

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Helping Hands (and Mice)

By Douglas E. Welch

Much of the work I do can best be described as “computer coaching.” I am often called in to assist someone in learning a particular program or task, whether it be word processing, spreadsheets, or dealing with digital pictures for the first time.

Over the years, I have discovered that one of the best ways to place clients on the right track is to engage them in some form of pleasant activity that can be used to teach basic computer skills. Such activities reduce the level of stress, and allow users to gain a confidence with their computer that they may never have otherwise experienced.

Finding a way to combine computers and play can be a way to keep your clients coming back for more, while also building your client list from referrals.

The Quick Six

In my 16 years of computer training work, I have found six specific tasks to be on the computer user’s hit parade of computer skills. These tasks are a great way to introduce general concepts to new or timid users, while giving them a sense of immediate gratification. By the end of your first session, your clients will be able to do something concrete and useful, even if they are only scratching the surface of their computer’s power.

Printing envelopes: You might not consider this task to be number one, but I have found that some users, especially those who create a lot of paper correspondence, find this one feature immensely useful. Perhaps they volunteer to send out a regular newsletter for their reading circle, or simply write a lot of letters to relatives and friends. Printing envelopes seems to be one feature that allows users to feel in control of their computer, sometimes for the first time.

Sending e-mail: Introducing a user to e-mail can be an extremely enjoyable experience for both of you. Many people, especially those with children and grandchildren far away, are amazed at the simplicity of e-mail and how it lets them stay in touch. Grandparents can feel more a part of their grandchildren’s lives even when they live

across the country.

Digital cameras: Helping users integrate their digital cameras into their lives opens yet another door. I recently helped a client purchase, install and learn how to use a new digital camera. Now, only four weeks later, he is showing me amazing photos of his recent trip through Europe, and using online services to make prints for his family. He found that using a digital camera greatly increased his enjoyment of the trip, as it removed worries about fogged or destroyed film due to the recent increases in airport security. The camera also allowed him to share his photos with many more people than ever before.

Searching the Web: One of the first places I take a new Internet user is Google (www.google.com). This search engine opens the door of the Internet, and quickly shows new users the wealth of information the Internet can provide. This is also one of the first places I go when teaching my Beginning Internet class at my local library. People are amazed at the information you can find on the Internet, and Google is a phenomenal source.

Word Processing: In many cases, clients have a book inside them just waiting to get out. This can be the “Great American Novel” or simply a family history to share with their children. Whatever the project, introducing them to the power of a word processor gives them the ability to get their ideas down on paper, perhaps for the first time. And it involves the most basic, yet most necessary, “tricks” of any program—New, Open, Save, Print, etc.

Financial management: Helping a client get a handle on her personal finances can be one of the most rewarding tasks of all. Whether it is a new graduate or a retiree with many investments, software such as Intuit’s Quick-en or MS Money can help people keep their financial lives on track.

Teaching your clients any of these six tasks can be the beginning of a wonderful and profitable relationship. It establishes a level of trust with your client that you are truly giving them the keys to their own success.

In fact, every time you work with a client, there should be some concrete result, some task, some product that the user produces on his own. For me, this is the only way to ensure a long and happy relationship with your clients. You will find that developing these relationships is one of the keys to developing a long and healthy high-tech career. □