

COMPUTER SKILLS 101

Computer technology is constantly changing, making it a challenge for the mature workforce to keep up with the times.

BY JEFF LEVY

Well, it's finally happened. You've successfully gotten 50 or more birthdays under your belt, and you've come to grips with where you are and where you want to go at this point in your life. One thing is certain ... you intend to keep working at some sort of a job, or even become a member of the self-employed club of America. The problem?

Your computer skills are sorely lacking or behind the times, and it's a whole new ballgame out there. Computer technology changes faster than the most recent polling data a politician reads.

There are plenty of younger people out there looking for work who have the computer skills the job market requires, and somehow, you've got to get caught up with the times. It's a goal you can reach. It's within your grasp as long as you're willing to put in the time and effort. You don't have to be a Windows wienie or a computer cream puff. You can move forward and up the ladder. Here's what you need to know.

Personal and work computers are, for the most part, divided into two distinct camps. The majority of these computers, about 95% of them, use the Microsoft Windows operating system, while the remaining 5% or so use the Apple Mac operating system. Which one is better? It really doesn't matter. The fact is that the Windows-based computer is king of the hill, right or wrong. The good news is that if you can navigate through the Windows operating system, most, if not all, of the programs you will be asked to work with, use the same interface, meaning they look and function alike. Did I say good news? That's GREAT news.

Think of a computer as a car. The engine and transmission in your car is like the operating system program in your computer. It allows the computer to function and take commands from you. The driver in your car is like the applications program in your computer. To go to San Diego, you drive south. To run word processing, you run Microsoft Word.

A computer is no more complicated than a large desk. Picture a work desk. It has a center drawer with a lock and

key, and drawers on either side. The top of the desk is empty. To do your work, you'd unlock the center drawer, giving you access to the other drawers, and you would take from those drawers your pencils, papers, rulers and work materials. And where would you place these items? On the desktop. That's exactly how your computer works.

The RAM or memory in your computer is the desktop, where the work is done. The more RAM your computer has, the larger your desktop and the more things you can pile on it at the same time. The hard disk, CD drive, floppy drive, etc. are your drawers where information is stored.



Once you understand exactly how a computer works, it's easy to make the computer do your bidding.

So where can you acquire the computer skills you need? Community colleges offer night and weekend classes in Windows and in several Windows-based programs. Local computer clubs offer expert help for specific questions and problems. And don't be afraid to ask your kids, or even your grand kids, for a bit of time to help you brush up on your computer skills.

There are several well-written training manuals available for Windows and application programs. Don't be afraid to pick up and leaf through several of these books. See which ones are easy to use, easy to understand and you'll know which ones to buy.

Sharpen and hone your computer skills and your work potential only gets better. 