Chapter XI

S3: Senior Surf School – A Special Graduate Information Systems Course

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ABSTRACT

Many elderly people (age of 60+) are keen on getting familiar with the Internet. At the same time, end-user training gets more and more important for IT management. Therefore, we implemented a graduate Information Systems course, where students have to design, organize, manage, and run a training session, where elderly people can see and try using the Internet. The students learned to design a teaching curriculum and teaching materials, to set up and maintain the technical infrastructure, to organize end-user training, and, most importantly, to teach and to train end-users.

INTRODUCTION

Internet Needs of Older People

In the countries of the western hemisphere, we observe a growing elderly population (60+), where many older people are smart and clever enough to focus their attention on management of productive elder years. They are keen to get to know and to use modern tools and techniques, but some circumstances and barriers hinder them in reaching a promising starting point. For example, within the population of the users of the Internet, elderly people...
are by far not represented proportionally to their part of all inhabitants. For Germany, the situation is like that shown in Figure 1. Out of 52.5 Mio people in Germany between 14 to 69 years old, 46% (24.2 Mio) have access to the Internet and use it at least sometimes (GfK, 2001). But, only 5% of the older population (60 to 69 years of age) is using the Internet. In other words, while two out of three juniors (14 to 19 years) are using the Internet at least occasionally, only one out of eight older people (60 to 69 years) do so (GfK, 2001).

Various reasons cause these different usage patterns. Some reasons why elderly people are not using the Internet as are younger people are as follows:

- Older people seldom have Internet access at home or at work. Therefore, they are missing possibilities to test and to train in usage of the Internet.
- Older people are often too shy to test newer technologies for the first time.
- Probably, the current generation of older people is the last generation that did not get any experience in using a PC; the following generations use PCs at school and at work.
- Therefore, older people have minor handling skills with PCs and the Internet; this implies that they could not recognize useful and promising ways to use the Internet.
- There may be some language problems, because in Germany, the common language of Data Processing is full of English idioms (e.g., Browser, World Wide Web, Joystick, Display, Windows, Icon, Click, Desktop, Button, Service Provider, Cursor, Download, Homepage, Link, Newsgroup, online, Client, Server, Update) and abbreviations (e.g., PC, WWW, PS/2, MS, USB, VGA, LCD, GB, DVD, ROM, RAM, ISDN, ISP, SMS, BIOS, DFÜ, PDF, SCSI, SSL). But, the language skills of elderly people are probably weaker than the skills of younger people. The lack of understanding of the language will increase their uncertainty with the technology.
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