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It's Time to Upgrade Your Technology Skills

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MASTERING THE ART
CAREER DEVELOPMENT

It's time to upgrade your technology skills

Technology, just like time, can be a friend or a foe, depending on how you treat it.

No doubt, technology has been good to journalism. From typewriters to computers, from encyclopedias to the World Wide Web and from film to digital, we have seen marvelous changes the past few decades in how we work.

Learning how to maximize your technology resources will help you remain competitive and could give you skills that make you more valuable in your newsroom.

Technology expert Peggy Duncan has written a few books aimed at busy people who want to learn quickly how to manage technology. Duncan says on her Web site (www.duncanresource.com) that 80 percent of the people know less than 20 percent of their software's capabilities.

Challenge yourself to know more than most in the world of technology. As I have mentioned before, getting up to speed is your responsibility, so exercise initiative.

How do you know if you are behind the times? Here are a few scenarios to consider:

- If you're constantly asking your tech savvy co-worker how to escape a computer snafu, it's time to get up to speed. It's really time if she picks up the phone or heads to the bathroom when she sees you approach.
- If you envy how a handout looks with its boxes, shadings and various typefaces, it's time to get up to speed.
- If you think a satellite phone is something meant only for superheros, it's time to get up to speed.
- If you think Google is simply a sound that babies make, it's time to get up to speed.

Still need incentive? Here are two small examples of how you can be a more effective journalist by using technology. If you're a reporter or an editor, imagine taking a source list of a few teachers that you catch up with by phone every now and then and expanding it to teachers all over the state

CARLA'S PICKS

• Find out how your reporting can be more powerful with the help of computers. Attend a Computer-Assisted Reporting Boot Camp by Investigative Reporters & Editors Inc. The training is open to print, broadcast and freelance journalists and students and ranges in cost from \$500 to \$1,000. One course is scheduled for May 15-20, 2005. See www.ire.org for more details.

• "Word 2002 for Dummies" by Dan Gookin, Cost: \$21.99.

• "Conquer E-mail Overload with Better Habits, Etiquette, and Outlook Tips and Tricks" by Peggy Duncan. Cost: \$24.97.

• Visit <http://webopedia.com>. This website bills itself as the "only online dictionary and search engine you need for computer and internet technology definitions."

that you reach out to weekly.

Technology can help you do that. How? Get the database from a teachers association and transport it into an e-mail program that helps you gather story ideas.

Or, become a fly on the wall in chat rooms that attract the people you want to reach. What are they concerned about? That could lead you to stories and to sources that go beyond officialdom.

Still doubting you could ever learn to harness technology into your circle of friends?

• Take a class on the wonders of Microsoft programs — Outlook, Excel and Word. Many

times you can find a class like this at a community college. I took a class several years ago on Microsoft programs. It was money well spent, and it's fun to know simple tricks. And, yes, it was tax-deductible.

• Ask someone in your newsroom who is computer savvy to offer a class. That person might tackle such things as how to use a software program, how to do research on the Internet or how to tackle the most common problems experienced by staff. This is a way to incorporate some low-cost training in the newsroom.

• If you recognize that your skills and your lingo are deficient, turn to our friend the Internet. I like <http://webopedia.com>. By reading that site, I learned the difference between the World Wide Web and the Internet, which are often used interchangeably and, thus, inaccurately. If I ever need to define virus, worm and Trojan horse, as they relate to computers, I can turn to this Web site for definitions. Plus, you can also find new terms and pronunciations.

Ok, now you are smart and sound smart, here are some tips on preventing technology from overtaking your world.

Just unplug. Sure you can take your laptop home with you and check it every few minutes for e-mail or updates, but why? Let the newsroom know that you're available by telephone if something urgent happens. Unplugging helps lower your stress levels and gives you time for life balance.

Embrace voice mail. Voice mail is your friend. You don't have to answer every call at that very moment.

Slow your addiction to e-mail. Limit the number of times you read or send e-mail. If someone you want to communicate with works a few feet away, get out of your seat and go talk with them. Leaving your computer behind is not only good for your relationships, it also can be good for your waistline.

Limit your time on the Web. Figure out what information you want or need and give yourself a certain amount of time to find it. Hop on and hop off. The Web can be one of the biggest time wasters anywhere. It's like a Lays potato chip; you can't just do one search.

The bottom line is that technology helps us do our work better and faster than ever before, and that's a very good thing. We have to learn to harness its capabilities and make sure it doesn't become a source of harassment. It can be done.



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