



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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**W**elcome to this first edition of Cool Tech. Each quarter I'll be bringing you cool open-source software and projects from the web. There's an entire world out there with some great software and projects that are free or real inexpensive to implement.

Ideally, I plan to expose you to open-source packages that are easy to install and get running. Initially, I'll cover LAMPP: Linux, Apache, PHP and Perl. Don't worry, there'll be plenty of stuff for Windows too.

I've been playing with some of these packages for the last five years. By day I work as an actuary, but by night I'm a Webmaster. I started out as a Microsoft guy who only used Microsoft products, but as their software started getting more and more expensive I started looking for alternatives. I kind of stumbled into the open-source world.

I got started by buying a real cheap Web site on E-Bay. For \$25 I had a website that was up and running. I didn't plan to start programming in PHP, but the person handling my Web site wanted to charge \$50 to write a simple little script. That seemed a little steep to me, so I did some snooping around the Web and found a simple little script that did the job very nicely, for free. That launched me into the world of PHP programming.

Buying a Web site on E-Bay is a good way to get a Web presence fast and inexpensively. Here's a link if you'd like to snoop around: <http://business.listings.ebay.com/Businesses-for-Sale>. Look for the Businesses for Sale sec-

tion. Click on the Internet Businesses & Websites link.

My first rule of programming: Steal as much code as possible before starting a project. Okay, I guess it's not really stealing, you're just freely copying somebody else's code that they've made available. A great place for free scripts is this Web site:

<http://www.hotscripts.com>

Hotscripts has tons of great scripts for PHP, Perl, Python and other programming languages. It's a great place to snoop around.

OK, let's jump in and look at a couple of interesting open-source packages that will instantly (almost) create a Web site for you.

In order to get a Web presence fast, these two open-source packages that are based on PHP and MySQL will do the trick: Wordpress and Joomla. The combination of PHP and MySQL makes these packages very powerful and easy to install. As a general rule, look for packages with this combination when first starting out. PHP and MySQL are generally provided on Linux servers rather than a Windows server.

Just so you can see what these types of Web sites look like, here are links to my Web sites:

Wordpress: <http://www.1913intel.com>

Joomla: <http://www.myseattle.us>

When you go to the race track it's always a little more interesting if you bet a little money.

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(continued on page 16)

So too with working on the Web. In trying to figure out what project I'm going to do, I find it more interesting to try and make a little money. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. 1913 Intel makes about \$120/month, but the My Seattle site makes almost nothing. I guess I should keep my day job.

These two packages create dynamically generated, database driven Web sites that are fully searchable. They are very popular and well supported by their respective community of developers. Both are Content Management Systems (CMSs), but Wordpress is typically used as a blogging system. Once the packages are installed correctly, all content is stored in a MySQL database. Pages are generated on-the-fly based on the database content. The look and feel of the Web sites is based on themes or templates. You can slap in a new theme and completely change the Web site. The actual content is not affected by the template.

If you haven't worked on the Web before then you'll need a Web host. I use and can recommend Dreamhost ([www.dreamhost.com](http://www.dreamhost.com)). It provides PHP, Perl and MySQL. It uses Debian (Think Debbie and Ian) Linux on their servers. It's inexpensive and very good. I use GoDaddy ([www.godaddy.com](http://www.godaddy.com)) to register my domain names.

Typically, you'll register a domain name. Then you'll go back to your Web host and add the name to your list of Web sites. Your Web host will then provide you a list of two or three servers. You have to go back to your domain name provider to put in the address for these servers. That's how everyone gets pointed to the correct Web site.

You're going to need an FTP program and a text editor to get started. I use FileZilla as my FTP program, and ConText as my text editor. They're free so the price is right. They're for the Windows environment.

I typically edit programs on my PC using ConText, then I FTP the program(s) to my Web site using FileZilla.

One thing you should know about most Web hosts, they typically provide quickie installs of favorite packages. Dreamhost, for example, will install Wordpress and Joomla for you. You will just have to configure them.

Before you install a database-driven Web site package, you need to have a MySQL database. Stop! I know what you're thinking. The thought of dealing with a database causes you to freeze up. Well, I'm here to tell you that dealing with a database is a piece of cake. Once you've created it then you're done. It's the packages that you will be installing that will interact with the database.

Your Web host will usually have some kind of program that creates databases. Just ask them if you can't figure it out. You will need to write down the following items associated with the database:

1. Database (Db) name
2. Host (95 percent of the time this is Local-host)
3. Db User name
4. Db Password

Every host I've used has a program called phpMyAdmin for the administration of MySQL

databases. That means you can mess around in your database without having to know any SQL code. However, I seriously doubt that you will ever have to go into the database to mess around.

Once you've created a database you're ready to install Wordpress or Joomla.

Here's a link about installing Wordpress:

[http://codex.wordpress.org/Installing\\_WordPress](http://codex.wordpress.org/Installing_WordPress)

Here's how the automatic install works at DreamHost:

<http://www.scriptful.com/2007/05/28/how-to-install-wordpress-22-on-dreamhost/>

Here's a video on the installation of Wordpress:

<http://revver.com/video/179449/how-to-install-wordpress-blog-hassle-free/>

Here are two links about installing Joomla:

<http://www.batractive.com/Joomla/Joomla-Install-small.pdf>

<http://www.joomlatribune.com/joomla-tutorials/how-to-install-joomla-cms.html>

The default theme for Wordpress or template for Joomla is pretty boring, so I would start looking for new ones.

Wordpress (Themes): <http://themes.wordpress.net/>

Joomla (Templates):

<http://www.joomla.org/content/blogcategory/19/51/>

<http://www.joomla24.com/>

How to install a theme or template:

Wordpress (Themes):

[http://php.about.com/od/phpbloggingsoftware/qt/wordpress\\_theme.htm](http://php.about.com/od/phpbloggingsoftware/qt/wordpress_theme.htm)

Joomla (Templates):

*(continued on page 18)*

<http://www.themestock.com/InstallingJoomlaTemplates.php>

How to use Wordpress/Joomla:

Wordpress: <http://www.siteground.com/tutorials/wordpress/index.htm>

Joomla: <http://www.sitebuilder.ws/tutorials/joomla/joomla-tutorials/>

Before I go I want to give you a link to a cool FREE package that will let you set up a Web server on your PC. You can then run Apache, PHP, Perl and MySQL on your own machine at home. There is a Windows version and a Linux version: Win-AMPP or LAMPP. The name of the package is XAMPP. Here's the link:

<http://www.apachefriends.org/en/xampp.html>

It comes with the following items:

Apache, MySQL, PHP + PEAR, Perl, mod\_php, mod\_perl, mod\_ssl, OpenSSL, phpMyAdmin, Webalizer, Mercury Mail Transport System for Win32 and NetWare Systems v3.32, Ming, Jp-Graph, FileZilla FTP Server, mcrypt, eAccelerator, SQLite, and WEB-DAV + mod\_auth\_mysql.

This package is the greatest thing since sliced bread. Really! I will talk about it more next time.

Here's some documentation about XAMPP:

<http://www.apachefriends.org/en/faq-xampp.html>

[http://andymelton.net/tutorials/xampp\\_server.pdf](http://andymelton.net/tutorials/xampp_server.pdf) 