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Learning the basic skills of information society – Netti-Nysse the Internet bus

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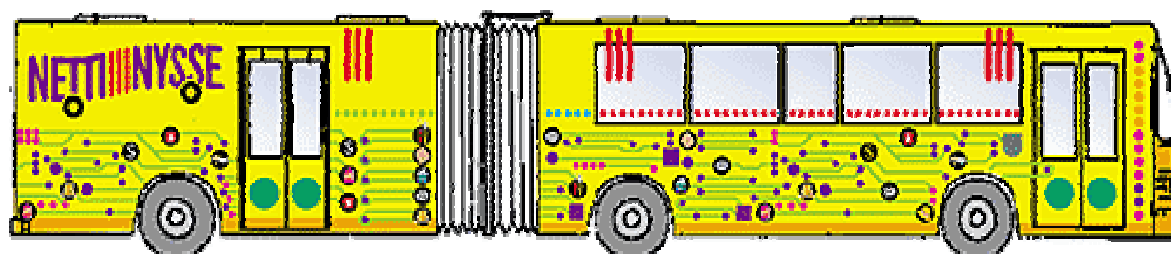
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www.tampere.fi/kirjasto/nettinysse

Do you know anyone lacking the basic computer skills? Or someone who has never used the Internet? Do you happen to know which mobile service is 18 meters long, bright yellow and moves on wheels?

Netti-Nysse put the Web on wheels and took it to its users. The purpose of this mobile service is to encourage the residents of Tampere, Finland to start using the computer and the Internet and give them the initial instruction to be able to do that.

Netti-Nysse can be booked for groups of citizens or individuals can sign up to open tuition groups. Groups of neighbours, clubs, societies- any group of people who want to learn to use the computer and the Internet can book the Netti-Nysse for their use and have it come to their own neighbourhood. Instruction is informal: there is always someone to help, but the users proceed at their own pace. Efficient instruction methods, learning by doing and getting used to the Internet are the cornerstones of Netti-Nysse. Elementary instruction is free of charge.



How did it all start?

In January 2000, teachers from 3 countries with a common wish to offer non-formal and low barrier opportunities for people to enter the world of computers, came together in Wales. The idea of an Internet bus was born. The original idea was to have one bus in Amsterdam, Holland, one in Roskilde, Denmark and one in Tampere, Finland. Tampere was the lucky one to get one.

Why was this? In the city of Tampere, the right people were found and the timing was good. Thanks to the flexibility and quick decision-making of the city, an old, articulated bus was bought for the purpose in the autumn of 2000. Local vocational schools did wonders and turned it to a wireless Internet bus during the winter. The transforming process itself was a joint effort of various experts from different fields. The people participating were really excited about the work and all the problems were gradually solved. With a small opening ceremony in June 2001, the bus was launched for the public.

There was a lot of talking done from the very beginning. The idea was presented to companies and other actors central to information society. We established co-operation agreements and also received computers, mobile phones and some financial aid besides finding a lot of people interested in our project. The media has been keen on the project right from the start, which helped us in making the project known for the general public.

The eTampere programme was launched at the same time as Netti-Nysse was being constructed. It is an ambitious programme “to make Tampere a global leader in the research, development and application of issues related to the Information Society.” The programme deals with e-business, technology and enterprises, but also touches issues concerning the citizens’ information society (read more about eTampere at www.etampere.fi). Netti-Nysse proved as a concrete, living example of eTampere, which in turn has been a good framework and support for the project.

Netti-Nysse is financed almost fully by the town of Tampere. Only a minor percentage of the project budget is coming from our co-operation partners.



What is the bus like?

Netti-Nysse used to serve as a citybus. It is a model 1982, 18,5 meter-long articulated bus. Netti-Nysse is a unique mixture of the familiar citybus combined with the latest high tech. It also has a very up-to-date exterior. There really should not be anything to be scared of; even the name of the bus is of local origin and, in fact, just another dialectal way to express ‘Internet bus’.

The bus consists of two parts. “The computer classroom” has 11 computers with the basic software installed. “The auditorium” has 10 seats, a big screen and a data-projector. Good audio-visual facilities as well as a coffee machine and a fridge are also provided.



There are 9 permanent W-lan antennas around the town for Internet access. When near to those antennas it is easy to get a working Internet connection, but beyond the reach of those antennas we can use the high-speed GSM or GPRS mobile connection. That connection, however, is much slower.

Large batteries or our own generator provide the necessary electricity for the bus but here is also the possibility to plug in the electricity network. There is an additional heating system and air conditioning in the bus. If necessary the bus can carry 13 people. Actually, Netti-Nysse is registered as a mini bus and it is probably the biggest minibus in the world.

How do we work?

The goal of Netti-Nysse is to serve and help people in getting started with computers and the Internet. People gather together groups of 7-10 people and call us. We normally offer them a package of instruction including 4 sessions 2 hours each. We fix the schedule to suit them as best we can. Normally our first group starts at 9 am and the last one is out at 7.30pm.

When people first come to us they seem to be very curious about the bus, but the fancy car alone doesn't take you far. Our tutors, the people who help the customers, are a very important part of the idea. There are five people working full time for the bus. With one group there are 2-5 tutors available, depending on the case. Individual support, someone to ask, is very important for the people who are entering a world they do not know before. Although our tutors are not teachers by profession, they are experienced customer service professionals and adults at 35-55 years of age and with good basic computer and Internet skills.

Our tutors represent a whole new kind of professionals. They know how to support and solve everyday computer problems or other information society –related matters. They have an encouraging attitude, empowering the learners and doing it in plain, understandable language. The whole idea is that the tutors must be easily approachable by anyone. We also hope that our bus is a place where difficult terms of information society are translated into understandable language. For us there is no such thing as a silly question.

With our groups we focus on the Internet, but to get there we normally need to practice using the computer mouse first. After that we very soon start surfing on the Internet, making use of search engines, opening new e-mail accounts and studying the web banking systems. Very soon people get so excited about what is there on the Internet that they forget the actual computer.

Of course we encourage them to carry on learning and using computers even after our meetings. We tell them how to access the Internet from their homes and inform them about other elementary computer courses available.

According to the feedback and demand we have succeeded in our work. The bus is fully booked for at least 3 months ahead.

Who are we working with?

During the first year, 85 different groups have attended the elementary courses. There has been a range of different groups; a lot of senior people, groups of mothers, truck drivers, young unemployed people, immigrants, entrepreneurs, extended families etc. There has also been a growing interest from the part of associations. It is obvious that a familiar group supports the learning experience and creates a relaxed atmosphere.

- **First year 85 groups; associations of senior people, immigrants, people with hearing problems, truck drivers, kitchen workers, entrepreneurs, mothers, etc.**
- **In basic instruction 980 people**
- **Participated in 80 different happenings, 12 000 visitors.**



Last year, 70% of the course participants were women, 45% between the ages of 31-55 years, 50% over the age of 55, 90% had never used a computer before or only knew how to play solitaire with it. 95% were going to go on using the computer after the course. 50% had a computer at home, but there was mainly someone else using it.

OUR CUSTOMERS

Women 66%

Men 34%

Age:

- - 30 2 %
- 31 – 55 34 %
- 56 – 64 27 %
- 65 - 37 %

- Working 29 %
- Retired 62 %
- Others 8 %



During the first year we also took part in various happenings and exhibitions and also arranged open doors days to make the service and the bus familiar to people. The total number of visitors amounted at 12 000.

Netti-Nysse also received some public recognition. Last November the European Commission awarded Netti-Nysse and the city of Tampere with a recognition for the "Best eGovernment Practise". Another recognition came from the Ministry of Education as Netti-Nysse won a national prize for being an 'innovative adult education practice'.

How to lower the barriers to participation in the information society?

The need to learn is there. In Finland people seem to feel a social pressure to learn to use new technology. But often the barrier to participate in computer classes and other formal education is too high. Courses are long, there are tests and you have to keep up with the pace of the teachers etc. Safe, easy-going, non-formal introductory courses are needed. Positive learning experiences empower as they feed curiosity and courage.

EXPERIENCE OF COMPUTERS

- Never used 35 %
- Some experience (f.e. solitaire) 46 %
- Use computer, but need support 19 %



POSSIBILITY TO USE COMPUTERS

- At home 50 %
- In library 34 %
- At work 14 %
- At friends home 11 %
- No possibility 11 %

- Mobile phone 81 %



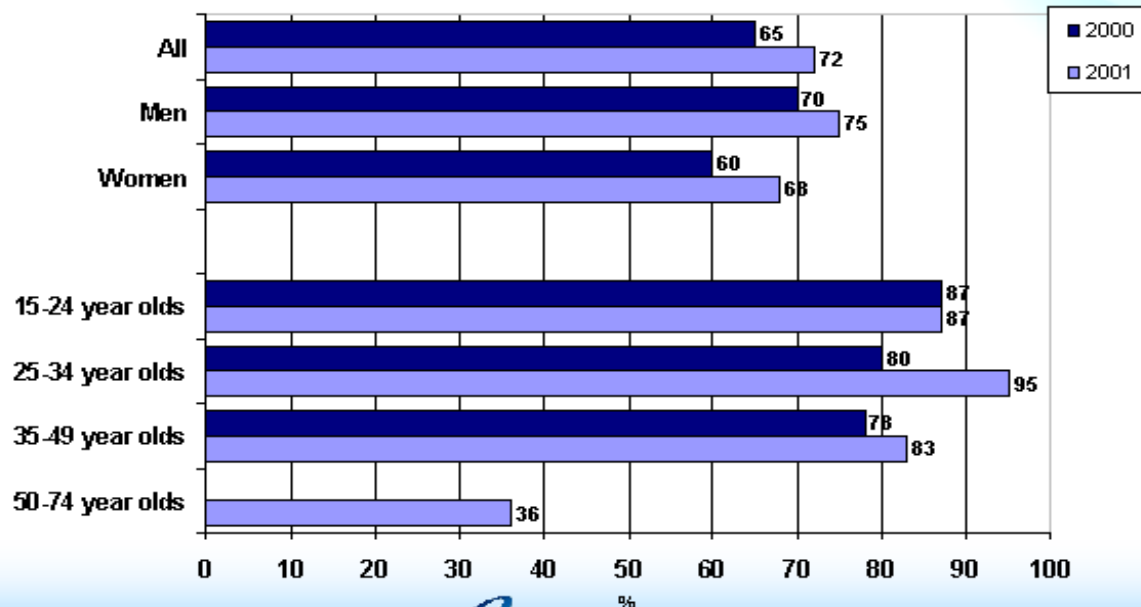
Supporting people's computer literacy plays an essential part in building the information society. But it's not nearly enough. Giving the people opportunities to use the computer besides offering reasonably priced and fast enough Internet connections are equally important. In the city of Tampere there are a little over 100 computers available for public use free of charge. In addition, public schools are quite well equipped as to computers. It is being examined whether the computer classrooms of public schools could be opened for the public in the evenings and during the weekends.

As to Internet connections for households, the number of alternatives to choose from has gone up while the prices have come down with the increased competition.

However, meaningful content is needed to supplement the faster connections and increased knowledge and skills of the people. What adults expect from using the Internet is some kind of added value for their everyday life or at least a certain kind of pleasure factor. To make this true the city of Tampere is actively developing new web services for its citizens.



Internet connection in use



eTampere aims high

The objective of the eTampere information society programme is to make Tampere the spearhead city of information society development

- by strengthening the knowledge base
- by creating new business
- by producing new public online services that ease the daily life of all citizens



Infocity (City of Tampere)

- **Makes Tampere a model city of information society**
- **by developing practical online services for citizens and**
- **by improving the citizens' skills to use them**

