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Friday, January 23, 2009

### How-To

## The right click: Recession pays for computer trainers

Boston Business Journal - by **Keith Regan** Special to the Journal

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Boosting worker productivity is a common aim during recessionary times as businesses look to do more with less. Often, training employees to make more effective use of technology is one path to that goal.

"Recession can be very good for computer trainers," said Elizabeth W. Brown, president of **Softtech Inc.**, a Needham-based training firm that will mark its 25th year of business in March. "We have a lot of clients who have invested tremendously in hardware and software and now they're looking at having fewer staff and want to get the most out of the people and the technology they still have."

Such training can also have a positive impact on morale at a time when workers are being cut. "It sends a positive message at a difficult time," Brown said.

Computer training professionals say the industry has evolved dramatically in recent years. As personal computing has become ingrained in everyday life, the need to teach basic skills has waned considerably. At the same time, the Internet has opened up new avenues for teaching skills to workers.

"Ten years ago, e-mail was new, the Internet was new and even Microsoft Word was new to a lot of people,"

said Tony Holowitz, the founder and president of **John Anthony Group** in Arlington.

Holowitz's firm now offers an online training option to all clients as well as in-person training in skills such as the contact management program ACT, Web-design programs and other applications.

"When you talk to the trainer, do they speak in technical jargon that's going to be difficult for employees to understand?" he added. "You'll also want to know if they use the software they're teaching on a regular basis. I teach QuickBooks and ACT to a lot of small businesses and, because I use them on a regular basis to run my own business, I can really relate to how people want to use them."

A good training firm will also offer a variety of options for training, perhaps using a combination of in-person training and online support. Web-based options may enable employees to learn at their own pace, which may suit some worker's learning style better while others may need the immersive experience of in-person, classroom-style teaching.

A trainer's skill set makes all the difference, said Jeanne Picardi, director of marketing at **The Training Associates Corp.** in Westborough, which manages a corps of independent trainers across the country. The firm supplies those trainers directly to businesses and indirectly through consulting firm partnerships.

A business should look for a trainer that has been carefully screened for qualifications, Picardi said, including coursework in the program being taught as well as experience in

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teaching adults. Even before that process, however, a business should first identify what it hopes to accomplish, with an emphasis on the business goal of the training, rather than the technological one.

The amount of time a training process will take varies dramatically and most training firms will offer flexibility in terms of time and techniques as well as offer some follow-up assistance to ensure the program has been a success.

"A lot of it comes down to the quality of the trainers," Picardi said. "Find out how long they've been with the company and talk to their past clients to see how happy they are with the results. And then spend some time making sure the trainer is a right fit personality-wise."

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**Stuart Kushner** February 6, 2009 2:24PM EST

It is a very difficult time for the computer industry. I think it is compounded by Microsoft's stranglehold on innovation. But as long as they keep breaking, we will have work to do here at <http://www.progoffice.com>. Good article. Regards, Stu.

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