

Information Management Resource Kit

Module on Building Electronic Communities and Networks

UNIT 4. DESIGNING AN ONLINE COMMUNITY

LESSON 3. MAKING THE RIGHT TECHNICAL CHOICES

NOTE

Please note that this PDF version does not have the interactive features offered through the IMARK courseware such as exercises with feedback, pop-ups, animations etc.

We recommend that you take the lesson using the interactive courseware environment, and use the PDF version for printing the lesson and to use as a reference after you have completed the course.



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Objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- apply criteria for **making technical choices** for the basic and more advanced stages of an online community project.



Introduction

One of the most important decisions the online community project team has to take is the **set of online communication tools** to be used in the community, and the relevant equipment needed to support these needs.



In this lesson we will look at the basic and more advanced choices you may make, and how they are included in the total cost of use of your online community project.

Making your first choice

When you first plan an online community and select the tools to support it, you are often working with a series of “**unknowns**”.



When you think about the impact on your community of using particular tools, you will be basing your decisions mainly on general guidelines and principles.

You will probably want to start small and simple (for example, with a mailing list), and scale up as the community expands and matures.

Making your first choice

An online community project may start with a pilot group of users.

At this stage of the project, you need to try and understand **how the community will react to the project** and use the online tools.

Information such as sociability issues, connectivity needs and technical skills, gathered over the needs analysis stage, helps to select the type of tools to be used.

Low-cost and simple to use tools will probably be selected at this stage.



For example, the Keper online community project starts with a group of 40 radio broadcasters which, during the needs analysis, has expressed a strong interest in participating in the project.

Making your first choice

The following are some simple considerations for choosing between e-mail and web based tools.

E-mail based tools When...



- There is the need to have light and easy to implement tools.
- The audience is already known.
- There is the need to enhance the relationships and the community purpose.
- There is no need for sharing audio, video or graphical objects.
- Messages need to be distributed as fast as possible.

Web based tools When...



- You have a large amount of ready-made content and information to share with potential visitors.
- Your first aim is to motivate new visitors to join the community.
- You want to provide members with various ways of interaction.
- You want to provide visitors with an overview of your activities.

Making your first choice



COMMUNICATION NEEDS




Results from your needs analysis allow you to make your choice.

For example, you have assessed the **communication needs** of the community.

This provides information for choosing between synchronous and asynchronous tools.

Communication needs	Type of Tool To Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants are in different time zones and remote locations and it is logistically impossible or too expensive to get them on the same phone call or in the same room. • The discussion or interaction can take place over a longer period than an hour or day. • There is no need for immediate, emergency, or on-the-spot feedback and decision-making 	Asynchronous tools: E-mail, Mailing list, Blogs, Discussion board, Bulletin board, Forum, Newsgroup, Online Collaboration Tools.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants need to get the information at the same time and react to it. • There is a need for quick discussion and decision-making. • The interaction is constrained by limited time. 	Synchronous tools: Chat rooms, Instant Messenger, Internet Conferencing.

 [Click here to know more about the impact of particular tools on the community](#)

Making your first choice



CONNECTIVITY CONTEXT



The Real Access analysis you have carried out provides you with additional information.

Connectivity Context	Type of Tool To Consider
Most users will have very limited and unreliable connectivity and will be using low bandwidth connections.	E-mail - Mailing list
Most users will have connectivity available most of the time, but only on a low bandwidth connection.	E-mail - Mailing list - Site update alerts - Chat/Instant Messenger (text-based) - Online answer tools - Online resource collections - Newsgroup - Forum - Blogs
Most users will have connectivity all the time and access to high-speed bandwidth such as cable, DSL, T1, etc.	E-mail – Mailing list - Chat (text and graphical interface) - Online answer tools - Online resource collections - Newsgroup – Forum - Blogs – Audio-video conferencing

Making your first choice



TECHNICAL SKILLS



Another criteria to consider is the users' ability in using the tools. This information also comes from the Real Access analysis.

Technical Level	Type of Tool To Consider
BEGINNER Can do basic e-mail, web browsing, word processing and computer commands. Has no experience in participating in an online community.	E-mail Mailing list Web site update alerts Online answer tools Online resource collections
ADVANCED Has used computer regularly for a year or more, formal training for Internet/Web software, e-mail and word processing. Has some experience participating in an online community.	Chat Room tools Non e-mail asynchronous discussion tools Blogs Audio-video conferencing

Making your first choice

The analysis of the users' needs and skills carried out by the Keper team has produced the following results. What do you think their choice should include?

Usually communication takes place over a longer period than an hour or day (Information about agriculture or food security issues from Keper), but sometimes the broadcasters have an immediate need to ask Keper for information (to solve technical radio problems).

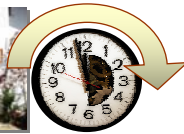
Most users will have connectivity available most of the time, but only on a low bandwidth connection.

General skills level is beginner.

- Newsletter
- Mailing list
- Web site update alerts
- Online answer tools
- Online resource collections
- Chat
- Instant Messenger
- Forum
- Blogs
- Audio-video conferencing

Please click on the answers (2 or more) of your choice

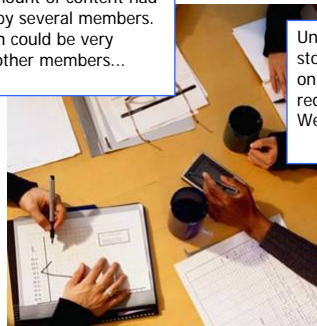
Refine your choice



Six months later...

Over the last few months a considerable amount of content had been provided by several members. This information could be very interesting for other members...

Unfortunately the information is stored only on my computer. It can only be shared if people send specific requests to me. We should have a Web site!



Refine your choice

The Keper team decides that it is time to **move the online community to the next level**, in order to give its members better access to the acquired information, to share the information with a broader community of radio broadcasters and to support communication **between** broadcasters.

They need to analyse the needs which have emerged to enhance or substitute their online tools, by answering the following questions...

How do we offer broadcasters the possibility to **get in touch** with one another?
Do they prefer one-to-one, small or large group discussions?
Do we need to introduce other languages?

Let's review their **tasks**. What do members need to do online? Post questions/answers? Discuss issues or problems? Look for information? What do facilitators and technical staff need to do to manage the community?



We also should review the current users' technology **skill level**, as there are new users and the old ones are now more skilled than six months ago.

Refine your choice

Once the community has been established you can start to **measure the actual impact of the tools** you have chosen. You want to know that your community is working well overall and how much of its success (or failure) is due to the tools you use to support the community. While there is no magic formula for calculating this, there are some general steps which may help you:

1) Overall state of the community

Your first step is to assess the overall "health" of your community against the measurable targets you set during the initial planning stage.

If the community is working well, it is likely that the tools you are using are supporting the community effectively.

2) Focus on tools

Next, you may want to focus more directly on the tools themselves. If the community is working well, are there tools which could help it work better? If you are not making the progress you would wish, could this in part be due to the tools you are using? Or due to insufficient training in the tools?

3) Take stock and plan

Consider the tools you are using with the mature community.

See next screen for more information

OVERALL STATE OF THE COMMUNITY

Indicators might include...

- Number of participants.
- Frequency/volume of participation by members.
- Percentage of members who participate.
- Requests from members (improvements, changes).
- Improvement in quality of involvement (in relation to the central issues covered).
- Advances you can perceive towards the achievement of your objectives.
- Impact areas such as participation, learning and knowledge sharing, social and professional interaction and decision making.

FOCUS ON TOOLS

Gather information relating to the effectiveness of the tools used in your online community. There are a number of possible sources for this:

- Surveys of your online community – ask community members which tools they use, and which tools they may have problems with.
- Draw on the observations of the facilitator/s of the community – the facilitator should have a good “feel” for what is happening in the community and why.
- Tracking changes in community activity against any changes in the tools used. For example, was there an increase in participation when you used a chat room for an online meeting instead of a mailing list?

TAKE STOCK AND PLAN

- Was the initial choice of tools appropriate? Was your assessment of the total cost of use of the tools accurate? If not, reassess your options.
- Have the needs of the community grown or otherwise changed? Can you see opportunities for new tools to support existing or new activities? Conversely, are there tools in your online community suite which are not being used?
- Have new tools been developed which could play a useful role in your community? If yes, consider their likely total cost of use.

Refine your choice

Answering questions on emerged needs allows you to define: what **specific features** you need from your tools, which of these functions are absolutely **essential** and which are on your wish list as **extras**.



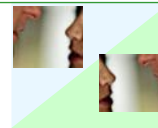
List of Functional Requirements for Online Community Software

Then, you will refine your choices. For example, Keper learned that ...

Participants would like to exchange digital audio files – e.g. sharing interviews. Therefore the web based discussion tool needs the functionality of uploading and downloading **digital audio files**.



Some of the discussion topics are specific to those in urban areas and of little use to those in rural areas and vice versa. Therefore the discussion tool needs the ability to set up **different discussion areas** where smaller groups can discuss these specific issues.

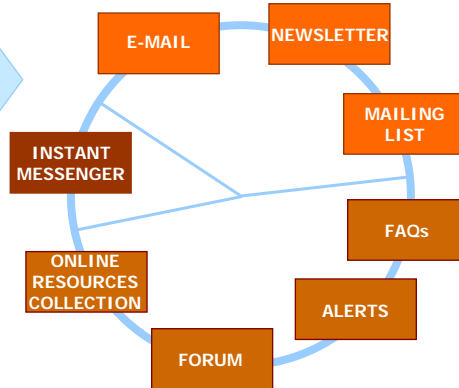
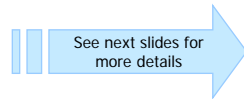


Refine your choice



At the end of the functional requirements analysis, Keper decides to build a Web site and provide a set of tools for the next stage of the online community project.

Let's have a look at their Functional Requirements List...



Refine your choice

FAQs

Allow to edit and develop content from the discussions among members - having it well organized would ease the capacity to access and use the tools.

WEB SITE UPDATE ALERTS

Members can set preferences to be alerted to new content or discussions, or posts to a discussion (for example, they can choose to be alerted only on a specific topic). E-mail alerts and announcements are available in text or HTML.

ONLINE RESOURCES COLLECTIONS

References to resources in the discussions will be edited and published on the site as online resource collections.

INSTANT MESSENGER

An Instant Messenger will be used by the radio technicians when they have the need to conduct a session conversation with group or individual for immediate, emergency, or on-the-spot feedback.

Refine your choice

FORUM

An asynchronous tool is needed as members are in different places and time zones. Keper needs a discussion tool that can thread discussion via topic to better store and organize information on the Web site.

Users will be able to upload files or pictures with postings and to see who has read their post. Full customization for look and feel choosing color schemes, languages, logos, layouts.

E-MAIL

Easy and fast, e-mail is useful to get in touch for rapid questions and brief points of view and can be used to transfer any kind of file instantly.

NEWSLETTER

Best substitute for traditional mail to spread interesting news about common activities. Costless and fast, distribute information of general interest.

MAILING LIST

Creating a living network of every member of the community, it is the right tool to share experiences, questions and solutions to every kind of problems.

Refine your choice

Once you have developed your list of functional requirements, you can focus on whether adopting a content management system.

Content of our Web site is growing... what about managing them by using a content management system?



You can use the following questions:

- Does your Web site play a major role in delivering and storing content for your community?
- Do you spend considerable amounts of time maintaining your Web site? Determining what 'considerable' means will depend on your community's size and needs.
- Has your Web site grown in number of pages to the point where maintenance has become difficult?
- Has the content on your Web site grown in complexity? For example, pages include complex links to other pages on your site.

If most of your answers are "yes", then you should consider adopting a content management system.

Selecting products



Once you have identified the kind of tools you need, you should select a specific software vendor or consultant.

You need to analyse possible solutions in terms of availability, cost, quality, timeframe, licensing and other criteria that will allow you to make the final decision.

Let's consider these criteria....

Selecting products



AVAILABILITY AND ACCESS

The following are some aspects you should consider about availability and access.

Availability: Is the tool something that is available in your geographic location? Is it available in the language or languages of you online community?

Bandwidth requirements: Based on your assessment information, do the bandwidth requirements of the tool **match the** bandwidth capability of the online community?

Ease of access/user-friendliness: Will your online community members be able to access this tool regularly? Is the design of the tool intuitive? Is it easy for them to use, given their skill levels or can they be quickly and easily trained to use the tool?

Quality: Are there reviews of this product from people who have used it? Do current users post anything in the user forums that reflect the quality of the product and the company behind it (or lack thereof)?

Timeframe: How quickly do you need to start using the software? Does it need to be something that can be up and running quickly? Or is there time for customization and configuration work?

Set-up/Installation: How much time can you expect to typically spend setting up the tool? Are there special technical skills or knowledge required to set up the tool? If the tool has to be set up by a provider, what is their usual turn around time for set up? What turn around time do they commit to?

Cost: How much does the tool cost? Is there a one time fee, or is it a pay as you go? What other related costs are there to use the tool? What are the conditions of licensing? Is there just one for the product or are you required to have more than one based on the number of users?

Selecting products



**OPEN SOURCE/
PROPRIETARY**

You will also need to consider the tradeoffs and benefits when choosing between **Proprietary Software** and **Open Source Software (OSS)**.

Proprietary Software - PROS

- Proprietary commercial software typically has high quality documentation, end-user technical support, with training materials easily and in some cases freely available.
- Users may already be familiar with the software if it is commercially available in their area and they can afford to purchase it.
- There may be a larger pool of individuals with technical skills to support and customize the software.
- Interfaces to proprietary software (not all) have been through formal usability testing and can be more polished and user-friendly.
- There may be a large number of proven tools with specific features needed available.

Proprietary Software - CONS

- Proprietary software usually requires payment for purchase or for user license fees; depending on the license model, it may be expensive to implement.
- Recent versions of proprietary software are typically developed for the most up-to-date operating systems and can not always be used on older computers.

Open Source Software- PROS

- OSS has no license fees, so it can be more cost effective over the lifetime of use of the software.
- OSS is often developed with "open standards", making it easier to use with other pieces of software.
- Some OSS can be used on computers more than 5 years old.
- User/developer communities exist for some OSS software that can provide free technical support.
- OSS can be customized and localized (i.e. made to work in different languages) by local developers.

Open Source Software- CONS

- OSS may not have extensive or high quality documentation, end-user technical support, and training materials. In some cases, you may need to create these materials.
- Users may not already be familiar with the software and the user interface may not be as refined as proprietary software.
- More technical skills may be required to customize OSS software to local needs and languages and to refine the user interface.

Selecting products



Imagine that Keper...

- is able to provide technical support and training material to the community users;
- has an old computer that can be used as web server, which has been donated.
- wants to be able to add more advanced features when and if needed.

Which solution would you suggest for the Keper Community?

Open Source and Proprietary software

Open Source	<input type="radio"/>	Proprietary software	<input type="radio"/>
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Please click on the answer of your choice

Selecting products



LONGEVITY

Longevity is another important criterion for making your decision both in terms of the software and the digital information that is generated from the online community.

SOFTWARE LONGEVITY



Software longevity is the length of time that there is active development on the software – that is releasing updates to keep up with hardware development, adding features, and making improvements in the code or the interface.

INFORMATION LONGEVITY



You also need to consider the **longevity of the knowledge** that is generated from your online community. Digital documents are accessible only by using combinations of computer hardware and software. If this combination becomes unavailable, then information created may be completely inaccessible.

Selecting products



READY TO USE/ CUSTOMIZED

Another consideration is whether to select a software tool that is pre-prepared or **ready to use** or one that you have made based on your own specifications (**customized solution**).

READY TO USE

A software application or tool designed to support online community building that can be used as is, without further development or modification.

PROS

CONS

CUSTOMIZED

A software solution where your community has hired someone to design, build, and implement a software application or add significant customizations to an existing software application to support your community's specific needs.

PROS

CONS

Click each button to read the relevant considerations

Selecting products

Ready to use solution: PROS

- Training and documentation generally available.
- Don't have to invest the time and money to design from the beginning.
- Good technical support is available, usually at no additional cost (although after a period of time, 90 days a year, etc, additional support may have to be purchased).
- Usually can be purchased and installed more quickly than a customized solution.

Ready to use solution: CONS

- Big financial risk if needs & software are not carefully evaluated and turn out not to be the right match.
- May need additional customization.
- Will still require some work and technical expertise to set up.
- May be paying for features that you don't need.

Customized solution: PROS

- High level of customization to your community's exact needs.
- Maximum control over design and functionality.
- With a custom application you pay only for the features you need and have asked for.
- There are normally no licensing fees with custom solutions. Once you have paid for the product, you can usually make as many copies as you need.

Customized solution: CONS

- Requires the contracting of expertise in technical programming and design.
- Requires some legal expertise to develop a clear contract with programmer regarding copyright issues.
- Requires high involvement of staff and members of online community to provide design feedback and usability testing.
- Need to have adequate time not only to design and develop the software.
- Overall, tends to have a higher initial cost because of the required expertise and time commitment.

Selecting products

In most cases, designing and building software from scratch will take longer and require a larger up-front investment.

While not as expensive, customizing an existing software package requires an ad hoc intervention. In some cases, depending on the software, a high level of technical skills maybe be necessary to intervene.

Your up-front investment cost may be higher than for an off-the-shelf package, so you need to factor in your **long-term return on investment** to determine the cost benefit of a custom solution.



Selecting products



As you evaluate your choices for tools, the quality and depth of technical support varies greatly from one software application to another. It is important to consider what and when **direct technical support** is available from the software vendor/company, and if there is any charge.

If software is widely adopted, there may be other external technical support sources (written manuals, Web sites, support listserv, etc.) that can be accessed.

You can also provide **internal support**, e.g. providing:

- support from within the online community itself – for example setting up a Help forum for members; or
- a person whose job or part of their job is to provide technical support.

Selecting products

DIRECT AND INDIRECT SUPPORT

Direct support

A technical support staff person works with you directly to solve your problems.

Examples:

- E-mail support
- Online/Chat/Forum support
- Phone/Help Desk support

Indirect support

You work with materials provided to solve problems on your own.

Examples:

- Product Manual: Print/Electronic formats
- Online Help and FAQ's on vendor's Web site
- Help menu in the software
- Forums or listserv that offer voluntary "peer support"

Selecting products

We will use already available FAQs about this tool that can be easily adapted for our community members.



We can also provide technical support to the users. That is part of my job description.

What kind of technical support will be provided to the Keper community members?

- Direct external technical support
- Internal technical support
- A combination of internal/external technical support

Please click on the answer of your choice

Selecting products



TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS



Selecting software for your online community requires determining the **technical requirements** of both the provider/developer and the participants, including: equipment, hosting, access.

Whether you plan to manage the server and software within your office or outsource it to a web host or applications service provider, you need to consider the "back-office" technical requirements of running the software.

Take care of hardware and software requirements to make sure that your software selection does not pose any hidden technical or access barriers to entry.

Provide a clear statement of technical and other access requirements for all users.



Some basic questions you need to ask

Selecting products

The following are other software features you may want to check:

REGISTRATION



Restricted communications typically use a registration process. So, if your community needs to restrict membership, make sure a **registration feature** is included. If you want to have your community completely “open”, make sure the registration feature isn’t cumbersome.

DIFFERENT ROLES



People take on different roles as the community develops, such as moderator, community administrators, and specialists or experts who participate in question-and-answer sessions and provide advice. Different roles require [specific functionalities](#) to fulfil their role.

COMMUNITY CHANGES



Online communities are often dynamic. There can be ongoing online discussion areas. Over time, certain members may decide to come together as a subset or subgroup of the larger community. You should check that the software **support changes** in the size, make up, and sub-groups of the community.

Selecting products

How well does the software support the roles?

For example, suppose that your discussion area is set up as a moderated discussion and a moderator tasked and trained to lead the discussion. Therefore, granting the moderator the ability to move, delete, archive, or edit posts may be important.

Members may require certain functionality to fulfil their role. Or, it may be necessary to allow members to start new discussion threads, if they need to start conversations in order to fulfil their role as members.

Some other features that need to be included:

- Administrator or moderator can delete messages.
- Administrator can limit user rights to read only or active participant.
- Moderator Commands: editing, clean-up or organizing discussion areas and archives
- Monitoring and administration, such as traffic analysis, setting privileges
- Customizable user privileges such as opening new topics

Selecting products



COST



Financial considerations are an important part of your selection process. Ensure that the tools you choose match your financial resources, as well as those of community members.

You need to look at not just the initial costs of setting up the community, but also at **ongoing maintenance costs**. For example, software may need updating as newer versions emerge; these upgrades often have costs attached, especially with commercial software, but even with open source software (in the form of human resources time).

Software licensing offers its own unique set of problems that can make it difficult to figure out the total cost of use.



Would you like to know more on Software Licensing?

See Annex 4.3.2 for a mini-lesson on licensing models for proprietary, freeware, shareware and open source software

Selecting products

Finally, remember to think about technical costs in the context of the **Total Cost of Use**, that is the sum of **all** costs (direct and indirect) to everyone involved with the project, both implementers and community members.

While the cost factors involved will vary between projects, there are a number common cost factors which you should take into account in your planning.



Selecting products

Let's come back to Keper's final choice.

How do they select the specific product for their community?



The team has specifically and formally defined what features they need from the software and why, through a [functional requirements document](#).

With that in mind, they visit several open-source software listing sites and narrow down the list to three Content Management Systems (CMSs).


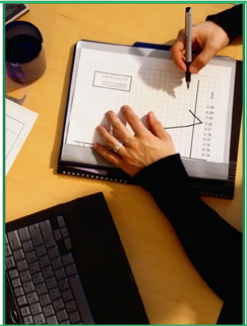




The team tests each CMS by visiting other communities' Web sites from each CMS and asks several representative online community members to test as well.

The technical staff tests the back-end panels to ensure that the required features are offered.

Keper selects the package that is the most stable, which they feel is the most user-friendly, and which meets all their other criteria.

Job aids

From the interactive lesson you can download and print documents that can help you in your work.

	Functional Requirements - Worksheet	
	Ranking Functional Requirements - Worksheet	
	Availability and Access Assessment - Decision Sheet	
	Longevity Assessment - Decision Sheet	
	Online Tools Selection - Decision Sheet	

Summary

One of the most important decisions for an online community project is the **set of online communication tools** to be used in the community.

During the first phase of the project, you need to try and understand **how the community will react to the project**. Online tools are selected based on the results from the needs analysis stage.

In a second phase, you can evaluate the results and decide if you want to **move the online community to the next level**, by enhancing existing tools or adding new ones.

To select your specific product and/or vendor, you need to carefully specify the **features and functionality** you want from your tools and ask the vendor about **back-office** technical requirements and other software features.

Remember to think about the **total cost of use** of your project, not only as initial costs of setting up the community, but also as ongoing maintenance costs for your organization and stakeholders.

If you want to learn more...

RESOURCES

Thinking about Tools for Groups Across Space and time

Full Circle Associates
<http://www.fullcirc.com/community/diffmodes.htm>
Describes different tools for interaction

Online Interaction Tools Resource Sheet

Full Circle Associates
<http://www.fullcirc.com/community/toolgrid.htm>
Feature checklist for web-based tools

Choosing Software that fits your needs

TechSoup
<http://www.techsoup.org/howto/articlepage.cfm?articleid=35&topicid=2>
Presents criteria for making software selections

Making sense of licensing

TechSoup
<http://www.techsoup.org/howto/articlepage.cfm?articleid=140&topicid=2>
Definitions of different software licensing

MMTK Open Source Units* Choosing Open Source Software*

ItrainOnline
<http://www.itrainonline.org/itrainonline/mmtk/opensource.shtml>
<http://www.itrainonline.org/itrainonline/mmtk/Opensource2.zip>
Criteria for selecting open source software

Using Open Source Software in Your Nonprofit Organization

DotOrgMedia
<http://www.dotorgmedia.org/Publications/Publications.cfm?ID=81&c=18>
Primer on Open Source Software

If you want to learn more...

Nonprofit Open Source Initiative Web

<http://www.nosi.net/>
Portal site for nonprofits seeking information about OSS

Linc Project Case Study

Low Incoming Networking Project
http://www.lincproject.org/toolkit/cos_guide/title/comparisons
An operating systems comparisons chart

Handbook for Digital Projects: A Management Tool for Preservation and Access

Howard Besser
<http://www.nedcc.org/digital/ix.htm>
How to information on digital preservation

Community Question and Answer

TechSoup
http://www.techsoup.org/community/qod_answer.cfm?qotdid=35&cg=searchterms&sg=custom%20software
Who owns the software when you hire a programmer or if an employee builds it?

Choosing Specialized Software

Coyote Communications
<http://www.coyote.com/database/software.html>
Determine when you can use off-the-shelf software

If you want to learn more...

Resources

Strategic Technology Toolkit: Technical Support Fact Sheet

Summit Collaborative
<http://www.summitcollaborative.com/cwpm.html#techsupport>
How to assess technical support needs

Basic Technical Support and Maintenance Of Small Computer Systems

MAPNP
http://www.mapnp.org/library/infomgmt/tech_spt/tech_spt.htm
Describes ways to get technical support

Technical Support

RTPNET
<http://www.rtpnet.org/tech/>
Example of technical support help desk with useful technical support links

Tech Support Alert

Tech Support Alert
<http://www.techsupportalert.com/>
Extensive Web site with many links to technical support sources

Online Interaction Tools Resource Sheet

Full Circle Associates
<http://www.fullcirc.com/community/toolgrid.htm>
Feature checklist for web based tools

Tool Tour

Full Circle Associates
<http://www.fullcirc.com/community/tooltour.htm>
Comparisons of specific web based tools

Virtual Communities

The Co-Working Institute
<http://virtualcommunities.start4all.com/>
Extensive list of online community software and articles

If you want to learn more...

Resources

30 Features to Consider When Choosing Forum Software

Online Community Report
<http://www.onlinecommunityreport.com/features/30/index.htm>
Summarizes features of web based discussion software

Forum Hosts

Researching and Selecting a Web Host for Web-Based Discussion
<http://www.forumhosts.com/hosts.htm>
Advice on how to evaluate a web host and reviews of different hosts

Thinkofit

Tools & strategies for virtual teams & virtual communities
<http://www.thinkofit.com/webconf/index.htm>
Extensive listings of online community software tools in different categories

Calculating Your Online Community Costs

Full Circle Associates
<http://www.fullcirc.com/community/communityroi.htm>
How to calculate costs

Community of Practices Technology Survey

How to make sense of this emerging market understand the potential of technology and set up a community platform by Etienne Wenger
http://knowledge.usaid.gov/documents/cop_technology_survey.pdf
Analysis of the software market and describes features and technical requirement of higher-end software

Annex 4.3.1
Mini-lesson: Software Licensing

What Software Licensing is

Most software manufacturers consider their products intellectual property and make them available under a **licensing agreement** to you. What you are “buying” is the use of the software rather than the software itself.

The license provides **restrictions on use** of the software. Generally restrictions are placed on how the software can be copied, modified, and distributed. As a result, there are an infinite number of different ways that software can be licensed, but there are some generally accepted classifications of copyrighted software.

Even if the licensing costs are “free” in the case of shareware and most Open Source software, there are hidden or indirect costs that you need consider. These include: Technical support, compatibility, ease of migration from one software package to another, and others.



What Software Licensing is

The following is an overview of the different Licensing Models:

Type	Definition	Licensing Models
Proprietary Software	Most commercial software today is proprietary. Proprietary software generally costs money, and its distribution and modification are prohibited.	<p>End User License Agreement (EULA) EULA provides stipulations as to how a piece of software may be used within an organization. In general, you can't have same the same copy of the software running on two machines at the same time.</p> <p>Site License Agreement This license grants schools, universities, and large organizations permission to copy and distribute a piece of software to members within the institutional community for a negotiated price.</p>

The table continues on the next page...

What Software Licensing is

Type	Definition	Licensing Models
Freeware	Freeware, as the name suggests, does not cost any money.	Since freeware it is copyrighted and because most freeware authors hope for as large an audience as possible for their software, distribution rules tend to be more relaxed than proprietary. However, the authors still don't want you to modify or resell their software.
Shareware	Shareware can basically be considered trial or demo software.	You are allowed to use it for a time, but if you want to keep it, you are required to register and usually pay a licensing fee that carries similar restrictions to a EULA.
Open Source Software	Generally holds no licensing restrictions.	Open Source is distributed with the source code for modification, and generally there are very few restrictions on usage and distribution.