

New Technology: Windows 95

Many people have asked when the County will upgrade to Windows 95. With any new upgrade, Information Technology must research the compatibility of the upgraded software to the current network system. There are many questions that need to be answered prior to any upgrade. One of the main reasons for this research is that the County simply cannot afford to do a mass installation of a software package and then wait for the inevitable problems with compatibility to occur. As you have experienced problems with the network going down from time to time, the same downtime would occur with an upgrade of software if it is not researched beforehand. Many departments can't afford an extended period of downtime while the compatibility issues are worked out. It is for that reason alone that Information Technology moves very cautiously toward installation of any new software or software upgrade.

The new Human Resource and Financial Information System (HRFIS) requires using the Windows 95 operating system. Therefore, some 250 County employees who have a need to access and use the new HRFIS system will need to be upgraded to Windows 95. Throughout the next several months you will notice these people receiving the upgrade to Windows 95. Information Technology is working very hard to find and resolve any compatibility problems so that those individuals will be able to move to the new HRFIS system. At this time, Information Technology does not anticipate moving the entire County to the Windows 95 operating system. As mentioned above, with an upgrade there are several issues that need to be addressed prior to installation. In fact, the same people who will be receiving the upgrade will be key players in identifying compatibility problems with the new operating system. As a result, any upgrades to Windows 95 will be done on an "as needed" basis (i.e., the HRFIS system will directly affect a number of County employees).

As with the WordPerfect 6.1 upgrade, Information Technology will be offering both Introduction and Upgrade classes for Windows 95 for the HRFIS users. Those individuals who currently use Windows 3.1 on a daily basis and will be upgrading to Windows 95, will have the opportunity to complete a one-half day Upgrade Windows 95 class. An Introduction to Windows 95 will also be offered as a two half day class for those who are new to the PC environment and will be using Windows 95. Look for more information in upcoming Information Technology Quarterly Newsletters.

Information Technology's Training Program Update

The second quarter 1997 training schedule is now available on the Publish drive "O", specifically "o:\infotech\training\schedule.doc". As you review the schedule you will notice that the number of classes offered have been reduced for the second quarter. During this time, one of Information Technology's training rooms will be used almost exclusively for HRFIS training. A second training room may also be used, at least part time, for the HRFIS training.

As a result, if you cannot find a class listed on the schedule which you need to take, or the dates and times are not convenient for you, please contact the receptionist at Information Technology. Your name will be placed on a waiting list. When any class has a waiting list of eight or more individuals Information Technology will attempt to open an additional class.

New Travel Regulations Published on the “O” Drive

Management and Budget has published the new Travel Regulations on the County-Wide Publish drive “O”, specifically “o:\mgmtbdgt\forms\travelre.wpd”. This is in addition to all MB forms published in 1996. If you have access to the “O” drive, you will now be able to open, review, and print the Travel Regulations as well as all MB forms through WordPerfect 6.1.

Technology Stars

Gary Vaught, an Analyst in the Personnel Department, has been named “Technology Star of the Quarter”. In December 1995, Gary received WordPerfect 6.1 and DragonDictate software for his PC. DragonDictate is a large vocabulary, speech-recognition system. DragonDictate lets an individual enter commands and dictate text by speaking into a microphone. DragonDictate can be used with a keyboard and mouse, or it can be used completely hands free. The edition Gary uses comes with a 60,000 word primary vocabulary, and a 120,000 word secondary vocabulary.

Gary not only had to learn how to use WordPerfect 6.1, he also had to learn the commands necessary to tell DragonDictate what to do to—enter numbers/text, make editing changes, and format the document. Some typical command examples that Gary uses daily are, “Bring Up WordPerfect”; “Open File”; “Open drive c:\”; and “Close Window”; etc. Once the document is open, he may give commands such as “Print Document”; “Select Text”; “Bold Text” and “Delete Sentence”. He also goes into a “Dictation Mode” to create memos, reports, agenda items, job descriptions, audit and budget recommendations.

Because of his physical limitations, Gary had to rely on clerical staff to type his handwritten or dictated work. He is now able to create, edit, print and publish all of his documents with efficiency and accuracy. Congratulations Gary!

If you know of any other individual who deserves the “Technology Star of the Quarter” please contact Tina Ramey or Lisa Corpus so that they can be featured in upcoming Information Technology Quarterly Newsletters.

Tips for Surfing the Internet using Netscape Navigator

Approximately 300 County employees now have direct access to the Internet using Netscape Navigator. While having access to the Internet to research topics of interest, some individuals find it difficult to pin point and locate the topics and related articles that will be useful to them. While Information Technology has attempted to make those search engines considered to be the most helpful to County employees available through the Oakland County start page, it is still difficult to find the information you need quickly.

When preparing to do a search you should plan on spending a minimum of one hour, quite possibly more, gathering the data you need. One analogy that you should keep in mind is that the Internet is like a giant global library. While the information is there for you to use it is like visiting your local library and not having a card catalog or librarian to assist you in your search. In fact, one aspect that every library has in common is that research material is typically grouped together by subject or author. Such is not true on the Internet. When you “surf” through the Internet it is like moving through the library blindfolded. Prepare to proceed slowly and cautiously through the never-ending amount of resource material.

While the above information is useful to know, it is not an attempt to dissuade you from moving forward. Following is a list of tips to help you quickly locate what you need to know on the Internet.

Phase One: Strategy - Develop a plan of action to summarize what you’re looking for before you boot up your PC.

Tip #1: Are you likely to find it on the Internet. While there is a great deal of information out there; what is the likelihood of your topic being published on the Internet.

Tip #2: Match your subject to a search method or engine. Remember, the more specific the topic, the better the search results will be.

Tip #3: Use the knowledge you already have and use it to build a precise set of search terms. Many search engines give you the option of searching for a phrase, person, place, groups of words, etc. Remember, if your topic is “Freedom of Information Act” and you do not search for the phrase, the search results will include all pages which contain the word “freedom”, “of”, “information”, and “act” in them.

Phase Two: The Search - After you’ve developed a strategy, it’s time to get down to business, and jump into the actual data quest.

Tip #4: Look in the right place. Try newsgroups. There are a tremendous amount of newsgroups out there. There may be a newsgroup which specializes in your topic.

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Tip #5: Use the right tool. A good researcher runs a Web search through at least two or three search engines. The variation of results can be astonishing. Try WebCrawler, HotBot, and Open Text.

Tip #6: Focus! Search engines don't necessarily put the most relevant hits at the top of the list; instead, they often put the site that utilizes your keywords most often.

Phase Three: Evaluation - O.K., so you've found your data. But can you trust it? Now it's time to separate the apples from the oranges.

Tip #7: Know your sources. The problem with the Web is that anyone can publish there. How can you establish the credibility of an Internet source? Take advantage of 'mail to' links. Is the information being published by an institution, government agency, or a company? Look for personal biases. Is the person publishing an article an authority or expert in this field or are they just publishing based on their personal evaluation or opinion on a topic.

Tip #8: Verify, verify, verify. Be aware that reliability is an issue, and bring a certain amount of skepticism to any information you get.

Hopefully the tips provided above will help you in your search. Good luck and have fun!

The above information, in part, was taken from an article "Stop Searching and Start Finding" from "The Net: Ultimate Internet Guide", published September 1996.

Year 2000! What Awaits Us

The Department of Information Technology recently presented a resolution to the Board of Commissioner's Strategic Planning Committee which will address the issue of the Year 2000. We are all aware that the Year 2000 is rapidly approaching, maybe sooner than we want it to. The Year 2000 creates a special problem in the computer world. Many of you currently use at least one computer system in which you enter dated information using numbers, an example is 01/05/97. The year is currently entered as the last two digits (97 is 1997). This creates a problem in the Year 2000 because dates entered as 1/5/00 will reflect January 5, 1900 not January 5, 2000. The Board of Commissioners approved the Year 2000 resolution on March 6, 1997.

Look for more news on the Year 2000 project in the next issue of the Information Technology Quarterly!