

Carolynne R. Maguire



Battling the User-Manual Blues

Remember the IBM Selectric? If so, you will also have witnessed the many innovations in office productivity and automation since then. Wasn't it great when they added memory to typewriters? And what about that fabulous fax machine? Do you recall how much you paid for your big thermal beauty, back in the mid-'80s? But you paid it or risked being shunned by your peers or, even worse, by your clients.

All the while, poised to revolutionize business procedure as we knew it, was the PC, gradually overcoming price and acceptance barriers to become the productivity hub of the modern office. One significant difference between the PC and most of its predecessors, however, was the number and thickness of the User Manuals involved.

Until that point, plugging it in and setting the internal clock was the extent of programming and user expertise required to gain an edge over, or at least maintain pace with, your competition. Today, to maximize the benefit of an ever-increasing and enhanced array of computer hardware and software options, our knowledge and training must extend beyond that of our chosen profession.

So what's a business to do? There will be those who attempt to avoid the problem by carrying on "business as usual" against the technology tide. Others with the resources to do so will dedicate personnel—even whole departments—to the deployment and integration of current IT solutions within their corporate culture. That leaves the rest of us choosing whether to allocate our few free moments to

engross ourselves in the exciting plot twists of various User Manuals or, dare I say it, seek outside help. Hmmm . . . HELP!

According to Sherry Braxton, Branch Manager of CTC Computer Training Centres (www.ctcvancouver.com), *people*—not more powerful computers or complex software—are the key to improving workplace productivity. Sherry offers this quote from Stephen Murgatroyd, business consultant and professor at Middlesex University in England, "Companies would be better off teaching their staff how to better use hardware and information technology they already have, than buying expensive new operating systems. The typical [staff have] not been properly trained to operate the software they use every day."

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For those of us who haven't seen the inside of a classroom for over a decade, or don't have teaching facilities within convenient range, Braxton adds, "there are three main methods in which to train people: Instructor Led Training, Web-Based Training, and Computer-Based Training. The reason for providing three distinct choices is that people learn in different ways, therefore they require more options. Talking (lecture) is not teaching

and listening is not learning. It is important that clients are receiving hands-on training sessions from a company with qualified, well-seasoned instructors with practical experience in the field."

Last year, for my own benefit, I participated in a few one-day desktop application courses, some of them with instructors currently at CTC. These classes were loaded with materials, step-by-step friendly instruction, and many useful tips. I found their greatest value, however, was in affording me the confidence to explore further on my own within the given software program.

I have too often been admonished and reminded by technical support to "RTFM." Maybe curling up by the fire with a good User Manual appeals to some but I appreciated the "just show me" alternative; now I'm getting more bang for my software buck, to boot—or reboot, as is so often the case. ▲

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