

In his classes, seniors get aboard the Internet

Personalized approach and hands-on curriculum produce success for older newbies

By NATE DOUGHERTY

Daniel Jones was a graphic designer for 25 years, but for the last seven or eight years a small voice in his head told him he wanted to work with seniors in some fashion.

PROFILE

Daniel Teaches

Roughly two years ago that voice got louder, and a friend shared information about a gerontology course at St. John Fisher College. Within a few weeks of taking the course Jones' idea became clear—he wanted to use his knowledge of computers to teach seniors.

After a year of researching and creating a curriculum, he started Daniel Teaches, a business offering courses on basic computer and internet skills to seniors.

"They didn't grow up with the kind of background people in my generation and younger have," says Jones, 46. "It's all about patience in teaching them skills that are sometimes foreign to them."

In 2010, Jones received his certificate in gerontology through St. John Fisher/Lifespan and has developed computer, Internet and digital technology programs for Lifespan's Lily Cafe and Senior Options for Independence at Fairport Baptist Homes.

Within the last 18 months, Daniel Teaches has expanded to include six courses, covering email, basic Internet skills, Facebook and social media, and iPad courses for beginners and intermediates.

Jones emphasizes personal attention. The classes meet for four weeks, twice each week for 90 minutes, and are limited to four or five students.



Photo by Kimberly McKinzie

Successful though it may be, Daniel Jones figures his enterprise will run into a wall in about 20 years, when it reaches the generation that grew up using and understanding computers. He also believes "there will always be some new technology that people need to learn."

After teaching graphic design as an adjunct professor, Jones says he was able to see what approach helps students connect with the material. As a result, his courses

offer a mix of hands-on activities, instructional video and terminology.

Jones now offers classes through senior programs and personal in-home instruction

as well. Within the first year he has taught more than 110 seniors.

The personalized approach and hands-on curriculum have helped students connect to the material with enthusiasm, he says. Jones recalls one of his students, 94-year-old Ken.

"Even though he was in his 90s, you would never know it with the high level of energy he had," he says. "One day after a class he came up to me with a smile and said, 'I feel like I'm back in kindergarten learning something new for the first time again.'"

Jones has worked to spread his courses to more potential students. He has worked with centers, including the town of Perinton, to offer courses to seniors, and he wants to expand to more senior settings.

Though it is still too early to know his annual revenue, Jones says he is focused on "keeping my head above water," so he will be in position to grow the company in the near future. He envisions creating a model of teaching so he can either franchise the business or hire more instructors to teach the material.

But Jones does not believe his company can last forever—or at least not in its current form.

"I figure there's about a 20-year window of people who will need help learning computers and navigating the Internet," Jones says. "By then we will reach the generation that grew up using and understanding computers. I don't think that means we will go away though, because there will always be some new technology that people need to learn."

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