



TECHGEAR

The Cinemin Swivel (\$299) from WowWee is a candy bar-sized micro projector that allows you to project videos, photos, or presentations on a wall or ceiling from a notebook, iPhone, or DVD player. The device can project a 60-inch image from eight feet away.



WEBLINKS



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LinkedIn.com

This is my primary resource for keeping up with business contacts. Unlike Outlook, LinkedIn's directory of business contacts is dynamic. Users can update their profile, which keeps your contacts current. Evolving features allow users to share documents, interact with groups of related users, and share Twitter accounts and blogs.

Copyblogger.com

This is a daily reference I use to improve not only my blog writing, but also my ability to connect with my target blog audience. With tips on writing, editing, promoting, and even finding enjoyment in your blog, I would recommend this site to anyone looking to maximize his or her blogging experience.

Profootballtalk.com

This is one of the best sources of up-to-the-minute news on the NFL. Run by a former attorney, the blog gives special attention to player contracts, collective bargaining, and players' off-field legal troubles (it even features a tool that tracks how many days have passed since the most recent NFL player arrest).

Hollywood Stock Exchange (www.hsx.com)

This is a game in which you invest fake money in films. The return on your investment depends upon the box office performance of your movie investments. In addition to being a fun game, HSX is one of the best places to keep up with Hollywood projects in development.

Open Source Software Helps Lawyers Cut Costs, Increase Productivity

BY GWYNNE MONAHAN

The term "open source," in the context of computer software, is not as foreign to lawyers as it used to be. Part of that is due to President Barack Obama and his administration's use of open source software. And part of it is awareness of technology costs as firms of all sizes evaluate cost-saving measures.

To be clear, "open source" refers to a type of license associated with a set of programs. The programs number in the thousands, which achieves one goal of open source software: choice. Open source software is also free, in two senses of the word: 1) free as in speech, and 2) free as in cost. The phrase "free as in speech" refers to the goal of removing restrictions of use instead of adding to them. Open source software lets you change, or adapt, the software to your needs by giving you access to the source code, or what makes an application work.

Open source software costs nothing, which is often the biggest draw for lawyers. However, that \$0 price tag creates the misconception that there is no support. That is not the case.

Open source applications are developed, maintained, and supported by volunteer communities of programmers, documentation specialists, and people

just like you. This approach, which is different than what you have been groomed to expect, has many benefits. There is not a "vendor" in the classic sense that sells the software. No "800" numbers to call that send you on an endless extension quest. No help desk emails that do everything except answer your question.

Instead, you are free to read and edit the documentation and post to forums, wikis, and the like. In some cases, you can even communicate directly with the programmer. In other words, answers to questions are crowd-sourced, allowing them to be answered more quickly and directly than conventional means.

So what does all this open source stuff have to do with you? Whether you have just graduated from law school, have decided to hang out your own shingle, or have been asked to re-evaluate your firm's technology needs, odds are good you are looking for ways to cut costs but maintain productivity. There are some specific applications that will help you do both, and even help bring in new business: 1) OpenOffice, 2) WordPress, and 3) Content Management System

OpenOffice (www.openoffice.org), is an award-winning open source alterna-



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tive to Microsoft Office that offers a complete suite of products: word processor, spreadsheet, presentation tools, graphics, and even a database. OpenOffice looks similar to Microsoft Office, making it even easier to learn. It runs on any platform, including PCs and Macs. There are no fees, so the number of computers you download and install it on is irrelevant. If you travel, you can download a copy to your laptop or notebook, as well as to your desktop computer at the office and at home, and still pay nothing.

Aside from its platform versatility and \$0 price tag, it also does things that Microsoft Office does not. For example, OpenOffice allows you to open a variety of file formats, including WordPerfect and Microsoft Word formats going back to Microsoft Office 95. This is beneficial as not everyone has upgraded to the latest version of Microsoft Office, or even switched from WordPerfect to Microsoft Office.

OpenOffice has a very robust development community that contributes all kinds of additions, or extensions. One rather useful extension for lawyers is called Writer's Tools. Among its many useful functions is its Start/Stop Timer, which allows you to save the document name, use time, and date in a database for future reference, like billing. Writer's Tools also has different backup options, such as email, remote, and third-party backup, such as Amazon E3.

What OpenOffice is to desktop software, WordPress is to blogging software. WordPress comes in two varieties: hosted at wordpress.com or hosted under your own domain name. Notable and familiar examples include *The Wall Street Journal Law Blog*, and weblogs at Harvard Law, Mashable, TechCrunch, and ZDNet.

Like OpenOffice, WordPress has a robust development community that has produced many design templates, called themes, and extensions, called plugins. Theming has to do with the layout and color of your blog or website. The open

source nature of WordPress makes it possible for you to easily customize your blog to match your firm website, whether or not you host your blog under your own domain. It also makes it easy to have your blog remain separate from your practice.

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Plugins vary as much as themes and create additional functionality as well as automation for your blog. There are plug-ins for creating search-engine friendly site maps and meta tags, which help people find you through search engines like Google. There are other plugins for sending a tweet when you publish a new post, providing another way for potential clients to find you. WordPress, as it likes to point out, is limited only by your imagination. And it is imagination that has led many to use WordPress as a Content Management System, and not just as a blog.

A Content Management System (CMS) makes it easy to create, edit, and organize information for a website or Intranet. SharePoint is an example of a

proprietary CMS, but just like with other proprietary applications, there are open source alternatives. Drupal and Joomla are the most popular, but others, such as DotNetNuke (DNN), stay within the Microsoft .NET framework and are available for download and customization. Since each open source CMS is free and has its own active development community, it is best to evaluate your needs and then choose the one that meets them.

Open source applications make it possible to cut costs without giving up productivity or business development. This article by no means presents an exhaustive list, only a few examples to get you started. Do a Google search and see what other open source alternatives you can find for your proprietary applications. *

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