

Social Web Skills for Elder People

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How can we motivate older people to join internet based social networks?

The objective of this European Grundtvig Learning Partnership was to explore approaches and methods that show how younger people can support senior citizens to join the world of internet based social networks and thereby promote the dialogue between generations, and to develop a concept that shows how younger people can transfer their skills using new information and communication technologies, especially web 2.0 technologies, to senior citizens. Older people should become able to participate in social networks, blogs, wiki, and digital picture and video platforms.

The partnership comprised three organisations from Slovenia, Austria and Germany that are all working in the field of adult education:

- INTEGRA Human Resources Developing Institute, Slovenia
- AHAPunkt, Institut für Erlebnistraining & Projektconsulting, Austria
- Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V., Germany

In the first phase, we investigated the situation in the partner countries. The results have been published in a report about the internet use of older people and already existing models for knowledge transfer between generations.

Based on this information, the partners have organised several workshops or courses where young tutors worked with seniors and introduced them to various web 2.0 technologies. The findings and outcomes of these courses have been discussed in a joint workshop, and based on these experiences, we developed Guidelines that we will describe in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Guidelines for a »Social Web Skills« Training

The Guidelines are available as pdf file for free download at the partnership's website in English, Slovenian and German.

Introduction

This chapter contains a short introduction into inter-generational learning, and its impact on this partnership: While older people will learn how to make use of Web 2.0 and how to use digital social networks, the project opens new learning chances also for

younger people: acting as tutors they take responsibility, and they will learn about the social potentials and historical backgrounds of the seniors.

Prerequisites for „Social Web Skills“ training

This chapter deals not only with the technical and organisational requirements, but focuses on the social competences that are required for successful transfer of ICT knowledge from younger to older people.

Activity-based learning concept: the „Buddy System“

We developed this holistic learning concept for situations where one person teaches a small group, and where subsequently this group tests their skills by teaching another group where the tutor participates, observes and co-ordinates the tutoring and learning process.

How to find young tutors

In this chapter, the reader will find suggestions how to recruit young tutors, how to motivate them to work on a voluntary basis (because this is the most likely scenario for such activities) and how they can transfer their knowledge in a way that is easily understood by the seniors.

How to find senior participants

We suggest places and institutions where one can inform potential senior learners about a new possibility to learn something about web 2.0.

Preparatory course for young tutors

We made the experience that it is very important to have a preparatory seminar for the young tutors beforehand to introduce them to the seniors' world and their way of thinking, as it differs a lot from their own. We give also some additional advice for young tutors to create a positive atmosphere and to make the training a success.

Introductory session for seniors

The first session with the seniors decides about success and failure of the whole course. Therefore we demonstrate how to create an atmosphere of trust and joy, and how to find out about the expectations, needs, interests and personal background of seniors to use this information in your future sessions.

Social web modules

In this chapter, the reader will find a short description why and how young tutors should introduce web 2.0 applications (platforms, blogs, forums, on-line shopping, picture and video applications, Facebook, Skype) to older learners. We suggest also certain exercises to these applications that we have tried out during our pilot tests.

Conclusions

In all three partnership countries, we met a tremendous interest of senior citizens to become acquainted with what many of them called the „internet phenom“. Due to the structure of our workshops and courses, it was also possible to liberate seniors from their fear that web 2.0 applications might be dangerous for them. We have also encountered a considerable interest and willingness from young people to act as trainers. However, many of them regarded their engagement as one-time experience only. Any institution that plans to organise such courses on a long-term basis should therefore plan a sufficiently large number of young tutors and/or make their work (financially) attractive.

The project has opened not only access to internet technologies for older citizens, but it has also opened new learning chances for younger people: acting as tutors they took responsibility, and they learned about the social potentials and historical backgrounds of the seniors. We believe that our project has contributed to promote the dialogue and the understanding between young and old, and that it can reduce prejudices and increase the tolerance between generations.