

Computer Skills for the Information Age, Part 2

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Surviving in today's technology-driven work environment requires computer literacy skills. This translates into having a basic understanding of computer hardware and software, of popular operating systems like Windows and NT and applications such as browsers, word processors, spreadsheets, databases and presentation graphics. Being competent at one's job includes the ability to master technology basics and use these basics to increase productivity, solve problems and use various job specific software applications.

Keeping computer skills current requires an investment in professional development. Fortunately, there are many resources ranging from self-paced learning tools to formal education. Inevitably you will find tools to meet your time and budget constraints. But before you invest in professional development tools, you will need to assess your current computer skills. Assessing your skills is a practical way to identify gaps and is the first step in building your technology-learning plan.

Developing Computer Literacy

In last month's column (ADVANCE, May 29, 2000), I provided a computer literacy inventory checklist to use in assessing your computer literacy.

Five basic computing areas were reviewed: basic operations and concepts; file management; Internet; electronic mail; and word processing.

The purpose of the computer inventory checklist is to assess your computer skills by identifying gaps in your computing skill set. This month, we wrap up the computer literacy inventory checklist and review five additional areas:

1. Spreadsheets
2. Presentation tools
3. Database management
4. Multimedia
5. Maintenance and troubleshooting

Computer Literacy Inventory Check List

I. Spreadsheets

- Create a simple spreadsheet with rows, columns and headings
- Move and scroll through a spreadsheet
- Insert and delete rows and columns
- Enter, edit, format and delete the contents of cells
- Change column width and row height
- Use the Format Cells menu option to format numbers, align cell content, change fonts, add borders and

patterns

- Create a formula using arithmetic operators such as + - / * % and cell references
- Create a formula using functions (SUM and AVERAGE) and apply it to a range of cells
- Copy values and formulas within columns and rows
- Select a range of cells and create a bar, pie and line graph
- Create charts, tables, and graphs
- Insert tables, graphs and spreadsheets into a word processing document
- Manipulate values in an existing spreadsheet to solve a problem
- Using page setup to set page orientation, change margins, add headers and footers, add grid lines, and select rows to repeat at top of spreadsheet
- Preview documents in page break preview mode and change location of page breaks.
- Print selected areas of spreadsheets, active worksheets and workbooks (multiple worksheets within one file)

II. Presentation Tools

- Create presentations using wizards, design templates or blank presentation layouts
- Create slides using standard layouts and designs
- Modify standard layouts and design templates
- Edit slides and insert slides from other presentations
- Format text fonts, add bullets or numbers
- Use spell checker to check for typos and misspelled words
- Add objects such as clip art, pictures, video clips and sound
- Add animations and transitions
- Include tables and charts in your presentation
- Move and re-size objects
- Navigate between slides and switch between different views (slide, outline, notes)
- Re-sequence slides
- Create notes and handouts
- Set up a slide show

III. Database Management

- Understand the uses of relational databases and the need for data definitions, data dictionaries and data modeling
- Find and open existing databases
- Understand the “tabs” and the type of data in each view (tables, queries, forms, reports, macros, modules)
- Create a simple database
- Understand Table design
- Field names and modifying properties (field size, input mask, caption)
- Select data types (text, number, yes/no, currency)
- Add descriptions to fields to be viewed on the status bar
- Insert and delete rows
- Save and name tables
- Create primary and secondary keys
- Familiarity with different views such as design and form views, as well as icons associated with these views
- Perform queries
- Add new queries by using design view or the simple query wizard
- Choose tables and/or queries to perform a query
- Add and remove fields to the query builder

- Modify the query view by sorting (ascending to descending) or hiding fields
- Use criteria to filter or extract information from the database
- Create a database report that meets specific criteria (report with columns that includes only specific data)

IV. Multimedia

- Play CDs in CD-ROM player
- Install Windows 98 desktop themes
- View streaming data such as digital audio, DVD or live broadcasts
- Modify Windows 95 or 98 multimedia properties
- Use a scanner and associated software to scan documents and pictures
- Use painting and drawing tools to create and edit images and graphics and to view and edit scanned pictures

V. Maintenance and troubleshooting

- Check cable connections (power, network cables, monitor, mouse, etc.) (Don't overlook the obvious!)
- Clean computer components (monitor, keyboard, mouse)
- Diagnose and correct common hardware/software problems using self-help resources (manuals, online help, windows troubleshooter) and or contacting technical support to assist you
- Install or upgrade an application
- Create operating system back up disks
- Add new hardware such as scanners, mouse, keyboards, monitors, palm pilot, modem, etc.
- Remove programs that are not used via add/remove programs feature
- Use and maintain an up-to-date anti-virus program to check programs and files for viruses
- Select and print to a designated printer on the network
- Trouble shoot basic printer problems such as paper jams, replacing printer cartridges, adding paper
- Perform basic system maintenance using system tools such as scan disk, disk cleanup, disk defragmenter. (Start Programs; Accessories; System Tools)
- Upgrade memory by installing additional random access memory (RAM)

Based on the results of your assessment, develop your technology-learning plan by following these simple steps:

1. List the basic computer skills you want to reinforce
2. List the basic computer skills you have not yet mastered
3. Identify the resources you will use to gain the skills you want to master
4. Identify a time frame for gaining these skills
5. Implement your plan
6. Apply what you learn (use it or lose it!)

Mapping out your technology plan should be a professional priority. Health care technology is progressing at Internet speed and is guaranteed to change the way health information management (HIM) professionals perform their work. Being technically prepared will keep you marketable and ready to adapt to the ever-changing use of technology in the workplace.

References and Acknowledgements

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