you invest wisely.

### Robinhood

- Link: <https://robinhood.com/us/en/>

- Free to Download and Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Trading and Investment

Robinhood is a US-based online investment tool that prioritizes US and Australian citizens. It is geared for absolute investment beginners, using a relatively inflexible yet simple and intuitive flow for finding, buying, selling or exchanging stock. However, there are some major caveats that need to be kept in mind.

Firstly, Robinhood's processing speed is not the best. As the value of a stock can turn around in minutes, its delayed processing of your trades can naturally lead to surprising losses. Secondly, while it has a much more fun and intuitive UI than Trading 212, it is a bit too fun and intuitive. It's like Khan Academy, except instead of making learning an addictive process, it is making investing addictive.

While its behavioral nudges (such as the bright confetti it showers your screens with when making a trade) can be ignored, this is definitely not an app for those with poor self-control (trading too often or too hastily can easily lead to staggering losses), and it doesn't come with as many free tools as Trading 212 in terms of helping you invest wisely. The biggest boon then is that it is commission-free, and that it won't charge you for inactivity, meaning you are more free to engage with it on your own terms.

Best for junior investors who have good willpower and self-discipline and just want a simple tool to help them start, especially for the purposes of quick-funding.

## BONUS SECTION: DAILY AND WEEKLY FREEBIES FOR YOU

This chapter deals mostly with Private Label Rights and Resale Rights, so allow me to take a moment to explain what those are and how to make the most out of them.

Private Label Rights is essentially a form of intellectual property that one finds in digital products and internet marketing. This means if you purchase Private Label Rights, you own the entire property associated with that product, including the right to sell the IP as your own after a little bit of editing. This means any Private Label Rights you purchase should come with Resale Rights (which entitles you to 100% of any profits made selling the product) and Master Resale Rights (which entitle you to sell the product's rights themselves), and you are legally entitled to change any of its content as you please, even going so far as putting your name on the work and crediting yourself as its original creator or author.

You can also make copies (such as burning to CD) as you will. Use this to essentially give yourself a near-instant product to sell, or alternatively try to resell your PLR for a profit. The normal idea is that you purchase the product, edit it to improve its value, and then either resell the PLR or keep the PLR and use it to generate sellable products (sort of like how Mickey Mouse is used to generate cartoons, or how the Star

Wars IP is used to generate books, animated shows and video games). Effective PLR consists of all websites, source code, graphics, master copies involved in the creation of the product. This is what you'd be expected to sell if you're selling your full PLR, as well as what you should check a PLR for before agreeing to purchase it.

Note that Resale Rights can be sold WITHOUT including PLR. If this happens, you're still entitled to sell the product and derivatives for 100% of the profit earned, but you are not entitled to edit, change it or claim it as your own in any legal way.

Once purchased, the best way to make a profit is, in addition to editing the PLR and expanding on it to improve its value, you also market it online so that people are aware you have content for sale, whether it's the full PLR or just products you have now derived from it (previous chapters already cover free tools that will help you with marketing and web design). This is the general rule.

However, what if I told you that you could obtain PLR without spending any money on its acquisition? What if I told you that you could take part in this venture for virtually no risk?

## **Resell Rights Weekly**

- Link: <http://resell-rights-weekly.com/>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Weekly PLR Distribution

Yes, the UI looks incredibly dated. Yes, the graphics feel a little sleazy. But yes, this site is completely legitimate. I had misgivings at first too, but this website is an amazing

example of why we shouldn't judge a book by its cover, and why we shouldn't let a first impression dictate our entire thought process. The content from this site has been a great help in supporting my digital marketing company in times of need, as it meant I'd have access to easily adaptable content whenever I needed.

Resell Rights Weekly allows you to download 2 fresh products every week (at the time of writing this site still manages to upload an overwhelming amount of fresh PLR content each day). These products will either be PLR or simply RR. You're also given access to a PLR toolbox that lets you use a host of free software that falls into many of the categories described earlier in this book, such as audio/video editors, website editors and optimizers, and so forth. Free, professionally-written sales letters and professionally rendered graphics for your product can often be found included as well.

You get all of these perks for being a basic member of Resell Rights Weekly, and basic membership is free. As long as you don't mind taking a trip back in time to the web design of 1999, you'll be fine. An absolutely amazing tool that makes it easier for you to give out valuable promotional content for your business, as well as help you put content out at faster rates with greater consistency. Sometimes, it's better to improve and expand on something that already exists rather than forgetting it and accidentally retreading old ground, and the PLR from this site makes that idea easier to live by than ever. Just try not to get too overwhelmed by the sheer amount of choice you have in terms of tools and PLR downloads.

### **Giveaways Networks**

- Link: <https://giveawaysnetworks.com/>

- Free to Download and Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version (but not all products are free)
- Purpose: Special Offers, Discounts and Freebies

Giveaways Networks has daily deals that range from dramatic discounts to completely free giveaways of a wide variety of software for Windows, Mac and Android. There's always stacks of discounted software to choose from in many categories, and at least a few good pieces of software free to download and install each day. Doesn't have anything to do with PLR or RR, but is a way for you to gain access to normally paid services at no cost. Even offers courses on Online Learning Platforms such as Udemy, so be sure to check this site daily to see if there's a deal you like. The UI is intuitive and clean, meaning it only takes a few minutes to give everything a quick check.

### **r/freebies (on Reddit)**

- Link: <https://www.reddit.com/r/freebies/>
- Free Online Tool
- No Paid Version
- Purpose: Daily Freebies

A community-driven, peer-reviewed site where all users alert one another to the active freebies they come across. Expect a slew of new posts daily that alert you to additional freebies. Does not require a Reddit account, nor does it require you to subscribe to the r/freebies subreddit, but doing so is nonetheless recommended so that you can more easily track and view new posts and comments. The feedback-driven nature of this site means there's a great deal of transparency and honesty in a product's worth that

provides a massive sense of security that one doesn't find on very many other freebie sites.

## **PLR Assassin**

- Link: <https://www.plrassassin.com/>
- Free Online Tool
- Has a Paid Version
- Purpose: Monthly Free PLR Distribution

Do not let the slightly edgy name put you off, PLR Assassin is a free PLR distributor with a relaxed ambiance. Compared to other PLR distributors, this one places extra emphasis on making its content fresh. Upon signing up for a free membership, you gain access to hundreds of PLRs which you can download and, in PLR Assassin's words, "Rebrand as your own!"

This will be necessary in order to distinguish your derivatives from everyone else's, and it's a great way to make a proof-of-concept for an idea that you're passionate about, but aren't sure will sell yet.

## CONCLUSION

And that is a wrap! At this point, it should now be obvious that no matter what your digital needs, whether it be professional or personal, commercial or recreational, there is a handy online tool or downloadable software that you can use to fulfill that need at minimal cost to yourself. If you ever wanted to enjoy the practical benefits of an extensive education, but felt as if you never had the funds to do so, well now you can.

If you've been planning to save the funds to get a degree but always held back because you were afraid of failure, now you can learn all you need to beforehand using the links and resources in this book so that when you do take the leap forward and pay, you can be confident you'll make the best of it.

No one should let their dreams be limited by the size of their bank, only the size of their drive, and now you've been shown 99 pathways along which your drive can travel, pathways that let your energy arrive at the milestones heading toward your goals.

You have been shown resources to help give your computer an edge in functionality, tools to help you recover lost time and streamline communication and tools that offer

impressive audio-visual editing features along with databases full of icons and images you can freely play around with.

You've been shown tools to help you set up your first website almost painlessly so long as you're fine with being under a subdomain, as well as reducing the creation strains of building your own site from the ground-up. You have even been granted resources to help you get a business together from scratch if you absolutely needed to. While many of these tools were helpful to me from the beginning, there are many more that I wish I'd known about earlier, and it is my hope that by being aware of all of them now, you'll get a better start to your endeavors than I did.

And when you feel your work and self-actualization is done, it is not as if you are lacking for free pure entertainment options either. Whether it's music, videos, books, games or even tours, you now have awareness of platforms to help you fill even your most relaxed downtime.

Now, of course it's possible that not all of these tools have come as a surprise to you. If you're a gamer, for instance, you probably already knew of Steam, Discord and Epic Games. It is my hope that in these cases, you've at least received affirmation that you already hold immense value in your hands. It's important to be reminded of this, because it's not that the best things in life aren't free, it's more that what is free tends to not have millions of dollars poured into its marketing, meaning it slips through the cracks regardless of its quality.

So go online, and make the best use possible of these resources. Milk each one for as far as they'll carry you. Rediscover old classics, happen upon serendipitous freebies

and, most importantly, erode the financial barrier that stands between you and your dreams.

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