I’m a super adopter. I love trying out hundreds of new applications, social networks and devices every year. But not everybody wants to live the thousand-app lifestyle. For most people, the goal is to adopt the smallest number of tools necessary to work efficiently. That’s why my friends and colleagues often ask me which technologies I regard as must-haves: the tools and tactics that will make a big impact on their productivity without spending a lot of time or money getting up and running.

While I often find myself recommending specific technologies to people with particular challenges, there are some tools I suggest again and again, because they are useful to just about everybody. In many cases, they are tools that not only benefit individual users, but entire teams, by reducing inbox clutter and communications overhead. But in other cases, they are applications I suggest because I find it viscerally painful to see someone using Microsoft Office for something that could be better accomplished with a purpose-built note-taking or collaboration tool.

These eight technologies are at the top of the list: they’re the sites, programs and features I wish every computer user would start using today. Every single one of them is available in a free version, though you may well find yourself paying for premium features once you discover how useful they are. Here are the must-haves:

**Evernote:** Sure, I can spend a couple of minutes checking my email while you go digging through your hard drive, looking for that document you know is there somewhere. But if you used Evernote, all your notes would be in one place, because Evernote makes it easy to collect and organize your notes, whether they consist of the first draft you typed directly into an Evernote note, a business card you snapped and stored (so it’s now text searchable) or an online article you’ve clipped.

**Twitter:** It’s time to stop sending links via email. In a world of email overload, it’s a lot more useful to share your links in a way that doesn’t add to inbox clutter. If you’re sending them to colleagues, do it through Slack, Yammer, or a shared Evernote notebook for relevant clippings. If you want to share your discoveries with a broader network of friends and colleagues, post them on Twitter, using hashtags to get them on the radar of other people who are interested in the same subject. For example, Use the #dataviz hashtag to share that neat story about data visualization, #smallbiz to share that great article on entrepreneurship, or create a hashtag specifically for the colleagues who want to share resources.

**Doodle:** Oh, to see the end of email threads ensnaring us in long, painful conversations about how to schedule that group conference call! Doodle eliminates those threads by polling people on their available call or meeting windows, so you can arrive at a mutually convenient time without endless back-and-forth. If you find yourself setting up a call with more than two or three other people, please just Doodle it instead of emailing.

**Facebook lists:** Yes, your dog is adorable. But I follow you on Facebook because I value your professional insights and personal news. If you’re going to share more than one photo a week of your new puppy or cute kid, please use Facebook lists to target those updates to people who are fellow dog-lovers or who actually know your child. The same principle applies to professional news: as more and more people use Facebook for sharing industry updates and connecting with colleagues, think about which of your posts are only of interest to people in your specific company or field, and use lists to target those accordingly.

**Feedly:** There’s a specific headache I get when I see someone’s inbox cluttered with Google News alerts. There’s a better way: by using a newsreader like Feedly to subscribe to Google News searches, as well as favorite blogs and websites. A newsreader brings all those news sources to you in one place that offers an uncluttered desktop and mobile experience.
Skitch: When you need to quickly resize an image before sharing it, opening Photoshop is overkill; when you need to quickly save a screenshot for future reference, your computer’s built-in screen capture offers no guarantee that you’ll ever find that image again. Skitch solves both these problems, making it easier to share an error message with tech support, grab a product listing you want to save or share, or store an online receipt. Sadly, the Windows version of Skitch was killed off, but Mac users can still use it.

TripIt: It breaks my heart when I discover that I could have seen a distant friend or colleague when we were both in the same city at the same time. TripIt can spare us that heartbreak: connect to the people you always want to see, and it will tell you whenever your travel brings you to the same place. Just as useful, it turns all the travel bookings you receive by email into a handy, accessible list of travel plans you can share and refer to.

Google Docs: If I never have to use Word’s “Track Changes” feature again, it will be too soon: there’s nothing like sending the same document to three different colleagues, and then struggling to reconcile three sets of feedback. Google Docs was meant to save us from that torture by making it possible for everyone to see the same document and add their changes and suggestions in the same place. Yet even though many people use Google Docs on occasion, sharing Word documents is still too often the default. Please, fellow humans: let’s embrace the power of online document sharing to do our collaborative document editing in a form that spares all of us the pain of figuring out who suggested which changes.

In a world in which so much of our working lives and online experiences are interdependent, we need to recognize that our individual use of online software affects other people, too. Embrace the power of online productivity, and you aren’t just doing yourself a favor: you’re helping out everyone you interact with.

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