

Professionals Can Get Ahead By Updating Technology Skills

*MBA and continuing education students
find value in tech tips and tricks*

By Liz Swain

Returning to school to learn or refresh computer skills could help business professionals perform well and advance in their current jobs. Those skills could set the professional apart in a job interview, says JoAnne Starr, assistant dean of UCSD's Rady School of Business.

Starr points out that Excel is used constantly by people well-versed in business fundamentals. However, Excel could be more than a spreadsheet application. Students in the Rady's FlexMBA program for working adults use Excel as an analytical tool and developed scenarios to study.

In one course, technology played a role in a two-week project involving problems from work, Starr says. One student examined work flow that was stalled by a bottleneck. The employer agreed with the student's solution and added an FTE (fulltime equivalent). Another student used the project to solve a parking lot flow problem.

Technology is part of Rady's one-day executive education courses. In addition to those courses, Rady's Center for Executive Development customizes onsite courses for companies. Customized courses also are offered by National University and through SDSU's College of Extended Studies (CES).

With technology advancing so rapidly, CES Dean Joe Shapiro quips that he has an archeological master's degree in computer science. He earned it during the 1970s. Back then, people used punch cards and the computer filled a room.

In the 21st century, technology is so much a part of life that schools like National University offer a computer literacy course. Entering students must take the course if they're unable to demonstrate proficiency in computer basics including keyboarding and Windows or Macintosh operating systems.



Mike Oslov, instructor in Point Loma Nazarene's MBA degree program, says the Technology Innovation and Management Knowledge course is not about programming. 'These are MBA students, not software engineers,' he says.



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Business people should know Microsoft Office Suite, advises Dan Prouty. He teaches “Educational Aspects of Computers,” a Chapman University course for K-12 teachers. The hands-on class covers the same lessons that teachers will give to students. However, while educators study the “how” of technology in order to teach, teachers also learn “why,” says Prouty, vice principal of Rio Seco Elementary School in Santee.

Educational applications of computer technology include computer literacy, computer-assisted instruction, telecommunications, electronic grade books, problem solving, networked learning environments, simulations, word processing, computer-managed instruction, test construction, computer maintenance, the electronic scholar, lesson authoring and schools of the future.

Learning Options

For educators and other professionals, technology ranges from PowerPoint presentations to virtual conferences. The good news is that a business professional doesn't need a graduate degree to keep up with technology. Area schools offer a range of learning options.

“Technology gives an advantage in the workplace,” Shapiro says. “It used to be that a development proposal was copied and sent around the world. Now the proposal can be sent online, with people around the world adding to an evolving document. Management needs to think of technology as a tool, the way (people) used to think of an encyclopedia.”

SDSU's continuing education offerings include the online Global Knowledge Program Management for Professionals series. Courses include “Business Process Analysis.” Other Global Knowledge courses are technology-oriented, says Shapiro.

The school's online Education To Go (ed2go.com) classes include “Computer Skills for the Workplace” and “Introduction to Vista.” CES Professional Development Online (PDOL) programs include a project management certificate that Shapiro says could be useful for a project manager or sales manager.

He adds that professionals don't need to know how to write programs. However, they should “understand and manage the capabilities that technology has to offer.” Understanding includes knowing challenges and liabilities. For example, is there liability when directing people from one Website to another?

Another consideration is the type of personnel needed. When Shapiro attended a virtual conference, someone set up equipment and gave him about 12 minutes of training. Instructions included “which buttons to push.”

At National University, technology is infused in all program outcomes and technology is especially stressed in the School of Business and Management,” says provost Tom Green.

National uses VoIP (Voice-over Internet Protocol) and technology for Web conferencing and Web-based instruction. National’s virtual conferences will involve iLinc until October when the university switches to Adobe Connect. The technology is used for all university meetings and a similar technology is employed for online courses. Someone plugs in the PC that projects images on the screen, and places a microphone in the middle of room. “It’s a great tool” with benefits that include not driving to Los Angeles for a 30-minute meeting, says Green.

He says that close to 55 percent of students attend an online class each month. The provost adds that most university resources may be accessed online. Green recommends that students and professionals become adept at researching online. “Recognize the role technology plays,” he says. There are new things all the time. “Be prepared; be accustomed to change. Be competitive.”

A Variety Of Courses

National is the transfer destination for many San Diego City College graduates, says Randy Barnes, dean of Business Information Technology. The Downtown community college’s courses include CBTE (Computer Business Technology) classes. Classes include Microsoft Office Suite topics such as Access, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook. In addition, City’s CBTE lab is open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday. Students sign up online, and may come in to get help from teachers or work at home. Barnes reminds business professionals that the campus is within “walking distance of most of Downtown.”

The dean notes that City split off from Mesa and Miramar Colleges. The Downtown college now has a small business focus. “A lot of students want to open a business or start one,” he says. City students are adults who don’t take the traditional Monday to Friday classes. “We serve a surprising number of reverse transfers,” people who already have a four-year degrees, says Barnes. His former accounting students include a person planning to earn an MBA.

To serve this nontraditional population, classes are offered online, in classrooms or in a hybrid of the two formats. In addition, courses may be scheduled mornings one semester and evenings during another.

For business professionals considering a career change, City’s vocational courses include “Survey of Operating Systems” and “Java Programming.”



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Randy Barnes, dean of Business Information Technology at San Diego City College, says his programs serve a lot of 'reverse commuters,' students who already have four year degrees.

Point Loma Nazarene's MBA degree program includes a "Technology Innovation and Management Knowledge" course. It's not a programming course, says instructor Mike Oslovar. "These are MBA students, not software engineers."

The course's technology innovation focus relates to new product issues such as research and development costs and marketing. The course also "explores how technology can augment current business processes such as accounting, phone systems, company intranets and marketing and product delivery," says Oslovar. He's the director of Software Quality Assurance for IntelliDOT, a business that produces a barcode point-of-care system used in hospitals.

Healthcare professionals use the wireless handheld unit for tasks such as dispensing medication to patients.

In his professional life, Oslovar meets in virtual conferences with hospital staffs. He says that in the future business people may be involved in Extreme Programming (XP). Don't be alarmed. This is a software development system that emphasizes customer involvement and teamwork.



Dan Prouty, vice principal of Rio Seco Elementary School in Santee, teaches a Chapman University course on Educational Aspects of Computers.



Keith Roberts, dean of the school of business at the University of Redlands, says an online technology called Blackboard is used in all degree programs and in four MBA emphases.

Students at University of Redlands discover that "blackboard" has a different meaning than it did when they were younger. Blackboard is an educational portal used in all degree programs and in four MBA emphases, says Keith Roberts, School of Business associate dean. Emphases courses are Web-enhanced. Students meet in person for half of the sessions. During the other half, students log on to Blackboard. Their online activities include participating in asynchronous chats — discussions not conducted at the same time.

While portals aren't traditionally used in the workplace, Redlands business students gain experience in international virtual conferencing. Equipment on campus connects students in two courses with their counterparts in other countries. In one course, students in California and India meet. The other course links students with people in Mexico. Roberts says the experience familiarizes students with technology, the culture of another country and working in teams.

Those courses involve Skype, an Internet telephony service. SDSU's American Language Institute also uses Skype for online conferences, says Shapiro.

Looking Forward

What's ahead for educators and students?

Prouty points to Snapz Pro, a utility that allows the recording of onscreen activities such as the creation of a table from a spreadsheet. The recorded video is saved, and students access it by clicking the mouse. Teachers could use Snapz Pro to create tutorials; businesses could use the utility for staff development, says Prouty.

Shapiro says work is under way on virtual 3-D classroom delivery with features like “second-life business” and “education in a pseudo three-dimensional world.” While technology is a valuable tool in education and business, Shapiro cautions that technological advances should be regarded as an opportunity or a challenge. “What makes an organization strong are the people, ethics and values. Interpersonal communication is very important.”