

Inside My Toolbox

by Ron Edmonson on December 2, 2012

I am often asked about the tools I use in my personal and professional life. I thought I would document them here. This is not a static list but one that I will update as my needs and tools change.



If there's a tool I am missing or one you think is better than the one I am using, please let me know in the comments at the bottom of this page. These entries are arranged in alphabetical order after each heading.

Blogging

- **Akismet**: This is the plugin I use to control comment spam. Even though I get more than 500 comments a day, I get very little spam. Akismet blocks almost all it, so it never sees the light of day. The creates less work for you and less friction for your readers. (For example, you don't have to require them to register to leave a comment.)
- **BlueHost**: If you use WordPress as I recommend (see below), you will need a hosting service too. I recommend BlueHost. They are currently offering a special \$3.95 a month rate to my readers. I also have a [free screencast](#) that will show you how to set up a WordPress site on BlueHost in 20 minutes or less.

- **Disqus:** This is my commenting platform. It is used by thousands of large sites and has become the *de facto* standard on professional blogs. It is super-easy for your readers and allows them to manage comments across many sites without having to sign in every time. It is also very useful to you as a blogger.
- **Feedburner:** Some people, particularly those who are more tech-savvy, will prefer to subscribe to your blog via RSS. I use Feedburner to manage my RSS feed. It is a free service owned by Google. It is easy to set up. It has an e-mail module too, but I still prefer using MailChimp for that (see below).
- **GetNoticed:** This is my brand-spanking new theme. I designed it myself and my web developer and partner Andrew Buckman coded it. We are planning to start selling this in the next few months. Before this, I used [StandardTheme](#), which is also very good. [Elegant Themes](#), [WooThemes](#), and [StudioPress](#) are also great options.
- **Google Analytics:** This is the gold standard when it comes to analytics. If you want to track your unique visitors, page views, bounce rate, and a host of other metrics, you need to sign up for a free account and then follow the directions for installing it on your blog.
- **iStockPhoto:** If you want your posts to get noticed, you need to use photos. They pull people into the content. Yes, you can get free ones at places like Flickr.com, but personally, I can't afford the time. iStockPhoto is one of the largest online stock photo databases. It is now owned by Getty Images. They offer a 20% discount to my readers.
- **MailChimp:** As any Internet marketer will tell you, nothing is more important than building your own e-mail list. I use MailChimp to manage mine. It has a super easy-to-use interface, great analytics, and is 100 percent reliable. Other people prefer [AWeber](#). I don't think you can go wrong with either one.
- **ScribeSEO:** This is a premium plugin I use to optimize my WordPress posts. It analyses each post, then assigns it a percentage grade (with 100% being a perfect score). Best of all, it suggests how to improve the score by offering different key words and metadata. It was developed by the very smart folks at CopyBlogger.
- **VaultPress:** You definitely want to back up your blog on a regular basis. Disasters happen, and you don't want to lose days, weeks, or years worth of content simply because you didn't have it backed up. VaultPress was developed by Automattic, the same people who built WordPress. The integration is seamless. Turn it on and forget about it.
- **WordPress:** I converted from TypePad to self-hosted WordPress in 2008 and haven't looked back. In my opinion it is the most robust, yet easy-to-use blogging platform out there. You will find thousands of themes, plugins, and tools that work with WordPress. Best of all, it's free. (However, you will pay for hosting, themes, and some plugins.)

Social Media

- **Buffer:** This is one of those ideas that is so simple and so elegant, you slap yourself on the forehead and say, “Of course!” You add tweets to your Buffer whenever you want. It then spreads them out during the day according to a schedule you pre-determine, so it doesn’t overwhelm your followers.
- **HootSuite:** This is my Twitter dashboard. (It can also be used for Facebook, LinkedIn, too.) It allows me to monitor direct messages, mentions, and the tweets of those I follow. It arranges lists of users into columns (e.g., Family, Work Associates, Industry Sources, etc.), so I can quickly see what’s happening with any specific group. I use this tool to send messages and replies.
- **Platform Conference:** This is my newest conference, based on the framework I use in my book, *Platform: Get Noticed in a Noisy World*. The first event is scheduled for February 11–13, 2013 in Nashville, TN. Confirmed speakers include Andrew Buckman, Ken Davis, Jeff Goins, Pat Flynn, Stu McLaren, Cliff Ravenscraft, John Saddington, Carrie Wilkerson ... and me!
- **SocialOomph:** This is the service I use to manage scheduled tweets. I have a file with my top 100 most popular blog posts. Essentially, it includes one tweet for each post. I bulk upload this to Social Oomph and it posts these tweets, one per day every day at a specific time. It is a great way to keep my older posts visible. It drives a lot of traffic to my blog.
- **TweetPages:** This is the design service I use to keep my social media branding in sync. They took my blog design and the used it to design my Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube profiles. They have spectacular customer service and are very affordable.

Speaking

- **Keynote:** This is the software package that single-handedly converted me from PC to Mac. If you are not familiar with it, it is Apple’s alternative to PowerPoint. It is easy-to-use and produces amazing, beautiful slides. The graphic capabilities are so robust that I usually use it in place of PhotoShop for designing almost everything.
- **KeySpan Remote:** This is the remote slide control unit I use when I speak publicly. Yes, I know I can use my iPhone for this, but the KeySpan is a third of the size of a phone. I can fit it in the palm of my hand, and no one knows it’s even there. It turns me into a magician!
- **Launch Conference:** This is a conference I co-own with my partner, Ken Davis. It is about the *business* of public speaking—how to get booked, what to charge, how to create products you can sell at the back of the room, etc. It is for professional speakers or those who want to consider becoming a professional speaker.
- **OmniOutliner:** This is where every speech starts for me. It is easier to use than a word processor, allowing me to arrange and rearrange all the elements of my speech, creating a thorough outline of my presentation. I also notate the slide numbers in a column to the right

of the outline. Here's [an example](#) of my Platform speech.

- **Photoshop**: As I mentioned earlier, I use Keynote for most of my graphic design needs. However, for those really difficult jobs, I still use Photoshop. To be honest, I am not a big fan. I find the interface non-intuitive and clunky. But for raw power, I haven't found anything that comes close. Photo shop does anything—if I can just figure out how to do it.
- **SCORRE Conference**: This is another conference I co-own with my partner, Ken Davis. It is designed for professional speakers and those who simply want to communicate more professionally. While Launch is about the business of public speaking, SCORRE is about how to prepare and deliver your speech in a way maximizes it's impact on the audience. It literally changed everything about how I communicate.

Podcasting

- **Adobe Audition**: This is the audio editing software I use. It is expensive and probably overkill. There are free or cheaper alternatives available. I bought it because Cliff Ravenscraft recommended it and has some good tutorials about it. It is super-easy to use, but I feel I am only tapping five percent of its capabilities.
- **BluBrry PowerPress**: This is the WordPress plugin I use to embed my podcast on my blog. It uses a simple, elegant interface and provides a very nice audio player, so your listeners can simply click "Play" to listen to your show.
- **BroadVoice**: This is one of two voice mail services I use to capture questions and feedback from my listeners. (The other one is SpeakPipe below.) People simply call into my number, hear a voice mail greeting from me, and then leave their message. BroadVoice then mails me a WAV file of the recording, which I can edit and insert into my show.
- **Ginger Schell**: She does all the transcriptions for my shows. She does a masterful job. She is a little more expensive than other services, but English is her first language, and she pays attention to the details. When you want it done right, she is the one to call.
- **Heil PR40 Microphone**: This is the microphone I use. Again, I bought it because [Cliff Ravenscraft](#) recommended it. I haven't found another mic that produces the depth and resonance of the PR40. If you have listened to [my podcast](#) and like the sound of my voice, this is the mic that is responsible.
- **Heil SM-2B Shock Mount**: This is the cage-looking thing on which the mic mounts. It is a "shock mount," so that if I bump the desk or the boom, the mic won't pick up the sounds.
- **ID3 Editor**: This is a single-purpose software package. It does one thing well. It allows you to create the metadata for your audio files, so when you upload them to iTunes, it's all there.
- **LibSyn**: If you are going to podcasting, you don't want to host these files on your own blog. If you have hundreds of people—or thousands—trying to access them at once, you

could crash your server, incur crazy charges from your hosting company, or risk them shutting down your blog. Instead, you want to host them on a flat-rate media service like LibSyn.

- **Mackie 1402-VLZ3 Mixer:** This is the audio mixer I use—again, recommended by [Cliff Ravenscraft](#). It enables me to mix together my voice, music bed, audio clips, and external callers, into a single audio stream that I record.
- **OmniOutliner:** This is where every podcast starts. I create my “Show Prep” here, just like I do my speech outlines (see above for details).
- **Roland R-05 Digital Recorder:** I don’t record directly to my computer’s hard disk or flash drive as you can with a USB microphone. The risk of doing so is that your computer crashes in the middle of your podcast and you have to re-record it. Instead, I record to a digital audio recorder. This one is fantastic quality and super simple to use.
- **SpeakPipe:** This is the second of two voice mail services I use to capture questions and feedback from my listeners. (The other one is BroadVoice above.) People simply call into my number, hear a voice mail greeting from me, and then leave their message. BroadVoice then mails me a mp3 file of the recording, which I can edit and insert into my show.
- **SoundByte:** This is another single-purpose program. It allows me to queue up audio clips (e.g., musical intro and outro, as well as listener questions) and play them in real time when I record my podcast. It’s a little buggy on Mountain Lion, but it works.
- **Timer Utility:** This is pretty much as the name suggests: it’s a timer. I start it when I begin my podcast, so that I don’t lose track of the time and ramble on and on.

Productivity

- **Chrome:** This is my browser of choice. I find that it is faster than Safari or Firefox. However, it also has some memory quirks that bother me. If I get too many tabs open, it can really slow down my system or make it a little quirky.
- **Cobook:** This is an interface to Apple’s Contacts application (formerly Address Book). Frankly, it’s what Contacts should be. My favorite feature is that it will look up the contact’s information on Twitter and/or Facebook and allow you to synchronize the user’s photo.
- **DropBox:** This is the application I use to share files with my family and business associates. I am able to give access to both folders and files. It syncs automatically with my local computer in the background.
- **eaHELP:** This is the company for whom my virtual assistant, Tricia, works. They are a domestic company, providing premium services to clients who really care how they are represented. I really cannot say enough good about them. They are first-class in every way. If you have never considered a virtual assistant, start by reading my post, “[7 Reasons You](#)

Should Hire a Virtual Assistant.”

- **Evernote**: This is my digital brain. I store everything here: receipts, web clippings, Kindle notes, meeting notes, you name it. I like it so much, I wrote a series of twelve posts about it on my blog. It is an application I launch at startup and keep open all the time.
- **Evernote Essentials**: This is a great e-book intro to Evernote by Brett Kelly. It's \$29.00 and worth every penny. It will save you hours of learning on your own. Highly recommended.
- **Excel**: I use this for all number-crunching. Frankly, I am not a big fan of Microsoft Office. It is just too bloated for me. But Excel is the exception. I have tried iWork Numbers and even the Google Docs spreadsheet, but they are just not powerful enough. Maybe it's because I have used Excel since version 2 in 1987. It's second-nature.
- **Google Calendar**: I have to have a calendar I can share. It must be accessible by my family and team members (e.b., managers, booking agents, etc.). Google Calendar provides all the functionality I need.
- **Harvest**: This is my invoicing system. It lives in the cloud and is readily accessible by my assistant and other team mates. It is powerful and allows my customers and clients to pay instantly by credit card. It has made collections effortless.
- **Mail**: I have tried almost every Mac mail software program ever written, including (most recently) [MailPlane](#), [PostBox](#), and [Sparrow](#). I keep coming back to Apple Mail. It really does everything I need, especially now that I have also installed [MailTags](#) and [Mail Act-On](#).
- **Nozbe**: This is my task management system. I have tried them all (I think), but I keep coming back to Nozbe. It has a bit of a learning curve, but I have not found anything that is more powerful or more flexible. The trick for me is to use labels to group projects together. This keeps my system organized and manageable. Nozbe also integrates with [Evernote](#) and [DropBox](#).
- **PathFinder**: This is a Finder replacement. (I can't imagine going back to Finder.) It provides multiple windows and tabs. It's really everything you would want in a file management system. It's what Apple should have designed to begin with.
- **Skim**: This is a PDF viewer and a replacement for Preview. It makes highlighting and notating PDFs a breeze. Plus, I just like the interface better than Preview.
- **SnagIt**: I use this program for all my screen capture needs. It is something I use daily. It has a robust set of effects tools, like borders, drop shadows, reflections, and perspective. It also has an amazing array of annotation tools. It can also do video capture of your screen (i.e., a screencast).
- **Typinator**: This is what is commonly called a text expander. You type in an abbreviation and it responds with whatever text you want. I use it to type commonly used phrases, correct common misspellings, insert HTML code, and type in boiler-plate templates.

Writing

- **Byword:** This is a minimal, stripped-down word processor. Unlike Word it is not bloated, and it doesn't get in your way. I use it for writing almost anything, including my blog posts. It also had the markdown language baked in, which I use extensively. It is my go-to word processor of choice.
- **Chicago Manual of Style, 16th Edition:** This is the bible in the book publishing industry. It has an interesting introduction on the art of bookmaking, but it's principal value is as a reference to all things related to grammar, style, and usage. If you prefer, you can use the online edition, which is what I do.
- **Fast, Effective Copywriting:** This is a course taught by David Garfinkle. It is not cheap but the content is priceless. Best of all, David and his partner Brian McLeod provide a notebook worth of writing "templates." They include every component of good sales copy, from headlines to bullets to guarantees.
- **How to Write Bestselling Fiction:** As far as I know, this is the only non-fiction book Dean Koontz has ever written. Sadly, it is out-of-print. However, you can still find it in used bookstores or through Amazon. It is the best single book I have ever read on writing fiction. Be prepared to spend \$50.00 or more.
- **On Writing:** This is my favorite overall book on writing. Stephen King chronicles his writing journey, which is worth the price of the book. But then he goes on to give his best writing advice. As one of the most successful, prolific writers of all time, this counsel is extremely valuable.
- **MarsEdit:** This is like a word processor for bloggers. It allows you to blog offline, including tagging your posts with the various kinds of metadata. You can schedule posts to appear in the future at the specific date and time you desire. I usually copy my text from Byword into MarsEdit where I format, tag, and schedule it.
- **Pages:** When I need something more robust than Byword, especially for documents requiring heavy formatting, I tune to Pages. It's Apple's version of Word. The interface is almost identical to Keynote. Unlike Word, it isn't bloated or slow. I find it much faster and intuitive.
- **The War of Art:** This classic by Stephen Pressfield illuminates why the creative process is often so difficult and what you can do about it. It's also a swift kick in the pants—something every writer needs from time to time. I have read this book several times and given dozens of copies away.
- **WestBow Press:** There have never been more options available for getting your book published. Self-publishing no longer carries the stigma it once did. WestBow, a division of Thomas Nelson, is a good choice if you want to pursue assisted self-publishing. It's like hiring

a contractor to build a house, so you don't have to manage the subcontractors.

- **Why Now Is the Best Time Ever to Be an Author:** This is a video of a speech I gave at the Indie Author Conference in 2011. Today we live in an unprecedented time for authors. Opportunities abound. I lay out five reasons why this is such a great time to pursue your dream of becoming a published author.
- **Word:** I put this in the same category as Photoshop (see my comments above). There are some things that only Word will do. It has about every feature known to man—if you can just find it. I would probably never use Word, except for the fact that my publisher insists on it. Also, so many people use it that has become the standard in cross-platform document exchange.
- **Writing a Winning Book Proposal:** This is my classic e-book that details everything you need to know to write a book proposal that gets the attention of agents and publishers. It has been used by publishing professionals for more than a decade and has become the *de facto* standard in the book publishing world.

164 |

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