

Outlook Training Case Study, Migrants Resource Centre

Shortly after becoming networked and joining the Lasa Circuit Rider Project in early 2003, the Migrants Resource Centre (MRC) conducted an IT skills analysis of staff members and volunteers to assess levels of IT knowledge. Staff and volunteers rated their skills and knowledge from 0 to 3, with 0 meaning 'no skills at all' and 3 meaning 'very skilled'. The training needs questionnaires covered 5 main areas including general Windows skills, hardware and peripherals, Word, Outlook/email, and Internet and online activities.

When the questionnaires were returned it was apparent that, although most individual's basic skills were adequate, Outlook was only being used at its most basic level. The majority of staff members used Outlook to send and receive emails only and were unaware or unskilled in the use of any of its other aspects. Ian Runeckles, MRC's Circuit Rider from Lasa, designed and delivered a half day training session at MRC's own IT training suite on the various aspects of Outlook, some of which were not being used. The following topics were covered:

- Email
- Calendars
- Contacts
- Journal
- Tasks
- Notes
- Shortcuts
- Folder View
- Other Users' Calendars

The training went well although it was difficult to ensure that all staff members were present because of working patterns. Most staff members were surprised at how many applications Outlook had and what they could be used for. With all staff members having basic IT skills it was not difficult for them to pick up the workings of Outlook on a broader scale. Most staff felt that the calendar and task applications would be most useful, if used properly, and that it would be useful to be able to see other staff members' calendars electronically. This will enable meetings and other training sessions to be co-ordinated more efficiently and hopefully cut down on absenteeism because of prior arrangements.

However... there were some problems with the implementation of using both individual and service area calendars that were set up subsequent to the training session. Most staff members have two paper diaries, one for work and one for personal appointments. It is difficult to ensure both diaries are kept up to date, so to add yet another one seems a bit daunting. In addition, if you decide to get rid of your other diaries and

solely use the Outlook calendar then it is worth remembering that it is not portable – unless you invest in a compatible PDA, not an option for MRC. After initially using the diaries to a limited degree it seems that most people have forgotten to use them and have gone back to the paper based option, and unless everyone uses the electronic version consistently then the original objectives cannot be met. There is obviously an issue here which policy development within MRC will need to address.

Nevertheless, although the initial incentive to have the Outlook training was to become more co-ordinated with staff timetables, meetings and appointments other aspects of the training have proved extremely helpful. Staff are now able to keep their inbox tidy, create folders to keep important information, and add addresses to their contact lists. A list of objectives for the day can be input into the Task application and reminder notes can be placed on the desk top. Sending and receiving emails has become more sophisticated, automatic 'out of the office' messages are now being sent and staff have a much better understanding of the tool bar in general. Overall the training has proved both useful and effective and was definitely worth taking the time to ensure staff members attended, although no training can be considered a complete success unless the trainees take the opportunity to put it into everyday practice.

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