

Kids are far more technically advanced



John Deans

Hey, all you parents out there, remember your first computer as a kid? Neither do I. And that is because computers did not enter the classroom until the 1980s.

In my case it was perfect timing which enabled me to jump in on the ground floor of the technology boom. Kids today cannot imagine a world without computers in the classroom or the home.

By the time they are in junior high they have cellular phones with built-in cameras, hold all their music, and can surf the Internet. We were lucky to have an Atari connected up to the only TV in the home.

Now that both public and private elementary schools have computer classes, our cherubs are immersed earlier and earlier. The basics of being able to do homework and school work from grammar school on (really dating myself here), are primarily done with Microsoft Office applications.

Home computers are mostly for surfing the web, viewing digital photos, and downloading music. At least one PC in the house needs to have the Microsoft Office Suite which includes Word, Excel and PowerPoint. The kiddos must utilize Word for reports, PowerPoint for presentations and Excel for task management and math projects.

Though codgers like us never had or needed those applications

in school, those programs are absolutely critical in today's educational environments for kids of all ages.

The most common version of MS Office is 2003 which was the last version with the original drop-down menu user interface.

Since Office 2007 came out users have had to adapt to the new and very different "ribbon" GUI (Graphical User Interface).

The latest Office 2010 runs faster and still has the 2007 GUI, but there are some differences in the Outlook menu system. Whether our youngsters use the older 2003 GUI or the new 2007 ribbon interface, they need to have Office available at all times.

The younger we can start them, the better prepared they will be. If they can play computer games then they can start writing little stories in MS Word. Our girls have been utilizing all three primary Office applications.

Since just after they got out of diapers, in fact both have been doing Deans Consulting administrative work for years now, their first job was to learn Excel.

Whether they start with Word, PowerPoint or Excel, the first concept we need to convey to them is the idea of files and folders. This is a basic practice that is important for early computer usage and gets them off with a good foundation of understanding.

Make sure they get the idea that we work on files and then the files go into folders. Have them create a simple word document and then save it in the My Documents folder.

Next have them create a subfolder under My Documents with their name as the folder name to hold all their computer files. This way they always know that their stuff goes in little Johnny's folder rather than mixed in with mom and dad's computer files.

It is also a good thing to show them how all their work within these new computer files is backed up to an external hard drive or over the internet to Cabonite.com. This way you will be instilling good computer management practices at a young age. They are never too young to start backing up their files.

This saved my son's school project 10 years ago when he accidentally over-wrote a 1,000-word paper he had worked on for over a week. Luckily I was consistently backing up the com-

plete family tree of computer folders and files every night to another computer on our home network. I was able to restore his hard work on the MS PowerPoint file within minutes.

Another trick of the trade we need to teach our students is to keep different versions of files when working on critical homework or projects. Since accidents can happen it is a good ideal to add a version number to the root of the filename like "History Report - Version 1.doc" or just use the date as in "Science Project - 10142010.ppt."

Increment the version number or date as new content is modified or added to the file so at the end of the project they may have numerous versions of the document. This way if they do overwrite or accidentally delete the latest version they can bail back to the previous good one without relying on backups.

In Microsoft Word make darn sure you show them how to use three critical tools to help them write better. First show them how words in the MS Word

document that are misspelled show up underlined in red. Then explain to them that if a word, phrase, or complete sentence is underlined in green they have a grammar problem to address.

Your child will really like it when you demonstrate how they can click on Tools and then Spelling and Grammar to have those red underlined words automatically corrected via the integrated dictionary. In their later years you can have them easily expand their vocabulary via MS Word's thesaurus under Tools then Language drop down menus.

Over the past 20 years I have said, "Excel rules the world" so our kids need to learn it and begin using it at an early age. My 12-year-old daughter has been delivering invoices in Excel for her office work since she was 8.

Once they get the Excel basics of the cells organized in rows and columns, show them how then can put a simple allowance budget down so they can see where they money is going. Simple functions like '=SUM(A1:A5)' can do the math for them and can open many new possibilities for them in Excel.

Bottom line: Our kids are far more technically advanced by elementary school then we were by the end of high school, but we can still get our younger ones on the right track as early as possible.

Next week's column: Red light camera technology.

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