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Amazing what you can do with a little electronic duct tape



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A great story came out of the international space station program the other day.

It seems that the kitchen table the Russians made was too heavy, so it wasn't taken up. But the astronauts on board were frustrated because they didn't have a table. So the crew discretely built one out of spare parts.

This must have been no small task, given that their daily activities are regimented by ground control and that there isn't a lot of extra stuff lying around your average space station.

They did manage to build a table, and paying homage to one of mankind's greatest inventions, they covered the top with duct tape.

It's a prime example of making do with what you have, and there's a lesson in this for anyone who deals with the Internet.

There's a lot of electronic duct tape lying around in the form of Web services that are often free for the taking.

I recently used some of this electronic duct tape to build an on-line discussion board for my high school reunion — a place where old chums could share stories from the past.

You may have used an on-line discussion board yourself. They are areas on the Internet where people can join a topic area, then read and post contributions to many different subcategories. Discussion boards exist for virtually every topic, from the serious to the ridiculous.

Creating your own discussion board is relatively easy because there are many services on-line. All of them are easy to use, straightforward, and free or bear a minimal fee. (The only challenge is that sometimes they can disappear overnight, due to the continuing struggles of the dot-com sector.)

I visited Ezboard (ezboard.com) and within half an hour, I had the whole thing set up with a variety of topics that people could post to.

There are countless other on-line services you can use for business or personal projects. Need an on-line, customer chat button? Hit HumanClick.com. Need to add a sophisticated search button to a Web site? Try Atomz.com. Want a cool "headline" feature on your page that gives a list of rolling titles? Visit Riada.com and download its headline program.

Interested in adding a "permission-based marketing" capability to your Web site? That's the folks at YesMail.com. Want to share photos on-line? Clubphoto is one such services (www.clubphoto.com).

These are but a small sampling of the thousands of useful tools to be found on-line.

There are plenty of lists you can access to get a sense of what's out there: Try the CoWorking Institute and look at its "technology tools" section (coworking.com/html/tools.html), for Web services or software that you can use for collaborative work on-line. Or travel to Cnet (webware.cnet.com) for another extensive list of useful resources.

Whether for personal or business use, you can expand your digital survivor skills immeasurably by learning to find and use the range of electronic duct tape to be found on-line.

After all, the astronauts figured out how to do something pretty remarkable with very little.

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