

'A guide to the Internet City'

Overview

Introductions to the Internet and digital devices are focused on the devices and approach of 'this is useful', not necessarily about personal goals.

Not being goal focused is also the problem with using computers and digital devices. The systems are never geared to start with choosing a goal, just performing tasks to procedural completion. It makes things hard to learn if you want to be goal orientated and have used a shovel and pick all of your working life instead of being an office worker. The example maybe flawed but there are many other occupations that have not used computers for many years. As a child I was always amazed at the quality of mental arithmetic that the ladies at the till in the supermarket exhibited.

The Internet City was created as a mind experiment to extend the metaphor of being online as a complete experience and overlay of the processes in the UK society of the early 21st century. The latter is potentially problematic as government and governance across the country is highly variable as is access to consistently high quality internet speeds, which the former rely upon.

With these aspects in mind, the course was developed as an attempt to address the ongoing problems of community ICT training and provide a framework for a learner centred approach to ongoing issues:

- Mindset and attitude
- Physical, sensory and cognitive efficacy
- Lack of structure and method
- Mismatch of goals/expectations
- Unsuitability and ownership of device
- Low level of ownership, lacking in appropriate set up
- Practice outside of session

Issues around lack of finances can't really be addressed within the given training remit, although it must be mentioned that it can't also be rectified with good advice often times, there is a need for purchasing knowledge and support. Assistance is always available, though its value is a variable too. The sessions are aimed at people with their own (or a loan for the course period) device to reflect and use the session to

inform their learning. These issues do have offsets in the shape of friends, family and never forgetting the good work of libraries.

“We love our friends and family, but their digital devices and advice are highly variable”

Types of ‘City Visitor’

As learners have historically (in my years of service delivery) compared their lacking with young people or members of friends and family, it was useful to sidestep these comparisons with categories for themselves to place themselves in outside of their comparative reach; the categories are broad enough to encompass the nuanced differences in level of understanding and skills, but reflects a pragmatic approach to using online services, as would a person working in a city would observe regular, infrequent and different passers by.

New to the area - ‘Newbie’

Newbie

Need to sort out device, more difficulties than successes, so doesn’t get into the city too much. The city is filled with people speaking a different language, not feeling too comfortable either, seems like unnecessary stress.

Frequent
Flyer

Visiting the ‘city’ now and again, managing to negotiate a device. Not quite confident in getting around on their own but has a go occasionally. Needs help dealing with problems

Steady
Driver

In the city most days; picking up, replying + sending email and getting to websites. Needs some navigation help now and again. Some skills in dealing with problems but would like to be more confident.

Digital
Dynamo

Spotting spam, dealing with email without batting an eyelid and thinks about where to go before starting off. Finds answers to problems, and doesn’t get taken in too easily by fake news or when things go wrong!

The top ‘level’ is not aimed at the target audience at all, but as a potential goal or to indicate that a visitor may be undervaluing their skills and knowledge. There is no ‘wrong’, but what someone is comfortably capable of.

Mindset before knowledge

The course attempts at various points to connect learners with their device in a meaningful manner. Each session starts with screens being turned off and each device is cleaned. This process alone can inform the session guide in terms of people being able to lock their device screen as a starting point and offer a brief

respite from their general frustration. Later on, visitors are assisted with finding and logging the relevant details of their device which would assist a technical person.

Session participants are encouraged in attempting to learn what is important to them, and frame what their goals so they can engage others effectively to get appropriate support - as more confident 'city visitors' they will more likely attempt to resolve their issues, on their own or with support.

Wayfinding and 'Stopping before you get too lost'

As a person coming to a new city, without a guide or a map to an area, forays start with a 'local look about' to determine what is in the vicinity, then to expand steadily; of course the other options in city exploration are to find places of interest and getting a map. As the Internet City offers no real map (it would be a 'semantic map'?). A visitor navigates firstly through negotiation with their device (their window to the city), their requirements for communication with friends/family, entertainment, news, education, civic engagement, shopping etc. Very much reflection of the activities undertaken in a city.

Each session attempts to reframe the jargon and technology into a format that engages with their motivations, way finding using existing knowledge, defined social and corporate brands. The value of stopping, going back and reflection before actually taking the journey is taken very seriously, as part of the health and safety aspect of the guided sessions – hygiene and posture are regular session reminders. Notebooks and pens are actively encouraged as multi use digital diary, problem /success log and repository of useful information for ownership.

Getting the little things right – dealing with challenges

Each session topic generates a challenge sheet, a series of defined challenges (distilled from years of hearing common themes) with empty options for the learner to fill in their own and also to insert options for what they can accomplish. This creates the opportunity for learners to appreciate that common problems are not isolated to themselves, problems can be analysed and resolved if given appropriate thought and action. The challenge sheet also gives avenues for questions, discussion and personal research. Time is given to the learner to address one of the challenges which fulfils an aspect of support which many learners need in lieu (or alongside) of structured training as their personal goals may not be directly addressed in any session.

Health and Safety

Aspects of general use and ownership are central to visiting the Internet City guide sessions, with health and safety an important feature. It also is a useful leverage for awareness of not just ergonomics and posture, but also mental health.

Training delivery

Sessions are re-badged as '2 hour visits'- a whole group exercise, where everyone is along for the ride. The visits start with a presentation about the overarching topic, in the style of a tour guide; not too much information but also giving context. Questions are encouraged but not allowed to detract from the topic at hand. An initial activity is introduced depending on topic, with appropriate reference materials for assisting

the goal. Challenge sheets are then distributed and then individual challenges are assisted. Presentations are emailed to participants in the next day.

Sessions

Introduction to the Internet City

Talking about the early internet (telegram, pre-broadband), data, Wi-Fi and addresses – all parts of the city where digital devices allow us to visit

Communication

Email is really important, messaging is useful

What's in your toolbox?

Apps, programs in a digital device and being aware of your body

Getting around

Web searches, web browsers

Dealing with problems

Getting some good information about your device, making sure you can ask people (and search engines) the right questions

Planning your visits

How a notebook and pen can be useful in getting online, introducing *'The 20 minute challenge'*

After these informational sessions, workshops for another four sessions can be deployed to affirm the learning and to ensure that learners have devices appropriately set up for their ongoing comfortable use. This can extend the course and limit numbers in a year, but the outcomes will be improved.