



# My Essential Open-Source Products List

*by Angela Allen Parker*

## Why I'm going to Open-Source

1. I hate waiting forever for my essential programs to launch. (I'm not a patient woman)
2. I believe that open-source software is the future of software and that the money will be made by those who understand the software and how it works. (And I always like staying "cutting-edge")
3. I don't like having Microsoft so deeply entrenched into my workday and my essential, mission-critical functions. (It makes me feel like I'm being held hostage)

So, I've started making it a personal mission to extract myself from that world...

## My Escape Plan

The first step is to find open-source software that will meet my needs now (under a Windows operating system) and that will convert to a Linux OS in the future. I'm taking baby-steps.

I can't change everything all at once, so I'm incorporating new software packages as I have time to test them and learn them. This way, when I'm busy learning a new operating system (Ubuntu Linux: [www.ubuntu.com](http://www.ubuntu.com)), I don't have to learn all new software tools too. (That would be too much at once.)

I'm well into my two-year plan to switch over to Linux and I'm sharing what I've learned with you here! Aside from all the other benefits – there is a serious cost advantage for learning open-source first. You save money on the product itself, and you save time (which you can now use for earning money with clients) if you begin with open-source and don't have to learn it after learning other programs.

Software is changing from a product based market to a service based market. Those who can use and can teach others to use open-source, and those who can code custom options for open-source software will make money on software.

Also, if you watch the technology trends, you will notice that most government agencies, schools and not-for-profits are already on this bandwagon. Corporate America is starting to get "in step" as well.

So if you are just getting started, open-source is THE way to go, in my opinion! And if you have an excess of cash burning a hole in your pocket, you can donate a bit to the developers. (They like that!)



## My Daily Use Open-Source Programs

**WordPress** – (<http://wordpress.org/>) - I use this for my WickedBlog.com, which is independently hosted. I am seriously considering moving my business website (currently on GeekLog – another open source content management system) over to WordPress, because I love it. I like the freedom of changing the look and feel myself. I like the way Google adores WordPress. I like the customization possibilities with plugins, widgets and other user-created content. It's amazing.

**OpenOffice Suite** (<http://www.OpenOffice.org>) - This program suite is a free, full-featured open-source office package. I use the OpenOffice Writer for all my documents (I actually have taken MS Word off my computer) and I use OpenOffice Calc for all my spreadsheets (I also uninstalled Excel). I have the rest of the suite, like a presentation package, but seldom use them. Check these out for a low-cost alternative that can save documents in nearly any format – including traditional MicroSoft formats.

**Gimp** (<http://www.gimp.org/>) - I love this one, although it has taken a bit of time to learn the basics. I'm not a graphics person, but this helps me to do basic manipulation. I traded in my love affair with PaintShopPro for this graphics manager. There is also an 'interface' overlay that makes it behave (and look) like Adobe PhotoShop. (You can get more information about that here: <http://blog.yumdap.net/archives/20-GIMPshop-for-Windows.html>)

**FileZilla** (<http://filezilla.sourceforge.net/>) - Ever do FTP to your website (or client sites)? Want a quick, simple program to do that? Want it to have a tiny-footprint and take few computer resources? Here ya go! This is the answer. I used to hate doing any FTP work, now I do it without batting an eye (or rolling my eyes!)

**Gaim** - (<http://www.pidgin.im/>) - This multi-platform IM program supports AIM, ICQ, Jabber/XMPP, MSN Messenger, Yahoo!, Bonjour, Gadu-Gadu, IRC, Novell GroupWise Messenger, QQ, Lotus Sametime, SILC, SIMPLE, and Zephyr. This open-source software functions under Windows, Linux and even offers another version for OS X [called Adium (<http://www.adiumx.com/>)]. You can even try a text-based version called Finch. Would you like an open-source, slightly smaller footprint than the top IM programs (and much smaller than having multiple installs for various IM programs) that also offers an optional spell-check and a slew of personalized options? Try Gaim. I traded in TrillianPro for this.

**7-Zip** (<http://www.7-zip.org/>) - the best compression and unpacking program I've ever used. Covers every file type I've needed to zip up or unpack to date. Love it!

**Mozilla Thunderbird** (<http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/thunderbird/>) - This is what I use for email. It replaced Outlook for me (of course I still had to add a calendar program). I can skin it to match my desktop theme and I can add plugins to make it more functional than it comes “out of the box” from Mozilla's labs.



**Mozilla Sunbird** (<http://www.mozilla.org/projects/calendar/sunbird/>) - The calendar program I added when I dropped outlook. I tried Lightning (<http://www.mozilla.org/projects/calendar/lightning/>) first (a Sunbird-like plugin for Thunderbird) but it made it too slow to launch. When I want to check or send email, I don't want to wait. Calendar program take longer to launch than most types. I will probably continue to look for an even better calendar program, but this one does the job just fine for now. I'll probably use a linux desktop version (some are excellent, I've heard) when I make the switch.

*(NOTE: I use another program (Rainlendar) to keep a one-month calendar, with the events for the day and a to do list all on my desktop. Not an open-source product, but the basic version is free. Visit <http://www.rainlendar.net> to learn more. )*

**FireFox** (<http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/>) - I despise IE and will only use it to check my sites for those people who still use the Microsoft browser. Personally, I love FireFox. I was using tabs with FF long before IE even considered such a feature. Again, I like the ability to customize the way my desktop looks and the plethora of tools that are offered on FF as add-ons.

Other Noteworthy Free or Low-Cost Tools I Use/Have Used or Have Tested:

**Xenu Link Sleuth** (<http://home.snafu.de/tilman/xenulink.html>) - This downloadable program will check your websites (and client sites) for broken links that will affect your web's usability and its ranking in the search engines. (NOT open-source)

**FreeMind** ([http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Main_Page)) – It is a mind-mapping software (not open-source, but it is free). I've tested it and may use it in the future, but it's not really the way I work now. If you like mind mapping techniques for project outlines and management, this is a program you should explore.

**PasswordSafe** (<http://passwordsafe.sourceforge.net/>) and **KeePass** (<http://keepass.info/>) - Both of these are excellent, open-source password management programs, but I've not made the switch from eWallet (a paid version) yet. I can't imagine doing my job without a password wallet. I juggle hundreds of passwords, usernames, logins, etc – and this makes it easy to retrieve that information. I don't like programs that “auto-fill” because of the security issues inherent with that approach.

**PDFCreator** (<http://www.pdfforge.org/products/pdfcreator>) – I have a windows-based client that needed a quick, easy way to convert documents into PDF and they were on a budget. I found this program for them and they love it. They have been using it daily for quite some time and can't imagine paying for Adobe. Personally, I still use Adobe Acrobat 8.0 for all my own work – but I do more than simply convert docs to PDF.

**AVG** (<http://free.grisoft.com/>) – Great little anti-virus program and scanner. I've done Norton, I've done McAfee – now I've lightened up and downloaded a great, FREE AV program that doesn't try to completely overtake and rearrange my operating system on a registry level. (Windows only, but you



can try an open-source version of AV called ClamAV ( <http://www.clamwin.com/> ). I've not tried it yet, but I will in the near future – just before skipping over to Linux.

**Miranda** (<http://www.miranda-im.org/>)– This cross-platform IM program takes up much less space and launches quicker than most commercial options. If you want to IM without all the fuss, this is your (highly configurable) best bet. It's tiny [Gaim is nearly 30 megs installed (commercial programs are even larger), but Miranda is less than two megs]. I tried it and liked it, with the exception that it kept “timing” out. I stay on IM all day long, and can't afford a regular time out. I don't know if my experience was unique or the norm.

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## Things I'm still Missing

The following are some promising programs that I'm testing now or will be testing in the near future to meet my needs and continue on my path to convert to Linux, move away from Microsoft products, and support the open-source community:

1. **Scribus** – <http://www.scribus.net/> - An open-source alternative to Publisher for DTP.
2. **Chandler** - <http://chandlerproject.org/> and **Zimbra** (<http://www.zimbra.com>) – Both are open-source alternatives to Outlook (And, both are still in Alpha).
3. **PostBooks** – <http://www.xtuple.com/postbooks> – A recently released open-source alternative to Quick Books and **GnuCash** (<http://www.gnucash.org/>) a highly rated open-source accounting program for Linux that was recently ported to Windows.
4. **OpenWengo** - <http://www.openwengo.org/> - An open-source VOIP and IM service with free PC to PC calls, low-cost PCc to phone calls.

## Help Me Collect (or Let Me Help You!)

If you have any open-source “I couldn't live without...” programs you have tried drop me an email and share your favorites.

If there is a particular program you NEED, but you can't find an open-source option, drop me a line and I'll let you know if I've found something that works – or if I have a lead on something that you may want to test.

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## A Little About Angela

Angela Allen Parker is a Kentucky native, a writer and an Internet marketing consultant who specializes in helping real estate agents, REALTORS® and brokers. Her clients are high-tech, cutting edge individuals seeking better ways to do business and a more balanced life.

Angela ran her first consulting business in 1990. She started working remotely in 1999, launched her own assistance business in 2000, and niched her writing and Internet marketing services in October 2002 with [WickedWordCraft.com](http://WickedWordCraft.com).

Since that time, her firm belief that "following your dreams is the best path to success" has proven to be valid for herself and for her clients.

Today, she can't imagine working any other way, with any finer clients and peers, under any conditions that could equal those she enjoys now. When not serving clients, enjoying family and friends, or hanging out on her farm, Angela fills her blog ([WickedBlog.com](http://WickedBlog.com)) with a myriad of topics ranging from politics and parenting to technology and voluntary simplicity.