ONLINE MARKETING TOOLS –
HOW TO FIND THE ONES THAT WILL ACTUALLY MAKE YOUR LIFE EASIER

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So Many Options to Choose From…

Running a business can feel overwhelming at times; there are campaigns and joint ventures to plan, bottomless inboxes, finances to track, websites to build, products and customers to manage, and a never-ending list of other initiatives you would love to take on - if only you could clone yourself.

And without any extra help – whether from an assistant, or from technologies that help you systematize and organize your day-to-day – it may sometimes feel like you're in over your head.

It doesn't have to be that way.

There are so many tools out there designed to make your life and business easier: there are schedulers to help you get organized, research tools to help you be more efficient, and finance tools to help you stay on budget. This is really just the tip of the iceberg; in cyberspace, there is an endless array of other services that can help you systematize, optimize, organize, automate, or help you in any other way you see fit.

That's all fine and dandy, but the fact is that sometimes it's just not worth the time, money, or energy. Given that there's a tool out there now for *everything*, it can be difficult to separate what you actually *need*, from what you *want* because it's flashy and high-tech.

Not to mention the fact that the tool you *need* may not work as advertized… and when you finally find the tool that works as it should, it could be way out of your budget.

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If you're not strategic about which tools you choose to incorporate into your business, you could wind up with a lengthy monthly bill for a plethora of services that don't pull their weight, or simply don't work for you at all.

So how do you cut through the clutter and identify what you need, what you need to pay for, and what you should take a pass on?

Not All Tools Are Made Equal

Remember that the tools you adopt to make your life easier should do just that; they should relieve you of stress and overwhelm rather than make you feel like you've just added another handful of tasks to your to-do list.

Given the wealth of resources out there, it can be tempting to buy into a lot of the technologies you hear about in networking groups and on marketing blogs. They may sound great and highly functional on the surface, but in actuality, they may not necessarily be a good fit for your business, or they may be more trouble than they're worth.

You can rest assured that a tool is a safe bet when the time involved in finding and learning how to use it will more than pay itself off. Although you must account for an initial learning phase where things may be a little less efficient, ultimately, your goal is to incorporate only the tools that solve an actual problem you currently have – whether to automate a grueling task, help you stay organized or save you time.

For example, you may find out about a really cool-sounding tool that allows you to post your blog updates to Pinterest with the click of a button. You want to expand your reach, so you spend some time configuring it, and troubleshooting the bugs so it runs smoothly, only to realize that no one is pinning your blog posts. Turns out your target audience doesn't really hang out on Pinterest...

The tool works great, and it may be an awesome resource for someone with an audience who hangs out on Pinterest, but perhaps it wasn't the greatest use of your time.

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On the other hand, you may spend much of your time completing some repetitive or mundane task, which you eventually realize is taking time away from what you really love doing. It may be a good time to look into a tool that can automate this repetitive task for you, so that you can get back to doing what you do best. For example, Firepole Marketing uses [FuzedApp](#) to automatically tag our contacts with whether or not they attended a webinar, a task that we previously had to run through manually. The 30 minutes we save may not seem like very much, but we do TONS of webinars, and so it adds up, and allows us to focus more energy on customer-facing work, which we really enjoy. (And know you appreciate!)

Before considering a new tool or technology, ask yourself if it solves a problem for your business. If you're not quite sure, put a pin in it. If it was meant to be, you'll eventually come face-to-face with the problem the tool can solve and you'll know that you need to have it.

Tried and True:
Examples of Tools We Know and Love

The following are tools and technologies that we have used and swear by. Remember that they might not necessarily be the perfect fit for you, so ask yourself if they have a place in your business and proceed with caution (nobody likes a tool hoarder)!

AWeber

AWeber is an email autoresponder and contact management system that we recommend to all our students. It is simple and straightforward to use, robust, and does what it claims to. They have excellent customer support (always a good sign), and although the service is not free, we find it to be a very generous offer for the value that it can bring to your business.

On top of all this, AWeber is dedicated to providing their clients with integration with the other technologies they use in their businesses. These apps make it easy for you to get AWeber to speak to 3rd party applications such as Facebook, Zapier, Eventbrite, Etsy, Zendesk (and many more). These help you streamline your processes and give you more bandwidth.

WordPress

WordPress is a blogging tool and content management system that is behind the functionality of nearly half of the top blogs on the net. What makes it so attractive? Amongst many other things, WordPress is

great for its gentle learning curve, its flexibility and customizability, and its potential for creating professional-looking webpages in no time flat. Did we mention it's free? WordPress' open source roots have nurtured a community of fans who offer technical support for one another and contribute to an ever-growing directory of free add-ons for the software, whether it be themes so you can make your site look great, or plugins for added functionality.

Rainlendar

Rainlendar is an organizational and scheduling tool that is excellent for collaboration and making sure everyone is on the same page. The calendar software allows you to merge several calendars and to-do lists into one central area so you can see the bigger picture, or so your entire team can sync schedules so the left hand knows what the right hand is doing.

Techsmith Jing

Having a business online means offering support to clients online – and everyone knows that on the internet, things are sometimes lost in translation. It can be difficult to convey an idea, and nothing beats being able to take a screenshot to very clearly demonstrate what you're referring to. Jing allows you to share images and short videos of your computer screen so you can get your ideas across clearly and with only a few clicks of a mouse. If this doesn't sound very revolutionary to you, you should give it a try. The ease of capturing and sharing screenshots has saved the Firepole Marketing a TON of time collectively. We don't know how we ever worked without it!

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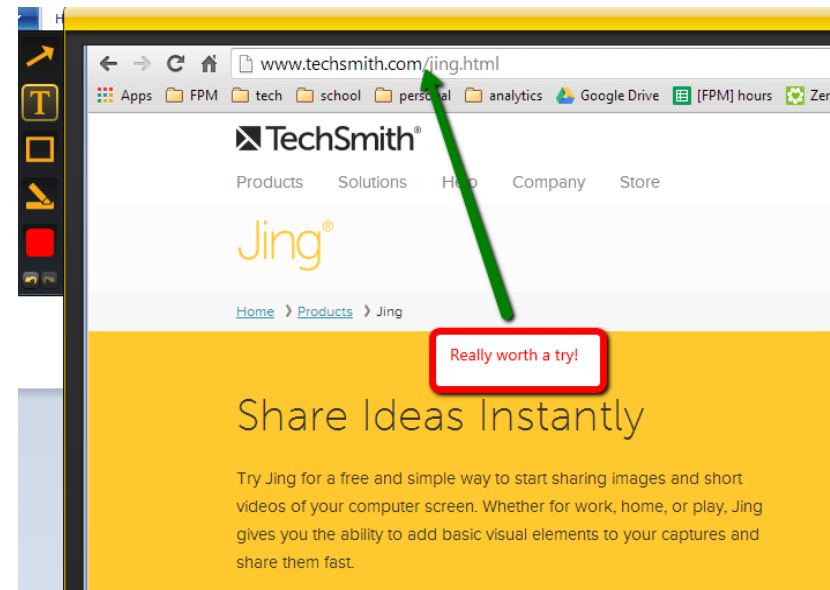
IFTTT

IFTTT (short for "if this, then that") is web-based software that allows you to sync various online applications without a computer science degree. You can use IFTTT to create trigger and action "recipes", with nearly 70 "ingredients" such as Evernote, Facebook, LinkedIn, Dropbox, email, and Twitter. What you automate is entirely up to you; you can use it to back up your Instragram photos to Dropbox, send you a text reminder for your appointments, or have the application auto-post to your social media profiles upon publishing a blog post.

Rapportive

Rapportive is a great Gmail extension that will pull information from a person's email address – like from Aweber or another email management system so that you can see how they are related to you and what interactions you've had when you open an email from them. This can save tons of time in terms of looking up contact information, and knowing what someone is contacting you about.

BufferApp

BufferApp is a Chrome extension that can automatically schedule a Tweet, LinkedIn or Facebook post with a click. It adds a button to your browser window so that when you're reading an article or something else that you want to share you can just click on it and it will be added to a queue to go out at intervals you can determine. This is a great way to automate your social media while still keeping it pretty personal.

Zendesk

The natural result of success is growth, and once you've reached a certain threshold of emails from clients per day, you're going to want to systematize your interaction with them. Maybe you have a team

of support technicians that you want to be able to occasionally monitor for quality spot-checks, or maybe you just want to have all our your interactions with your customers and prospects in one place. Enter: Zendesk! Zendesk is a ticketing system that allows you to do all of the above and more. At Firepole Marketing, we use it to track communication with all our students so we are mutually aware of their business goals as a team. It helps us work collaboratively, and it helps us ensure that all of our students receive the timely response they were promised.

LeadPages

Leadpages is the industry standard when it comes to high-converting landing pages. They have dozens of proven and easy-to-edit templates that will let you put your offers and registrations in the best light possible, and great training and tutorials for how to create the best copy, and how to split test different versions of your page. If you were going to invest money in one area of your audience building (after your email autoresponder) this should be it.

VelocityPage

VelocityPage is another landing page option – this time a plugin that fits into wordpress and makes any page editable from the front end rather than the back. It takes a little getting used to, but once you have the hang of it, you have exceptional control over the look and feel of your pages – and creating a purpose built landing page is a snap.

Hootsuite

If you haven't been living under a rock, then you know that social media is an excellent way to expand your reach. However, with social media sites coming in and out of fashion all the time, it can get tricky to stay on top of your diverse social media presence (and all your passwords)! Hootsuite allows you to manage multiple social media services (and accounts) from one easy-to-use dashboard. It also allows you

to schedule messages and tweets ahead of time, offering additional functionality that even the social media sites themselves do not offer!

Trello

As you add members or assistants to your team, you may want to stay on top of their to-do lists so you have visibility over their progress and goals. Trello allows your team to share their task list in a central space so that everyone is on the same page and aware of any potential bottlenecks or delays. You can create a column for each member of your team, and can create cards to be moved back and forth between the columns as you work. If you're working solo, it can also be used to manage your progress on various campaigns or projects.
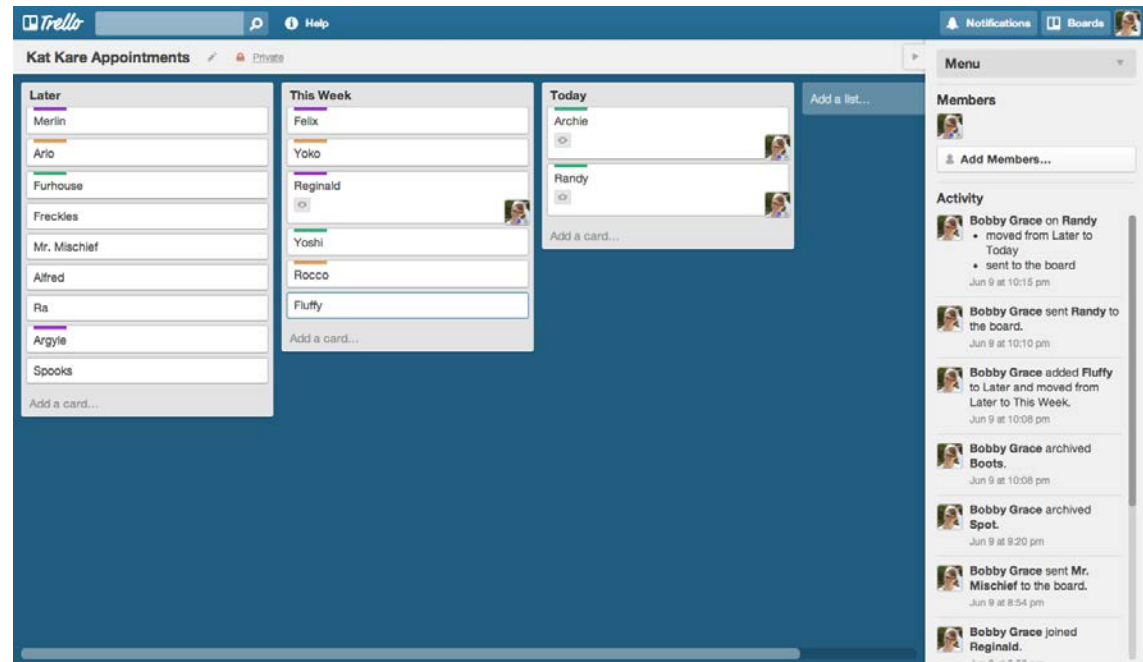
Visual Website Optimizer

The unique benefit that split testing brings to the table is that it makes evident very small changes that could improve your landing pages and increase conversions drastically. Split tests can sometimes produce surprising and delightful results.

Make a point of split-testing your landing and sales pages using tools such as [Visual Website Optimizer](#) so that you learn what works best for your audience. Doing so requires a bit of initial setup work in order to learn the technology, but ultimately there are little tweaks that you can make that will pay off in a major way. In the interest of simplicity, start with something small, get familiar with the technology, and then scale up.

When Good Tools Go Bad

Most online marketing tools are developed to solve a problem, and sometimes, they are wildly successful.

Other times, for a variety of reasons, they can wind up doing more harm than good.

Some tools aren't inherently "bad", but can be a bad fit for your particular set of needs. What works for your favorite blogger might not work great for you.

But sometimes, you're going to have a clear reason for adopting a certain technology, and you'll find that your problem still isn't solved. There are times when the tools that we think will be our saving grace don't save us the time or have the effect we wanted.

You can spend hours looking for the right tool, only to finally stumble upon something that can do *exactly* what you need. This can feel very serendipitous, and can leave you feeling relieved – until you realize that the product has terrible customer support, or doesn't work as advertised. It may seem obvious, but the only real criteria for a good tool is that it *works*.

At Firepole Marketing, we've been burned our fair share of times – but we'll share two examples. Take these cautionary tales as reminders not to let your guard down, and to do lots of research before investing time and money into a service that may wind up costing you lots of trouble and exponentially more dollars than you expected.

Given that PayPal is such a household name, it may strike you as surprising that there are hundreds upon thousands of PayPal horror stories online, tales of arbitrary account freezes and suspensions with

absolutely no explanation – and no customer support to help clarify and resolve the issue so that business can continue as planned.

We had certainly heard these horror stories, but naively felt *it could never happen to us.*

And then it did.

The post above details the stress we faced, but the fast and quick of it is that during a major launch, PayPal unilaterally threatened to suspend our account – a move that would have put an abrupt stop to something we had all worked very hard for. All of their communications with us were vague, and any attempt on our part (and there were many) to try and resolve the issue by complying in any way PayPal requested was in vain.

Although the experience was very stressful, it taught us that just because a company has a seemingly ubiquitous household name, it doesn't mean they have their act together.

Then there is the ongoing struggle of having migrated to the email autoresponder and contact management system Office Autopilot. During that same launch where we had the episode with PayPal, we were dealing with a laundry list of technological glitches which were, in a nutshell, a result of attempting to use features that the service was advertising as fully functional.

What happened here?

The issue is that the features didn't work as advertised, as depended on them to. We had invested a lot in the assumption that they would work as advertised, and as a result, we got burned. For the most part, we were able to put out the fires, but it did cause a lot of unnecessary stress, time, and money, and resulted in tons of corrupt split-test data.

What's the lesson here? Try your best not to over-invest time or money in something without being sure that it does what you need it to do, without any glitches that could seriously cost your business.

And remember that when the inevitable happens (many businesses will eventually come face-to-face with an evil tool), it's going to suck, but you'll live.

Free vs. Premium?

The fact is that there are plenty of great tools out there that DO work, and have GREAT customer support. And some of them are even free.

Given this reality, you may have a hard time imagining why you should ever have to pay anyone for a premium product, especially when you're just starting out, and your budget is tight. You may be tempted to settle for the free version, with fewer features and less flexibility, and in some cases, this may be just fine.

However, there are times when the value a tool brings will surpass its monetary value many times over, making it a great investment that will have concrete payoff in terms of real dollars and more time on your hands.

So how do you determine whether or not a tool is *really* worth the premium price?

For starters, ask yourself what the time it saves is worth to you. If you're spending 30 minutes each day synching your appointments across calendars when you could be automating the task and filling that 30 minutes with another 500-dollars-an-hour coaching call, a premium option will likely pay for itself many times over within the first month.

If you're unsure whether or not you can get the benefit in other ways, or if the tool will lead to any results that makes the price tag worthwhile, consider that many products have free trials or lower level memberships. This may be a good place to start in order to identify whether or not it is something

essential to your business.

When in doubt, opt for products with trial periods or reasonable refund policies, so that you have time to test each service for the functionality you're using it for, determine whether it is a good investment, and ask for your money back if need be – or move on to the premium version.

Further Reading

With all of this in mind, you may feel that it's time to evaluate the online marketing tools you currently use, or you may be excited to start learning about tools that can solve the chronic problems you have in your business. Here are some other online marketing tool resources to get you started:

- [7 Surprising Ways to Develop a Pinterest Marketing Strategy](#)

- [Social Media Strategies to Help You Master Your Online Engagement](#)

- [What Is a Virtual Assistant (And How to Market Effectively With the Help of One)](#)

- [How to Set Up Google Adwords Retargeting](#)

- [I Used Instagram for Business and Doubled My Sales in One Month](#)

- [How Tiny Business Owners Can Leverage LinkedIn to Market Like Massive Businesses](#)

- [Presentation Ideas: Success with Video – A.K.A Lay Off of PowerPoint!](#)

- [How Smart Marketers Use WordPress For Business Like a Boss](#)

- [How to Make a Podcast The Grows With Your Blog](#)