Digital Technologies and Adult Education: The Challenge
Digital Citizenship
An Interview with Nava Gilad, Digital Citizenship Task group Manager, The Israel Internet Association (ISOC-IL)

A Focus on the Digital Periphery
- What is ‘Digital Citizenship’?
- We are all citizens, and a new arena has opened up for all inhabitants of the world – the virtual arena. We have become a very digital society, particularly in three areas: information, communication and service consumption. One of the first goals the Israel Internet Association set for itself a decade ago was to narrow the digital gap.
- ‘Narrow the gap’ in what sense – adults versus young people?
- The intent is to narrow the gap for those in the ‘digital periphery’. This refers to diverse audiences – those who ‘are not there’, who are not at the center of the digital world for a variety of reasons. Perhaps they were not born into the digital world and have difficulty entering it, or maybe their employment circumstances did not provide the opportunity to use digital tools. In 2001 we decided to focus on the ‘third age’ population. Life expectancy was increasing and people retired without having acquired knowledge of computing, while the ability to consume and use the Internet to obtain information, communicate and take advantage of services could improve their quality of life. We established a task group comprised of “suppliers and consumers”.
- Who are the suppliers?
- Eshel (the Association for Planning and Development of Services for the Elderly in Israel) within the framework of Joint-Israel is from our perspective a supplier because it is focused on ‘third age’
individuals (providing services, information etc. to this population group). Non-profit organizations of pensioners are consumers, as is a person that has retired.

- So is this the main target group as you see it?
- Not only this group. To the same extent we engage in making the Internet accessible to people with disabilities; we are also involved with the Arab sector as well as with other groups that for cultural, economic or social reasons, or because they worked in ‘blue collar’ professions, were not exposed to the technological world of computers and the Internet. We also have for parents, teachers, children and adolescents to increase awareness of the need for informed Internet use

- How did you approach this task?
- Our approach in the Israel Internet Association developed gradually over time: defining and mapping needs, constructing and developing knowledge, producing training kits under the titled ‘Online Citizen’ and identifying partners that would help disseminate the kits and would train, accompany and provide professional development to the group we defined as ‘third age members’.

Third Age versus New Technology

- What challenges did you encounter in your work with third age individuals?
- The main problem is what I call ‘self-branding’ – how elderly people perceive themselves in relation to technology, how they think it can serve them, their attitude towards the Internet and the new communication options that are now available. Also, how they
perceive the fact that their means of self-expression have changed, for example they can write a blog or collaborate in writing a Wikipedia entry. In other words, in this new reality the fact that a person is no longer in the workforce does not mean that he or she do not have anything to contribute to society or to themself. As a result, we decided to develop the knowledge these people require by asking ourselves what an individual needs in order to be an ‘online citizen’. By this we meant individuals who are not intimidated by technology, use it for things that genuinely interest them and that they view as necessary such as finding information; consuming news, health and banking services; distance learning; Internet games; culture and hobbies; maintaining contact, etc.

- How do you define ‘Digital Citizenship’ with respect to the ‘third age’?

- Digital citizenship refers to three main areas which I already mentioned: information, communication and service, and branches out into nine areas of digital literacy: what is technology and what is the proper use of technology (this also includes mobile phones, digital cameras, Skype, etc.)? What are the differences between the various Internet uses – sending electronic mail, writing a blog, partnering in writing a Wiki entry. The Internet offers a wide range of tools and services. You must be familiar with the options it provides for your empowerment and at the same time be aware of ‘potential problem areas’ and the general issue of privacy: responsibility for my privacy and for the privacy of others. So there are two sides: empowerment and danger. Without this you are not ‘digitally literate’.

Digital citizenship also includes: digital ethics, law, consumption and health. Regarding these topics – we understood that on the one hand we had to develop the knowledge, and on the other hand
reach the audience that needs it by offering one-on-one or group instruction. We had to examine and understand the advantages of each of these learning formats. This is how we developed different alternatives. Our material enables everyone – in the ‘third age’ context – to choose both a learning format and the topics that are of real interest and importance to them.

- So you developed study kits?
- Yes, we started out with study kits, both hardcopy and online, accessible to everyone. After we had the material, some of which I had produced as the Computerization Center manager in the city of Hadera, we asked ourselves whether learning and memory are different for third-agers. To answer this, in 2007 we asked Dr. Tova Gamliel from Bar Ilan University to conduct a study that would accompany the project. To this end we created focus group of pensioners who studied with the help of the first study kit we produced in 2003 and another group that used the second kit, ‘NETWISE-Online Citizen’ that we developed following a pilot among groups of women. In addition to the focus groups the study also included observations and questionnaires.

We designed a weekly and a periodic questionnaire that the learners answered and addressed all aspects of their learning. They were also asked about what was missing in the kit and about the difficulties they encountered. We did the same with focus groups of instructors that worked with the pensioners (scholarship students from the Friends of the IDF IMPACT! program who worked with us through Eshel-Joint). This group was also part of our study. The weekly and periodic questionnaires pertained to the learning process with both study kits. For example we found that our kits did not address the use of ‘peripheral equipment’ such as digital cameras, and how to
upload pictures to the computer and send them through the Internet. Skype is another example, after all nothing interests this population more than talking to their grandson that is on a trip abroad. We became aware of these issues through the observations, focus groups and questionnaires.

- How would you summarize the study conclusions?
- The conclusions address topics that were missing as well as teaching methods. For example, we found that there is a need for a glossary and decided to create a glossary based on terms mentioned in the study kits. We included these terms in the glossary and added a reference to the page on which it is discussed in the study kit. We also compiled a list of questions and answers that refer the user to the relevant page in the study kit where the topic is discussed. For example, if an individual learned how to attach a file to an email but does not remember how to do so he can refer to the Q&A list and find the information he needs. This list provides learners with answers to all issues, large or small, related to word processing, the Internet and emails, for example deleting or highlighting words. These are examples of ‘learning aids’ we developed after understanding the needs of the elderly in learning to work with technology.

- What did you change in the study kits as a result of the study?
- We had a better handle on the learning issues that we needed to address and how to approach them. We could define our precise goals for every stage, determine how to achieve them and then offer practice exercises and a summary of the topics covered. This approach also helps the instructor remain more focused. After all with the Internet you can ‘surf’ in many directions and ‘get lost’ and forget where you were and what you were looking for… Another
important thing we learned from the study had to do with using the ‘mouse’ and the problem of hand-eye coordination when using the computer. Also, when using the computer users must hold their head in a different position than when reading a book or writing. Consequently we began to teach our students how to use the computer without a mouse – by performing all necessary functions using only the keyboard. Another issue we addressed following the study had to do with managing knowledge on the computer – creating ‘libraries’ and ‘favorites’ – a critical topic since if a person visits a website but does not place it in ‘Favorites’, he might not find it again. Knowledge management is a common theme throughout the study kit. The study also helped us develop The Guide for the Guide with information and guidelines for the instructors.

- And what about ‘social networks’?
- Our kits have two target audiences: retired individuals and their instructors. Following our study and follow-up we developed a third kit about social networks, including Facebook. In other words, you can see how a whole new world unfolded – Part A: the level of holding the mouse (in the first unit), understanding the work environment and the work tools and initial use of the Internet; Part B: how to find information, transfer and organize information, organize email communication, communicate in forums and use additional communication tools such as Skype. This booklet is geared towards service consumption: E-Government (including pensioner rights and useful forms), banks, financial transactions, the world of health services, searching for information and cross-referencing information to check that it is reliable, up to date and valid. Everyone that used the kit was very enthusiastic. And I am referring to learners and their instructors.
Additional Information

The ‘Online Citizen’ study guide for senior citizens is divided into three parts:

Part A - acquaintance with the computer and the work environment, basic acquaintance with a word processor and the Internet browser.

Part B - Hands-on experience finding information on the Internet, using the E-Government website and a variety of other services available on the Internet, email and its use, communication and information in forums, acquaintance with online conversation services such as SKYPE, using a digital camera and peripherals such as a USB.

Part C – acquaintance with social networks and hands-on experience with Facebook.

Study kits are available on the Israel Internet Association website:
isoc.org.il/workgroup/guidance_kits.html

For additional information contact:
Nava Gilad, Digital Citizenship, The Israel Internet Association  nava@isoc.org.il
Michal Hess, NETWISE Coordinator – life skills for the third age Michal@isoc.org.il