AvanTech, Free / Libre / Open Source software, and WikiSuite: what are they?

Launched in 1999, AvanTech is an IT business that offers WikiSuite, an integrated communication, collaboration and commerce open source solution that covers most needs of businesses and organizations. AvanTech offers both *out of the box* and customized solutions such as intranets, for example.

Among free / Open Source software, WikiSuite comprises Openfire, Tiki Wiki CMS Groupware, Syncthing and Xibo. **WikiSuite is the most comprehensive and integrated Free / Libre / Open Source enterprise software suite**.

All these programs are free software, which means that their source code is public and anyone can freely use, study, modify and redistribute it (see FLOSS). These applications are developed by large communities including companies, government agencies, and individual developers. To illustrate, some 300 individuals and companies have participated in the development of Tiki Wiki CMS Groupware. This essential component of the suite has been downloaded over one million times. (Recall that *groupware* is software designed to help people involved in a common task to achieve their goals.) Tiki Wiki CMS Groupware is a web application, released as Free / Libre / Open Source software, used to manage websites, e-communities, intranets, and so on, and which offers many features out-of-the-box, covering a large number of use cases. It is a Wiki **and** a CMS **and** a groupware **and** a database web app builder.

Tiki Wiki CMS Groupware and others software of the WikiSuite have been deliberately grouped for greater interoperability and security. The result? The WikiSuite is particularly interesting because it offers the features that 80% of people in an organization use 80% of the time (collaboration, productivity, publication, etc.). Features include: email + website + CMS (content management system) + CRM (customer relationship management) + commercial + document management webinar + desktop sharing telephony and instant messaging + video management.

Why does AvanTech choose Free / Libre / Open Source Software (FLOSS)?

Software development is very expensive and often takes longer than anticipated. FLOSS offers many benefits.

1. Since the source code is available, we can adapt it to our specific needs. Since we are using tested software as a base, we reduce the risk of delays and unexpected development costs.
2. Because a very large community uses it and contributes to its development, we only have to support a fraction of its development costs.
3. This allows a small company like AvanTech to offer a service level more typical of much larger companies.
4. AvanTech is committed to contributing back to the community and has been an important contributor to the success of Tiki Wiki CMS Groupware.
5. AvanTech is a member of the Open Invention Network.
6. See more benefits here: Benefits of Free/Libre/Open Source software.

Free? So I don't have to pay, and why would I pay for something I can have for free?

It is true that you can download the software at no cost. And you don't pay for a license to use the software. But related services typically can be and are paid for, such as installation, support, training, bug fixing, feature development and a range of other services included with our packages. Well, AvanTech's job is specifically to provide hosting, upgrades and support so you can focus on updating your content!

Please see our Free Libre Open Source software services.

OK, so anyone could start a company supporting this free software and compete directly with AvanTech?

Yes, and this is in AvanTech's interest. And, it's in the interest of AvanTech's clients. The more people use and develop Tiki Wiki CMS Groupware, the better it gets. An explicit goal of AvanTech is to increase the number of available careers in Free / Libre / Open Source services.

For clients, having multiple supplier options protects them from "vendor lock-in". It can seem counterintuitive, but this business environment of AvanTech is an example of coopetition. For AvanTech, it's one more source of contribution to improve and give visibility to Tiki. AvanTech has several such partners engaged in similar work. In short, if you would like to start your own Tiki-based consulting business, please contact AvanTech and/or the Tiki community.

Where does my data live?

Where you want! It can be 100% on premises, 100% on rented servers, or a hybrid approach. During the analysis phase, we'll discuss the options and you decide. For example, if you have high-speed internet with a fixed IP address, it can all be in your office.

How will I know if the software is good enough for our needs?

We can provide demonstration accounts on running systems. A lot of testing and analysis has been invested in selecting all the components and how they all will interact. It is possible that features here and there of other apps might be better. But the grass is always greener on the other side, and some other features will be weaker. WikiSuite's weak spot as of 2019 are 1- Accounting / ERP and 2- Email. The shopping cart is still undergoing improvement as well, but Tiki's features are quite good to excellent for most other use cases.

What if I need a specific feature to be better?

Ok, let's talk! We want to offer the best possible solution to you and all our other clients (current and future). Tell us what is wrong and how it should be better. Showing us another app that does it better is the most straightforward way of explaining it.

Once we agree that a feature is a generally useful one and that it *should* be in the software, let's coordinate with that project. Is it on the roadmap? Is there an add-on that handles this? etc. Often, desired features are not yet 100% finished because they never got to the top of the list of priorities.

So let's make it happen! This is FLOSS so you can fund this enhancement (or supply your team if you have coders with time available). We can ask other interested parties to co-fund as well.

Do I need to use everything?

No. If you prefer to keep your mail system, etc. it's quite alright. However, we can't commit to proper support for these systems. So if it works well, keep it. But if there are issues, you'll know what we'll be recommending 🙂

What are the limits in terms of user accounts, disk space, RAM, number of pages, etc.?

- The Packages we propose are designed for associations and businesses of fewer than 50 employees, but these organizations can have large communities (clients, members, volunteers, etc.) of hundreds or even thousands.
- In terms of number of pages, disk space, etc., there is no set limit. If you feel your project has unusual needs, please let us know and we'll find a solution.

Can you take over projects initiated by others?

Sure. This happens often when the project goes haywire, then the client decides to get experience on board 🙂

Can you support our existing software?

Perhaps, but not as part of one of the packages. This would be via a bank of hours, and we may not have the required level of expertise. Contact us to discuss.

How can you have such a broad service offering?

It's true that very few will offer such diverse services. A typical web agency will make a nice web site for you but, if you ask them to also handle file sync, shared calendars or video-conferencing, they will give you a puzzled stare and ask something like "why don't you use Skype like we do?"

Web agencies also tend not to think long term (how the systems will evolve, etc.). In some cases, they come

from the print world and they are really good at making something awesome at one point in time. In some cases, they will just want to make a new website every few years, but not care about about historical information on your site, and will just break all your URLs willy-nilly.

Some tech support companies will care about your systems and software, but not so much about your data and business processes. They will set up your printer and make your backups. But they are not too interested in questions like "is your team efficient?"

Since 1999, we have seen all kinds of needs. Most of the time, these needs were resolved by adding features to Tiki; this is a major contributing factor to Tiki becoming the Free / Libre / Open Source Web Application with the most built-in features. However, for some other needs, we were unwilling or unable to offer a solution. Nonetheless, these needs remained in a virtual wishlist and this prompted the birth of the WikiSuite project.

Since we couldn't offer an integrated solution (within or interoperable with Tiki), either the need was never addressed or it was addressed with various tools that we couldn't support. Either they were not FLOSS or it wasn't possible to have proper interoperability (for example, there was too much overlap). Also, since it would end up as a somewhat unique solution, we couldn't offer the benefits of the usual economies of scale and scope that we can implement for our usual projects.

It's sad when the client is picking a solution that has issues, like price, lock-in, lack of interoperability, etc., but you can't really propose an alternative that you are confident enough to take responsibility for.

When we suggest a solution, we don't want to be like these two consultants:

How much will it cost to fix a bug?

Please see Estimates.

How can I work for AvanTech?

Please see Employment.