

## Don't Be Left Behind: The Right Computer Skills Can Make All The Difference ®

(NAPSA)—Kelly Dodson knows firsthand why companies value the ability to use computers and software. An administrative assistant in Kansas, Dodson used to keep her CEO's calendar by hand, until one day an important meeting slipped through the cracks.

That painful experience compelled her to seek training in the effective use of the company's scheduling software. And today she feels she couldn't do her job as well without it.

As early as 1999, the Progressive Policy Institute estimated that 75 percent of employees use computers in their work, and that figure continues to increase as computers make their way into more and more aspects of individuals' lives. Since just about every job today is connected to computers and software in some way, employees who lack the ability to use that information successfully are finding themselves increasingly marginalized.

The effects of this evolution for individual workers are real, and they show up most vividly when it comes to the bottom line. Research has shown that workers with the right computer skills can earn 17 percent to 40 percent higher wages than those without, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and California Journal. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Office of Productivity and Technology agrees, emphasizing, "It is not merely the employee having a computer on his desk—but rather having complementary computer skills—that causes wages to increase."

Commenting on information workers' adoption of technology, Laura Stack, productivity expert and author of "Leave the Office Earlier," said, "The people who succeed are those who take the time to figure it out rather than struggling each time, doing it the hard way, or taking too much time. Employees who self-educate themselves will experience a performance boost from using the full range of available functions."

That is to say, whether you're an administrative assistant, audi-

tor or staff attorney, having the right computer skills can make a difference in your career and your paycheck.

So what can you do to get those skills? Dodson was lucky enough to develop them on the job, with support from an understanding employer. But without basic computer literacy, it can be tough nowadays to get a job in the first place.

The Web offers a myriad of courses and programs on a range of technical skills, from basic computer literacy to complex programming and IT training.

"Software training is evolving into a just-in-time approach," Stack said. "Many workers complain about the slow response from the company help desk or lack of available training. It's more efficient for workers to access self-help online resources, such as Microsoft Office Work Essentials, to allow them to find answers to problems they are experiencing in real time."

Microsoft Office Work Essentials is a comprehensive resource with occupation-specific tools in programs such as Microsoft Office Excel, Word and PowerPoint. The site has hundreds of free templates, how-to articles, product demonstrations, tip sheets and other resources. Available 24/7 at [www.microsoft.com/workessentials](http://www.microsoft.com/workessentials), it helps professionals in more than 30 occupations—including auditors, project managers, sales managers and human resource professionals—find tools to help them improve their skills.

"Local computer superstores and community colleges also offer inexpensive courses on many common software packages," Stack said. "The day I spent at Comp USA learning PowerPoint saved me much time and frustration of trying to figure it out myself. Doing a search at <http://www.amazon.com> will display a vast array of literature to read on the topic."

Whatever method you choose, one thing is for certain: Educating yourself in today's computer programs is a sure way to make yourself more appealing to prospective and current employers.