U3A EAGER TO LEARN

Linda unlocks the mysteries of eresources with one of her U3A students.

A re you looking for new ways to promote eresources? Do you need a ready-made audience receptive to learning? Earlier this year, I targeted a University of the Third Age (U3A) group and ran a six week course for them on using eresources.

Topics included Finding Your Next Great Read (NoveList Plus, Literary Reference Centre and the library's online catalogue), Old News and New News (Australia/NZ Reference Centre and Trove), Law and Health (Find Legal Answers, Consumer Health Complete), Overdrive, and Family History (New South Wales State Records, Ancestry Library Edition and Find My Past).

We found participants liked the practical examples of using eresources to find information about daily problems such as discovering a new author or locating that newspaper article they read a while ago. They also liked learning about navigating websites; exploring tabs and menus and following up links to more information

I included a weekly quiz, which proved very popular and encouraged discussion. I discovered too that handouts were a hit amongst this 50+ age group. In fact, participants demanded them!

We had some negative feedback relating to the technology, such as "the WiFi was down" and "the laptop I had didn't work". But we also found we could turn these negatives into learning opportunities. If the in-house wireless wasn't working, we encouraged participants to discover free library wireless instead.

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The level of comfort and expertise with technology amongst participants was wide-ranging. As the course progressed, I noticed significant improvement as the unfamiliar became familiar and as trouble-shooting knowledge increased.

Handling a class of 18 people using different devices proved tricky at times. Some websites don't appear the same on an iPad as a laptop/pc and this caused consternation when participants thought they were in the 'wrong place'. Having a colleague available to 'float 'and assist was invaluable.

Running the program was a learning experience for me too. Next time I will ask about the level of expertise and familiarity people already have with the technology I plan to use before we start. I will focus classes around one device and keep the tutor/participant ratio workable.

Another U3A group has now asked me to run a course. Maybe there are similar groups in your community you could approach as a way of promoting eresources?

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