Tools for Use

There are many tools available to libraries to facilitate communication, project management, and work flow. All of the tools highlighted in this chapter fall into one of three categories:

- free on a small-scale or trial basis
- open-source and thus "free," but will require some staff time
- free

Many tools that are available on a free basis with limited features can be upgraded to the pay version inexpensively. The pay version will often allow you to utilize more features; however, for many, the free versions work fine. For most of the tools, institutional accounts are available. Open-source options are, of course, free, but most do require that you have server space and someone who can install and run the software. The tools that are free and do not require server space are referred to as "hosted." This means you will have less control, but you will not need someone to install and customize the tool for you. There are also many, many services available on the Web to organizations that can afford to pay. Some of them have very limited free trials, often 30 or 60 days. I believe that most libraries cannot afford the high-priced services of these companies, so I have left them off this list. If you prefer to go with the higher priced services, they are easily findable on the Web.

Web Conferencing

VMukti Meeting Place
free, open-source

Meeting Place, a software tool from VMukti, allows you to schedule a one-time meeting, set up a recurring meeting, create a space for ongoing meetings (essentially an open room), and create instant meetings. The interface is easy to use. Meeting Place uses a combination of .NET Framework and Asterisk to eliminate the need for users to download a client onto their computer. Meetings can be open or private, and there are many modules and options from which to choose.

Meeting Place is an open-source tool and offers a range of video, audio, and Web conferencing options. To install and run Meeting Place, you need a server running an SQL database. In addition to documentation, VMukti has video tutorials on everything from setting up your server for Meeting Place to using the poll feature of the tool. VMukti provides support for all its tools, with additional installation and training support offered for $100 USD.

DimDim
free, open-source, or hosted at $8 per month, $99 per year

DimDim is a browser-based Web conferencing tool that allows audio, video, screen, and document sharing; whiteboards with annotations; multiuser chat options; polls; a

Question Manager that acts like a moderated Q&A; and a recording and archiving feature. DimDim will soon be able to integrate with Moodle, an open-source course management system, and options are being explored for use with Sakai, an open-source learning system, and dotLRN, an open-source learning system built at MIT.

There are two options when using DimDim. It is a free, open-source tool licensed under a Mozilla Public License 1.1 with attribution. DimDim has been ported to Windows and Linux servers, and it supports languages other than English, though the specific languages supported were not listed on the DimDim Web site. The Web site cautions that this open-source release is meant for "technically skilled early adopters." DimDim does have a hosted version, which runs on their server. This service costs $8 a month or $99 per year, and attendees are limited to 20 per meeting, with unlimited meetings.

Attendees using DimDim must use at least IE 6 or Firefox 1.5. There is no download required for users. Presenters must use IE6 or Firefox 1.5 on Windows XP/2000/2003.

Yugma

free for 10 people and with limited features; scale pricing for more attendees and features

Yugma is a hosted Web conferencing tool, so it does not require that you have server space. It does require the person calling the meeting to install a program on their computer. The free version allows you to invite up to 10 people to a meeting, with the ability to share your desktop and switch desktops between users; teleconference (compatible with many VoIP services); use whiteboards with annotating capabilities; engage in public or private chats; and customize the Yugma widget. The free version includes some paid advertisements. For a monthly fee, determined by the number of attendees allowed, you are also able to share the mouse and control with attendees; schedule sessions; and record, play back, and host a webcast. You have access to 100MB of shared file space, technical support, and no advertisements. The prices are as follows:

- for 10 attendees: $9.95 a month or $99.50 a year
- for 30 attendees: $29.95 a month or $299.50 a year
- for 100 attendees: $69.95 a month or $699.50 a year

Yugma is compatible with Windows 2000 or higher, Mac (OS X 10.4 or higher), and Linux. The Linux versions currently supported are Centos, Red Hat 4.9, Slackware, Debian, Ubuntu, Fedora, and Open Suse. Yugma also requires Java 1.4.2_07 or higher, but the download will check for this upon installation.

IM/Chat Clients

AIM, Yahoo Messenger, Windows Live Messenger (formerly MSN Messenger), and Google Talk
all available free

IM, or Instant Messaging, is a tool that lets you have a written conversation with another person over the Internet. In the past, libraries have used *IM* and *chat* to mean two different things, *IM* referring to informal communication, and *chat* meaning the structured question-and-answer environment of something like Question Point. As far as I know, we are the only profession to make this distinction, and the outside world uses *chat* and *IM* interchangeably. In this section, I adhere to the world's understanding of these two terms and use them to mean the same thing: plain, old-fashioned instant messaging.

There are many different kinds of IM services offered by companies such as AOL, MSN, Yahoo, and Google. Each different tool is called a client; for example, AIM from AOL is one type of IM client. To use IM, you have to have an account set up with a particular client (company), and normally you can chat only with other people on the same client. There are ways to get around this issue, however (see the Third-Party IM Clients section).

With the exception of Windows Live Messenger, which is compatible with Yahoo Messenger, all of these clients work only with other users who have the same software. For instance, if you were signed into Google Talk, you could not add a buddy or friend who had only an AIM account. If your institution wants everyone to create a new account to use internally, choosing one of these clients is not a bad option.

Except for Google Talk, all of the above clients require a download. Some of them, AIM for instance, will also install a bundle of other software that you will have to delete after installation. This is, to me, the most irritating thing about using these clients. Most of them have Web versions, which require no download, but in many organizations, businesses and libraries alike, these sites are blocked. There are many different arguments

for blocking IM pages on employees' computers, ranging from productivity to concerns about file sharing, but all of these arguments are hollow. As discussed previously, many employees find IM to be beneficial to their work flow, and IM is no more counterproductive than e-mail or the telephone.

You can sign up for an account with one of these services without installing the actual client. With a username and password, you can then use a third-party client to sign into multiple accounts at the same time. The advantage of using a third-party client is that you can sign into multiple names and clients that may serve different user groups, or you may use different IM names for work and personal needs.

IM/Chat Clients

AIM
www.aim.com

Yahoo Messenger
http://messenger.yahoo.com

Windows Live Messenger (formerly MSN Messenger)
http://im.live.com/Messenger/IM/Home

Google Talk
www.google.com/talk

Third-Party IM Clients

A third-party IM client is a company that provides a tool with which you can log into IM accounts with other clients or companies. It is like shopping at a store where you can buy groceries, clothes, and hardware all in the same place instead of visiting three separate stores. You go to one place to access all of your accounts. Third-party clients are a great tool for people who have multiple IM accounts in different places. With one click, you can sign into all of your accounts at one time and see all of your buddies (friends) displayed on one screen. A third-party client will tell you what single-party clients their tool is compatible with, which is especially useful to Mac users, who frequently use different IM clients than PC users.

Meebo
free

Meebo, a relatively new tool, has taken the IM world by storm. It is the third-party client that I recommend most often. Meebo allows you to sign into other IM clients (AIM,

Yahoo!, MSN, Google Talk, ICQ, and Jabber). You can sign into multiple accounts from the same client or from different clients at the same time. Meebo does not require a download because it is all Web-based. This means that you can sign into your IM accounts from any computer. After creating a Meebo account, you can sign into all of your IM accounts with one click of your mouse.

Meebo has two unique features that make it a truly wonderful tool. MeeboMe is a widget you can install on a Web page, blog, or wiki that allows users to IM you directly without being logged into a client. The widget is customizable in size, color, and name display. It will tell people if you are offline (not signed in) or online and available for chat. Many libraries use this widget on their Web pages for a quick and cheap way of offering virtual reference. Meebo Rooms is another interesting feature of Meebo. If you have a Meebo account, you can create a room in which you can have a group chat. This room stays open all the time, whether you are in the room or not, and users can talk to each other and you at any time of the day. Rooms can be password-protected, and users can share video and Web pages within the room. Like MeeboMe, Meebo Rooms can be imbedded onto a Web page so that any visitor to the page can participate in the conversation, regardless of whether they have a Meebo account or not.

Trillian
free, or $25 one-time cost

Trillian allows you to sign into AIM, ICQ, MSN Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, and IRC. Trillian gives you all the versatility of the single-chat clients in a multi-chat environment. It offers group chat, file transfer, audio chat, chat rooms, buddy icons, customizable skins, tabbed messaging, and many different kinds of sounds and emoticons.

Trillan is not browser-based and requires that you download the tool and run it on your desktop. This is its major drawback because you will be able to access Trillian only on the computer on which it was installed and downloaded. I want my tools to travel with me, so I prefer things that are browser- or Web-based. Trillian has a Pro version which comes with one-year upgrade protection, one year of technical support, access to user forums, video chat, history and summary searching options, and a few other features. Trillian runs only on Windows 98 or higher and requires 64 MB of RAM and 30 MB of hard drive space.

Pidgin
free

Pidgin is similar to Trillian; it is a tool you download and run from your desktop. Again, the major down-

side is that Pidgin does not travel with you when you change computers. Pidgin supports AIM, ICQ, Jabber/XMPP, MSN Messenger, Yahoo!, Bonjour, Gadu-Gadu, IRC, Novell GroupWise Messenger, QQ, Lotus Sametime, SILC, SIMPLE, and Zephyr. Pidgin's features are similar to Trillian's, and it supports many of the features from clients as well. It also makes available something called Buddy Pounces, which are alerts (such as a message or a sound) that let you know when a specific buddy goes away, returns, comes online, or changes a message. Pidgin also has some unique plugins that allow you to create "away" icons, spell-check your chat messages, and have tabbed conversations.

Pidgin runs on all Windows and Unix systems, and binaries are available for Windows, Fedora Core, and CentOS /RHEL.

Adium
free

Adium is also a tool that you download to your desktop, but it is designed specifically for the Mac OS. It is compatible with AIM, Jabber, MSN Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, Bonjour (compatible with iChat), Google Talk, ICQ, Gadu-Gadu, LiveJournal, Novell Groupwise, QQ, and Lotus Sametime. Adium is open-source, available under the GNU General Public License, and it is available in 22 different languages. Adium features include tabbed messaging, file transfers, buddy icons, and off-the-record (OTR) messaging (a safety feature).

Third-Party IM Clients

Meebo
http://meebo.com

Trillian
www.trillian.cc

Pidgin
http://pidgin.im

Adium
www.adiumx.com

Group Chat

Campfire
free for 4 attendees and 10 MB of storage, or scale pricing for more attendees and storage

Campfire is a group-chat client from the 37 Signals group. 37 Signals is the company that created Basecamp, a project management tool discussed below. A Campfire account allows you to create a chat room, designated by a URL that you can give to group members. Members follow the URL and enter a password to get into the chat room. The chat happens in Campfire's own system, and there is no installation. Campfire is a straightforward tool that has a very low learning curve. Because the chat occurs within Campfire, there is no need for other IM client accounts. It may be useful for people operating behind firewalls because you access the chat room through a unique URL generated from the account of the person hosting the chat. It is difficult to filter out these URLs, and thus they can slip by undetected. In addition to chat options, Campfire also offers file sharing, image previews, and voting.

Like many of the other tools, Campfire has a tiered pricing structure depending on how many users you want in your room at one time and how much storage space you want. With the free account you receive 10MB of storage and can have 4 simultaneous users. The other pricing is as follows:

- 12 users, 250 MB for $12 per month
- 25 users, 750 MB for $24 per month
- 60 users, 2 GB for $49 per month

Campfire caps usage at 60 people per room. Campfire works with IE, Safari, and Firefox.

Group Chat Client

Campfire
www.campfirenow.com

Wikis

Much has already been said about the different kinds of wiki tools available, and the information is easily findable. I am going to talk about the two types of wikis and suggest a couple from each category, but I am not going to discuss their nuances. All wikis are similar and have similar structures. Their aesthetics, WYSIWIGs, and syntax vary. Wiki software is free, though many of the hosted versions will offer more features and storage for a small price.

The first type of wiki is hosted. A hosted wiki is run on someone else's server. You do not have to install any programs to use them. You simply go to a Web site, choose a wiki name, and instantly have a wiki. These are the most user-friendly, and they are, for the most part, free. The most popular hosted wiki tools are PBwiki, SeedWiki, and Wetpaint.

Some of the popular hosted blog platforms are Wordpress.com, Blogger, LiveJournal, Vox, and TypePad.

Hosted Wiki Tools

PBwiki
http://pbwiki.com

SeedWiki
www.seedwiki.com

Wetpaint
www.wetpaint.com

The second type of wiki is non-hosted. You must install the software on your server. By going this route, you will gain some customizability that you do not have with a hosted service. However, it is also more likely that the WYSIWIG for non-hosted wikis will be more basic, requiring that the user have more knowledge of wiki syntax. Many of the non-hosted wikis have nice WYSIWIG plugins available for installation. The most popular non-hosted wikis are MediaWiki and PmWiki.

Non-Hosted Wiki Tools

MediaWiki
www.mediawiki.org

PmWiki
www.pmwiki.org

For more information about choosing the wiki that is right for you, visit WikiMatrix. On this Web site you can choose features that are important to you, and it will tell you what wiki tools meet your criteria.

WikiMatrix
www.wikimatrix.org

Blogs

Like wikis, blog platforms have been discussed in many different places, so I will be brief about the kinds of blogging tools out there. Both hosted and non-hosted blog software is available. Your choice will depend on the flexibility you want and your access to server space. Like hosted wikis, a hosted blog will live on a server elsewhere, and all you have to do is sign up for an account. A non-hosted blog will require that you download the software to a server and install the software. You will have more flexibility with a non-hosted tool, but you will have to do

Hosted Blog Platforms

Wordpress.com
www.wordpress.com

Blogger
www.blogger.com

LiveJournal
www.livejournal.com

Vox
www.vox.com

TypePad
www.typepad.com

Non-hosted platforms include Wordpress.org and MoveableType. MoveableType is not a free service, even though it is a non-hosted tool, and the pricing depends on number of users and whether you are using it for personal, business, or educational pursuits.

Non-Hosted Blog Platforms

Wordpress.org
www.wordpress.org

MoveableType
www.movabletype.com

Project Management

Project management software comes in a large variety of flavors. A project management tool for libraries should have an emphasis on collaboration and resource sharing. Most project management tools are geared towards businesses whose main concerns are time, money, and project tracking. Tools for businesses have many added functions that help track budgets and highlight resource conflicts for teams that are mostly concerned with the bottom line. Libraries, though concerned about money, will need tools that help their teams collaborate and share information. Many of the tools created with businesses in mind cost money and quite a lot of it. Below are two examples of tools that have the maximum flexibility needed for non-business pursuits and which have free or cheap versions.

Basecamp

free for 1 project, and scaled pricing for businesses and personal use ranging from $12 to $149 per month

Basecamp is an easy-to-use tool that offers all of the things a working group needs to get projects done efficiently. It is from 37 Signals, the creators of Campfire, the group-chat client discussed above. Features of Basecamp include milestones, to-do items that can be assigned to specific team members, writeboards for collaborative document editing, file sharing, a message board, time tracking for billing purposes, and the ability to have e-mail alerts when a message or file has been added. Even though this is a hosted service, Basecamp allows you to use logos to customize your projects and account. Users can upload pictures and create a profile to be shared with other members of their project team. Basecamp has also made their API available to programmers for even more customization. Because Basecamp is a hosted service, there is no download required for users. There is an RSS feed available for individual projects.

Mingle

free for nonprofits

Mingle is a product from ThoughtWorks Studios, and while there is a charge for businesses to use this tool, it is available free to nonprofits. Mingle works on a card system, in which items called "cards" can be sorted, tagged, and moved around. Each card represents a task, schedule, conversation, document, or other individual aspect of a project. Projects and tasks are organized through the use of these cards, and each card can be shared between many different projects or pieces of the same project. I found the card idea to be a little confusing, though it seems an unique way of organizing things. Mingle has built-in wiki pages for collaboration, e-mail notifications, searching capabilities, and project and bug tracking. Mingle is a non-hosted service, and you will have to install it on your own server. ThoughtWorks Studio does provide some support for Mingle. At the time of this writing, I was unable to locate system requirements for this product.

Tools That Do Multiple Things

Finally, there are tools available that will do multiple things to make your life easier and increase the ease with which you can share things with others, for work or play. All of these tools are hosted services that are accessible everywhere, as long as you have an Internet connection. These suites of services are the tools that are truly revolutionizing the way people work and share.

Google Accounts

free

I will start with the behemoth. Google takes things we use every day and makes them better. Some of Google's services, such as Documents and Gmail, are so far in advance of the competitors that there really is no competition. With Google Accounts, you have access to a customized home page, a feed reader, document writing and collaboration, a calendaring tool that you can share with others, e-mail, a personal notebook, an IM service, mailing lists (called groups), social networking (orkut), Sketchup, Picasa (photo sharing), and a Web history that travels with you.

Vyew

free

Vyew is a synchronous and asynchronous collaboration and conferencing tool that accepts a variety of file formats. You can host a live meeting in which you can share files, such as .ppt, .doc, or .swf, or you can collaborate asynchronously on projects. Other Vyew features include chat, whiteboards, drawing tools, comments, and plug-ins for added capability.

Zoho

free

Zoho, like Google, offers a huge variety of tools for collaboration or single users. In terms of features offered, Zoho is Google's closest competitor. One Zoho account enables you access to the following features: spreadsheets, documents, Web conferencing, online presentations, notebooks, a Web applications creator, planners, chat, a wiki tool, and project management (one project free).

Backpack and Writeboard

free

Backpack is a 37 Signals tool that allows you to keep to-do's, lists, notes, ideas, and your schedule online. With Backpack, you can import files so that they can travel with you easily. This will come in handy if a USB drive is too small for you to keep track of easily. You can also create documents with 37 Signals' Writeboard tool and incorporate them into your Backpack account. RSS is available for the Writeboard feature so that you will easily know when changes have been made to a document you are collaborating on with your work group. Backpack allows you to publish the URL of particular projects, lists, or notes in your Backpack account for either viewing or collaboration with others.

Tools That Do Multiple Things

Google Accounts
https://www.google.com/accounts

Vyew
http://vyew.com

Zoho
http://zoho.com

Backpack
www.backpackit.com

Writeboard
www.writeboard.com