

January 10, 2011

David Robertson's Tech Tip

Every now and then a piece of software or a unique web site comes along that literally revolutionizes my life. I'm thinking beyond the obvious standards of Windows, Microsoft Office, and Google. In this tech tip, I would love to quickly share three examples of products I have integrated into my daily life and business.

Windows Office Live – <http://officelive.com/en-us/free-website>

Once upon a time I paid a monthly fee for web hosting. That is, until I discovered Windows Office Live. Office Live presently hosts ten web sites that I built which house my life coaching business/ministry. With little money for startup, Office Live provided a novice web designer like me with easy-as-pie templates, tools, and space that made it possible for me to create and publish stylish web pages that actually work, are pleasing to look at, easy to navigate, and provide users an interactive (self-coaching or mentor-driven) experience with modules involving key life issues. The learning curve was minimal and the flexibility of how my sites looked and link together was sophisticated for a free web site requiring no HTML knowledge. Site tools include forms, HTML code, slide shows, video, PayPal, blogging, and other widgets. The default domain name is long, but for a nominal fee you can create your own. My flagship parent site is at this URL and the "My Life Menu" tab links to the other nine sites in the cluster:

<http://mylifecoaching.web.officelive.com/default.aspx>

Dropbox – www.dropbox.com

I am a Dropbox fanatic. Introduced to me by a professor during my Masters coursework, Dropbox, at its core, offers 2 gigabytes of free online storage space accessible from any Internet-

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connected device. Additional space can be purchased inexpensively. Every paper for every class during my Masters (and now during my Ed.S.) is stored on Dropbox (which essentially means that all my work resides on my hard drive but is backed up to the cloud.) Dropbox is an innovative hybrid of Software as a Service (SaaS) which works in partnership with your own computer. I was able to wean myself from carrying a USB thumb drive because of Dropbox. My data is all there, always. Two gigs is a lot of space for documents, spreadsheets, and presentations provided you steer clear of storing your audio and video library on Dropbox. The most utilitarian function of Dropbox for me is the shared folder feature. Dropbox makes collaboration using shared files a breeze.

One example of how I use it collaboratively is that currently I am on an Implementation Team at my church rolling out a huge discipleship program. Through a single email invitation, I was able to invite all my team members simultaneously to download Dropbox, as an administrator share one folder with them, and now all of us have real-time document sharing rights to hundreds of documents in a single folder on *their* desktops. Whenever I drag and drop a file(s) to the shared folder, it is dynamically synced with all the users on their desktops via the Internet. One does not even need to log onto Dropbox.com to access current versions of all files – they all live in the Dropbox folder on each end users' desktop. Beyond the share folder, users can drag and drop to their heart's delight other files they wish to sync to the web for offsite storage and transportability reasons. This is good tech and works for us splendidly. For every friend you invite to join your Dropbox, you get 250 MB of bonus space up to 8 GB.

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Lynda.com – www.lynda.com

Finally, I want to share one more tech tip that's just too good to not pass forward. My last semester of my Masters degree was spent doing a 6-credit hour practicum in the newly launched Digital Media Studio (DMS) at the James E. Walker Library at Middle Tennessee State University. I was a graduate assistant to the Emerging Technologies Librarian and she and I partnered together to train 20+ student workers on supporting the Studio for the computing needs of our 25K plus student population. The DMS had 13 Apple and 9 Dell devices generously configured in addition to Microtext ScanPro 2000's devices. The Studio supported high end computing needs of design students with lots of open source software plus plenty of commercial packages for video editing, audio manipulation, 3D animation, web design, and the other common computing needs. The Studio was brimming with new software and hardware (pen tablets, etc.) that student workers carrying an 18-hour class load and working 20-hour/week shifts supported. Our task was to get these workers up to speed fielding hundreds of student questions per week. Part of the answer was Lynda.com. Lynda.com provides expert training videos on over 57,000 titles, even obscure ones. I stepped my way through a Microsoft Word Essentials tutorial on Lynda.com and was shocked, as a long-time Word users, at how many new things I learned (that were really there all the time!) Lynda.com is not free but it is affordable (as low as \$25/month). I heartily recommend Lynda.com to anyone needing to bone up on a software package for a class project or to be able to add a particular package to a resume that is requiring some exposure to a certain software. For more info, you can go to:

<http://www.lynda.com/aboutus/>.

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