

## Maximize the Benefits of Computer Technology to Market Your School More Effectively and Maintain Better Records, While Reducing Administrative Time

By Bob Hubbard

*[Editor's Note: Martial arts schools, as with most small businesses, are utilizing computer technology, as an essential tool of any business or organization. Many NAPMA members are still "technology challenged," either delaying the inevitable need for computer technology at some level or under-utilizing the computers already in their schools, and the technologies many benefits and even direct effect on revenues.*

*Understanding why computer technology is required to operate your school, selecting the right equipment, and learning how to use a computer are essential components of your continuing education. Computer education is just as important as sales, marketing and business education.*

*This is the first of a series of Black Belt Technology Reports from computer experts who specialize in helping martial arts instructors and school owners with computer technology and Internet strategies.*

*If you are experienced with computer technology, then you may find these reports basic, but, upon review, may reveal some deficiencies in your skill set. These reports are also great material for new instructors and your G.O.L.D. Leadership Team (although the young members of your team may already be computer wizards. Learn to use their skills to your advantage).]*

### Benefits of Computer Technology for Martial Arts School Owners

Today, during the opening years of the 21st century, computers are everywhere. They are in cars, stores, phones and home appliances. To exist—and succeed—in the business world of the 21st century, you must understand the benefits computers can provide your businesses.

There are two primary benefits.

#### Benefit #1: Computers help you organize the chaos of modern life.

You've seen them. The walls of sticky notes, the piles of paperwork, stacks of business cards, half-done "To-Do" lists and other assorted clutter and time-stealers. Proper use of a computer can organize this chaos and save you hours of time each week (and this is only a partial list).

- Organize contact information into an easily searchable list.

- Sort and customize "To-Do" lists in seconds.
- Program automatic appointment reminders.
- Access, update and manage secured financial information quickly and easily.
- Track student information easily, including contact information, special needs, attendance history, payment records and promotions.
- Track personal and business expenses, making for more efficient financial planning.

#### Benefit #2: Computers save you both time and money.

How many times have you discarded old business cards, flyers, brochures or other business literature? How much time do you spend doing paperwork each day, rather than teaching or training? Have you ever needed one more flyer or ran short of business cards during an event at your school? How much time do you spend looking for and filing the day's paperwork?

Computers can save you time, and we all know time is money.

- Track student attendance quickly and more efficiently.
- Check student payments easily, helping to reduce collection time.
- Print only the quantity of flyers you need at your desktop.
- Print business cards, as needed, on affordable card stock at your desktop.
- Use a time-planning tool, which typically comes with your computer to improve the efficient use of your time.

#### Special Benefit #3 (for NAPMA Members only): Maximize the school-growing and revenue-generating content in every month's Multimedia Success System.

As a NAPMA member, you have a special reason to embrace computer technology: your monthly content of outstanding information and education in the Multimedia Success System.

- Listen to the *Sounds of Success CD*, while taking notes, to learn the secrets of successful entrepreneurs, both inside and outside the industry.
- Watch the teaching segments on the NAPMA *Innovations DVD*, while using a weekly planner, to determine when to introduce this great instructional material.

# BLACK BELT TECHNOLOGY

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- Use the marketing and educational content of the *Media Master CD-ROM* to customize marketing campaigns and improve the quality and professionalism of your staff and G.O.L.D. Leadership Team.

If you're a Maximum Impact member, then you also receive a package of media – a DVD and two audio CDs – alternating every other month. Developed by Stephen Oliver, this is business, sales, marketing, curriculum and staff training information essential to your success. (If you're not already a Maximum Impact member, then please visit [NAPMA.com/MaximumImpact](http://NAPMA.com/MaximumImpact) today!)

## Basic Computer Skills

A computer is a valuable tool that will help you organize and use information, time and money more efficiently and effectively in both your personal and professional lives. To maximize the benefits of computer technology, you must acquire a minimum level of computer knowledge and proficiency.

There are, in my opinion, six primary computer skills that you should learn. Although, this report can't teach you those skills in detail, it will present and explain them and then provide you with some tips on computer training.

### Computer Skill #1: Learn the basic functions and features of your computer.

These include turning your computer on and off; operating the keyboard, mouse and CD/DVD drive; managing documents; using email; and accessing the Internet. You should also know basic maintenance skills, such as computer cleaning, creating back-up discs, security procedures, computer virus protection and installing new software and software upgrades.

### Computer Skill #2: Learn the basics of the Internet.

You don't have to be an expert, but understanding how to use and benefit from the Internet will give you an edge over your competition. Learn and experience the use of search sites like Google and Yahoo. Search sites are excellent sources of information, provided you use them correctly. More people today are turning to them instead of phone books, printed encyclopedias, newspapers, magazines and even TV, for news, information and recreation. If your school has a Web site, then congratulations go to you for recognizing its value. Now, make sure you and your staff learn how to maximize that value because it should be one of your most powerful marketing and communications tool.

### Computer Skill #3: Learn how to use electronic mail (e-mail) as a communications tool.

Today, more and more communications and information is being shared through the World Wide Web or Internet, much of it with electronic mail or e-mail. There are dozens of different e-mail programs you can use, some are free, while others are affordably priced, so I'll avoid specific tips for specific e-mail programs here, but I'll provide a few suggestions to help you receive the most benefit from this tool.

- Once you acquire an e-mail address, think of it as the equivalent of your phone number. You should memorize it and list it correctly in all form of communications.
- Make sure you set up your e-mail account and program correctly. There are many sources of help: the Help command in your e-mail program, the Web site of the company that created your e-mail program, local computer companies and even a friend, experienced with computers. (One tip for all first-time computer users: You will need help. Everyone did, including me. Don't be ashamed to ask.)
- Learn the basic functions of your e-mail program: receive, read and reply to incoming mail; write and send



outgoing mail; adding and downloading attachments; creating folders to save e-mails; etc.

- Learn how to set up the "Signature" feature of your email program. It allows you to customize as many con-

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tact information blocks that you can then automatically insert at the end of e-mails, without having to type it every time. Think of it as a mini-business card.

- Check your e-mail regularly and respond to messages in a reasonably amount of time. Learn how to recognize junk e-mails that may slip through the security software.

## **Computer Skill #4: Learn how to use the basic features of a word-processing program.**

All computers sold today include a basic word-processing program or software to create and edit documents. More advanced programs, such as Microsoft Word™, are also available and often included with the purchase of a computer system.

Learn how to use not only the basic program, but also spend the time to learn more advanced programs. Basic skills include starting a new document; typing text; formatting functions, such as margins, fonts, font size, bold, italics, underlining and centering text; editing functions, such as cutting, copying and pasting text; printing your documents; and setting up a series of folders to save and organize your documents.

Advanced skills include incorporating pictures and artwork with your text to create more attractive communications, even newsletters. You'll save on design services and printing costs and give your school a more professional presentation.

## **Computer Skill #5: Learn how to use your printer.**

Many systems sold today include an inexpensive printer. You should learn how to load paper, change the ink cartridges, and use its basic features, which includes printing documents from all the software programs you use. Using your printer correctly can cut costs and save time, so you can talk to more prospects.

## **Computer Skill #6: Learn how to use a bookkeeping program.**

There are many bookkeeping, spreadsheet and/or accounting programs in the marketplace. Some of the most popular and useful for you are QuickBooks™ and Microsoft Excel™. It's time you stopped using file cards, multi-column ledgers, folders, boxes and even bags of documents, receipts, contracts, etc.

Basic bookkeeping programs are relatively easy to learn and use and can greatly improve your ability to track income and expenses, contact information, employees, students, prospects and much more. You'll see at a glance how you are doing and where you need to focus your attention.

## **Computer Training**

As a martial arts instructor, you should understand better than most the importance of training to achieve excellence. You live and breathe that philosophy, so computer training should be an easy challenge for you; and you don't have to be an "excellent" computer user to benefit from its use.

One of the great benefits of basic computer training is that once you've acquired that knowledge, you also have many of the skills you'll need to continue your computer education on your own. There are certain advanced computer skills and software programs that are best learned in a formal classroom setting, but you won't need to know those, unless you want to expand your knowledge.

There are three primary methods to learn the six basic computer skills listed above (and many others).

1. Trial and error. This is the old "poke it with a stick 'til you figure it out" method. This is, of course, one we all try from time to time. It is, unfortunately, the least efficient.

2. Learn from books or videos. Books and videos are great references, and for some programs, all you might need. Two series I highly recommend are the Dummies books (*Computers for Dummies*, *Internet for Dummies*, etc.) and the Visual QuickStart Guide series. The former puts things in simple terms, explains all the jargon and offers a nice introduction to the basics, while the latter is loaded with step-by-step instructions and pictures, including almost every mouse click or key hit.

3. Find a qualified teacher. This method should be the most familiar! Learning computers is much like learning martial arts. Students need the right tools and the right teacher to do their best. Finding a qualified computer teacher or course can be a challenge. Today, specialty training centers, most computer stores and office supply chains, and even electronic stores, offer some form of computer training.

Follow my tips below to choose the right computer training for you.

During the last few years, there has been an explosion in the number of training centers catering to both computer novices and experts. The options can seem overwhelming. Before spending time and money on computer training, research your options.

Ask the following questions before making your decision.

- How big are the classes?

Just as in martial arts training, smaller classes mean more personal attention from the instructor.

- Are the training computers up-to-date?

All computers on which you train should be up-to-date, with the latest versions of the software programs you want to learn. It does you little good to learn on old, out-dated equipment, with old software versions, that won't be like the computer in your school.

- Is there a computer for each student or must they share equipment?

Each student, including you, in your computer training class should be assigned a computer on which to learn. This allows for more first-hand training, rather than watching a classmate do the exercises on a shared computer.

- Are class times convenient?

To learn, you need to be able to attend the classes. Many courses are offered during the day, night and weekend. The more flexible the class schedule, the

more likely you can – and will faithfully – attend.

- How long has the training center been in business? Older training centers will have established track records. Talk to other people, especially those in professional fields for recommendations.

- What are the instructors' credentials?

Computer instructor certifications are a dime a dozen today. There are, however, a few names that are credible and you should know when choosing an instructor. Do the instructors hold certifications from Microsoft™, Adobe™ or other makers of the software you want to learn? For example, if you want to learn Microsoft Word or any other software it makes, then choose a training center or teacher with a Microsoft certification.

- Does this instructor regularly teach this class?

Many training centers rotate instructors to teach various topics. You want someone who regularly teaches the class you want to attend, so you know his or her skills are sharp-est, and they are more likely to be properly prepared.

Some additional questions you should ask:

- Can you observe a class before enrolling?
- What are all the fees?
- Can you talk to existing students for their opinions?
- How long will the classes run?

Some other advice:

- Don't sign any documents during your first visit.
- Don't make a hasty decision, even if you are told that seats are limited and going fast.
- Review all paperwork carefully before signing.
- Be certain to get a receipt for all payments.

With some planning and an investment of both time and money, computer technology and the flexibility and benefits they offer can be a great boon to your business, improving efficiency, cutting costs and boosting your bottom line.

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