

Key software solutions for the VCS

What's available, and how it can be used to improve operational performance

Products You Need But Don't Have



Introduction

This report was commissioned by the ICT Hub and CITA have developed these resources in partnership with the VCS.

The list of potential products in this section of the report could be huge. To keep things to a manageable size this work focuses on low cost and free tools and software that assists in office management. The benefits of such software are clear - having an efficient way of producing work or having well maintained, and hence reliable, PC systems is essential to the smooth running of any organisation.

The first section looks at office productivity software, the second into Microsoft products and the third section examines what Open Source products can be of use.

The Charities Technology Trust (CTX)

CTX offers very low cost Microsoft (MS) via the Microsoft giving programme. It also includes software from other suppliers including Symantec (Norton). This is available to registered charities and not for profit groups. Some religious groups are ineligible for the scheme and there are limits, make sure to check the criteria and read the terms carefully.

Typically registration takes two weeks and ordering around 10 days.

Anti Virus or Anti Spyware Products

We all know about viruses that can potentially destroy data and even damage the PC, but spyware slows internet access considerably and now by linking in with viruses (Malware) can be equally as damaging. We recommend the use of both anti virus and anti spyware systems, some come in a combined form.

One problem with modern anti virus software is that it can slow PCs down. A fully functioning real time anti virus and anti spyware package will make a reasonably fast PC (for example one that was top of the range two years ago) run very slowly.

AVG is probably the best known "free" program, but it is **NOT FREE** to the VCS, is only free for *personal* use. The same is true with AVG anti spyware.

Packages like Norton anti virus are excellent and can be purchased very cheaply from CTX. Free anti virus solutions include PCtools, Clamwin and threatfire. Some are cut down commercial packages and require manual updating.

Windows Defender is free and is a real time protection against all types of Malware. It is available for Windows XP and is built in to Windows Vista. This is good but far from perfect protection, it can be downloaded from:

<http://www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware/software/default.aspx>

Housecall is a free online virus and spyware scanner produced by Trend Micro and is quite effective. It can take several hours to scan a full hard drive so overnight scanning is advised. To use Housecall go to: [//housecall.trendmicro.com](http://housecall.trendmicro.com)

E-Mail products

Spam is becoming the scourge of the Internet. It creates a large waste of time, necessitating a trawl through a large list of e-mails daily. Outlook does have spam controls but still requires each new message to be tagged as spam. There are other products that deal with spam in a more proactive way (Mailwasher, Spam B, Cloudmark, Spam Bayes).

Whilst some people back up key files, many do not, or don't know how to. Backing up e-mails should be the basis of any backing up regime, MS Outlook Personal Folders Backup offers this facility. It can be obtained from the Microsoft downloads centre. Once copied the files can then be backed up with any other data as a part of your normal backup routine.

Outlook 2003 is possibly the least reliable of the MS Office products, and mailbox files can often become corrupt. Windows has a utility that attempts to fix corrupt mailbox files – ScanPST.exe is available from within your Windows installation. The best way to find it is by using the search facility in Windows. There are many commercial equivalents that can perform the same task and even attempt fixes that this tool cannot. Outlook Express has equivalent software free from Microsoft.

There are other PC based e-mail clients such as Thunderbird. Web mail does provide an alternative but is far from immune to spam.

Backing up

The dangers of ineffective or incomplete backing up can be catastrophic. To be effective backup should be automatic, there should be multiple copies and one must be taken off site (a fire proof safe is an alternative).

MS Backup is available in all MS operating systems but is not installed as a default in XP Home, it is usually found in the system tools part of accessories. MS Backup is often much maligned because using backup software with tape drives is complex and this makes it difficult for a non-expert to put into practice. It has become more useful with the advent of flash drives and small external hard drives. A word of warning about flash drives - they can be fragile. It is important that vital backups are not stored on only one flash drive, rotate at least three or even better use inexpensive external 2.5 inch hard drives.

MozyHome remote backup is a free remote web based backup that can hold up to 2GB. It is easy to install, automatic and easy to restore either everything or just an odd file.

Web Based Services

The recent increase in free web based services primarily sprang from Hotmail being bought and developed by Microsoft. Recent years have seen the growth of Google to a stage

where it rivals Microsoft as an influence on IT. Many services offered by both companies are free, they also offer a raft of other features such as e-mail, document sharing, web storage, diaries, etc.

Hotmail – now re-branded “Windows Live Hotmail” has developed a great deal and now offers many additional services in many ways similar to Outlook. The use of Windows Live (as it now likes to be called) is becoming a social networking service capable of offering file storage (Sky Drive, still in beta format), blog and other features. Microsoft are even offering a PC and personal protection service called One Care, which incorporates backup, anti virus, anti-spyware identity protection and most things with the possible exception of life assurance. This can offer a valuable service to small organisations, particularly if people work in disparate locations.

Other virtual office services can offer a raft of services up to and including a full CRM service (MyOffice.net, Officezilla, Zoho). They can work on a local PC and synchronise to the web.

Remote Access

Being able to access your office work whilst at home or at another PC makes managing documents or getting e-mails much easier. Web based remote access systems such as LogMeIn and GoToMyPC allow this facility. Some systems allow files to be copied and pasted and even printed via the remote link. Remote

access software can be complex to set up and may require a file server (Windows remote desktop, VNC), whilst others work via a web interface. Some are free, whilst others come at a cost, depending on the features required. Some systems can be complex to set up but all require Internet access and the PC at base to be kept on just in case.

Social Networking

Social networking is a relatively new phenomenon and has yet to be fully adopted by the VCS. Generally referred to as “Viral Media”, it has a huge potential for connecting isolated groups and even for fundraising. Several social networking sites exist, the most popular being Facebook, Bebo and MySpace. Facebook has recently teamed up with PayPal and offers a potential way to fundraise.

Video and pictures can be displayed on the web using Youtube and Flickr, this can save bandwidth and hosting costs on your own website.

Conversion Tools

The ability to convert files between different formats (e.g. PDF from Word) is becoming increasingly important as the need to put documents on websites grows. Commercial products like PDF factory offer this facility. Open Office can also convert document format and is free. Web based conversion tools also offer free conversion (pdf online, primo pdf).

Communications

Communicating via webcam and elementary teleconferencing can be achieved at low cost or even for free (e.g. Skype, MSN). Some systems can be complex to set up and lead to less than satisfactory results. There are also potential security risks in allowing users access to other features within the software.

As bandwidth increases and new technologies emerge these systems can only get better and offer an interesting potential for development within the sector.

By the way of a “verbal chat room”, real voice to voice conversations can be achieved using Voice Over IP (VOIP) through Ventrilo.

Shared Calendars

Sharing and being able to change a calendar can stop double bookings and help to make your organisation run more effectively. Many systems exist to allow diaries to be shared. Web based office systems include Officezilla and Zoho. MS Exchange can be accessed via a web interface. A full MS Exchange installation needs an investment of both time and money. Although licences can be obtained cheaply from CTX, a full blown MS Exchange system needs a server and the associated expertise to manage and maintain it. Other simpler (web based) systems allow for calendars to be shared e.g. Google and Yahoo groups.

Shared calendars can be added to websites but also require expert installation. Users access their diary

via a secure log in (e.g. PBX), many are based on Open Source. Free online diaries such as Google are easier to set up.

MS Outlook 2007 also offers features for sharing a diary on the web via Hotmail Live but the calendar can only be viewed and not edited by others. Commercial tools such as OfficeCalendar offer full sharing capabilities for Outlook.

Microsoft Products

Although not for small groups, MS server products may be useful to medium sized groups, as they are available at very low cost from CTX. There are many advantages of using a file server (file sharing, centralised backing up, resource sharing, remote access) but these require extensive planning, setup and implementation. A considerable level of skill in maintenance and support is also required.

Open Source (Linux systems) offers direct competition to MS server solutions.

One implementation of Microsoft's Server 2003 family (Small Business Server 2003 R2) offers a range of IT services for organisations of up to 75 users. Using other low cost options from CTX, it can be developed into an extensive and sophisticated office system, managing e-mails, Internet, Intranet, websites, etc.

Microsoft Office 2007 looks very different from earlier versions, much of the functionality is there but in a slightly different form. Additional

packages are now also included within the suite (Groove, One Note, Project, etc). Care must be taken when installing this on older PC systems as they might slow down. Check the amount of RAM and the processor speed of the PC carefully against the recommended specification.

Add ins can be freely downloaded from the Microsoft download website (www.microsoft.com/downloads).

There is one that creates pdf formatted documents from Office 2007. Photostory is a useful tool that can be used to create video presentations of digital photographs.

Open Source

Open Source has the benefit of being “free”. Free as in having no cost to purchase, but often costs are incurred for support and maintenance of the systems. There are many direct equivalents to Microsoft products, (e.g. Windows & Ubuntu) some that are even better (e.g. Linux Terminal Services - LTSP), but still most people use Microsoft.

Open Office offers a free alternative to MS Office and can do exactly the same job, but care must be taken when setting up to make opening and saving the documents MS compatible. The database element and MS Access are not fully interchangeable in terms of templates but data can be freely exchanged in the vast majority of cases. Calc (the spreadsheet) and MS Excel are 99% compatible. Open

Office Writer also allows conversion of files to pdf format.

GIMP is a photo editing suite and provides a decent alternative to Adobe Photoshop, performing many of the same tasks.

Using Firefox and Opera as your web browser instead of Internet Explorer, reduces the threat of Spyware considerably.

More advanced CRM packages such as Civi and Sugar CRM offer low cost alternatives to potentially highly expensive corporate cousins. However setup and support are significant aspects of the additional cost.

Case Study – SCIP

SCIP are an IT development and support social enterprise based in Brighton. They serve both the Voluntary and Community sector (VCS) and support businesses operating in the small to medium enterprise (SME) market. They offer a range of IT services including technical support, consultancy, web and database design and training.

Spam is getting to be a huge problem, many users do not know how to deal with the volume of the messages received and there remains an education issue as to which message types are true Spam. Some of SCIP's clients were receiving over 300 SPAM messages per day, thus taking a large amount of time separating the “wheat from the chaff”. SCIP came across Spam

Bayes through word of mouth and now recommend it to all clients. It is Open Source and so comes at no cost.

Spam Bayes works using a logical algorithm that needs to “learn” which messages are Spam and which are not, it places messages it cannot decide on in a “suspects” folder. This leads to a very slight training requirement for the system (5 - 10 minutes). One disappointment is the lack of help within the system, you simply need to follow your nose, although documentation is available from the website. However once the idea of the “suspects” folder is grasped the system is very easy to use.

Spam Bayes also works with mail clients other than Microsoft Outlook, It has reduced SCIP’s Spam problem to virtually zero, but as can happen with Open Source products, can break down occasionally. Internal tools allow for easy recovery.

www.scip.org.uk

Case Study - COSMIC

COSMIC are An IT social enterprise company based in Devon and operate across the South West and UK. Their services include website design, IT training, technical support and consultancy.

COSMIC currently host the SW Regional ICT Champion and Accessibility Champion.

Cosmic had been looking for a solution to overcome the fact the

organisation had no central database, which could not only be used to hold customer contacts and service history, but also be used as a tool to help COSMIC market its services and track its campaigns from beginning to end. COSMIC had had tried and tested many systems including the development of bespoke systems using its own internal skills and resources. With staff already working to full capacity and with a budget which had not been set to include the purchasing of a new system, an Open Source solution, Sugar CRM, was recommended.

The initial installation was time consuming and not straight forward. Sugar is a huge contact management system which does far beyond what COSMIC needs to use it for. It takes time to strip out the components which are not required. A fairly large amount of time needs to be dedicated to getting familiar with Sugar.

COSMIC’s Kim adds; “The percentage of the program we use is so small and it can feel a little like swimming around in a huge ocean if you’re not careful”.

Other organisations would benefit from spending time putting things on trial.

There were initial technical teething problems, but once successfully installed Sugar can be used by all members of staff (once a user name has been created for them). Staff can also be given various levels of access rights and editorial control.

Contacts and clients can then be accessible and managed by all staff. Now three months on from the adoption decision the system is working across the company and its activities, providing a central source of information, reporting and updating. It has extensively enhanced their client management and provides regular reminders and suggestions for new ways of engaging existing and new clients in new products and services.

COSMIC's Pete Goff stated; "Sugar has made my life easier because it

allows me to monitor client flow and cash flow from the same place. I am able to predict monthly incomes and therefore plan workload far easier." "For clients it means they feel a more personal approach from us in that we can take notes and anyone can pick up the account and within a few minutes see the whole background and history."

www.cosmic.org.uk

Comparison Table		Cost	Ease of use	Set up
Low cost and free Microsoft software	Charities Technology Trust www.ctxchange.org MSDownloads www.microsoft.com/downloads	££ £		
Anti-Virus	Housecall www.trendmicro.com ClamWin www.clamwin.com	£ £	*** ***	*** ***
E-Mail	ScanPST.exe (Within Windows) Outlook Personal Folders Backup www.microsoft.com/downloads	£ £	** ***	** ***
Backing Up	Microsoft backup – (within Windows) Mozy Backup https://mozy.com/home	£ £	** ***	** ****
Web Based Services	Hotmail www.hotmail.co.uk Google www.google.co.uk (wide range of office services and features)	£ £	**** ****	**** ****
<u>Cost</u> £ Free ££ Under £100 £££ up to £500 ££££ £thousand plus	<u>Ease of use</u> * Extensive training needed ** Some training required *** Requires use of a manual **** Easy – no training required	<u>Set up</u> * Specialist setup required ** Expert user setup only *** Setup for experienced users and/or practitioners **** Very easy		



	Comparison Table	Cost	Ease of use	Set up
Remote Access	Microsoft remote desktop (within Windows)	£	**	**
	LogMeIn www.logmein.com	£	****	***
Social Networking	Facebook www.facebook.com	£	***	***
	MySpace www.myspace.com	£	***	***
Conversion Tools	PDF Factory - converts .doc – .pdf format www.fineprint.com/products/pdfactory/	££	****	****
	Online conversion via www.pdfonline.com	£	****	****
Communications	Skype www.skype.com	£	***	***
	Ventrilo www.ventrilo.com	£	***	**
Shared Diaries	Inbox Journal www.inboxjournal.com	£	***	***
	Office Calendar www.officecalendar.com	££	**	**
Microsoft Products	Microsoft Server 2003 and Office 2007 from www.ctxchange.org	££	*	*
		££	***	**
Open Source File server	Linux (e.g Fedora) – http://www.fedora-linux.org/	£	*	*
Office Suites	Officezilla – www.officezilla.com	£	***	****
	Open Office – www.openoffice.org	£	****	***
Photo editing	GIMP – http://gimp.org	£	***	****
Web browser	Firefox – www.mozilla.com	£	****	***
E-mail client	Thunderbird – http://www.mozilla.org/projects/thunderbird	£	***	*
Ant-Spam	Spam Bayes – http://spambayes.sourceforge.net	£	****	***
CRM	Sugar – www.sugarcrm.com	£	*	*
	Civi - http://civCRM.org/	£	*	*
Cost £ Free ££ Under £100 £££ up to £500 ££££ £thousand plus		Ease of use * Extensive training needed ** Some training required *** Requires use of a manual **** Easy – no training required		Set up * Specialist setup required ** Expert user setup only *** Setup for experienced users and/or practitioners **** Very easy