

High Tech Activity Idea: Resident Blogging

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More and more facilities are setting up computer labs or stations and teaching the elderly how to utilize computers and the internet. There are so many different ways in which activity and recreation professionals are utilizing these computers such as, computer games, emailing, webcams, digital photos, and mp3's, watching videos, pen pal programs, on-line travel clubs, www scavenger hunts, and so much more!

Have you ever considered starting a Resident Blog? A blog is basically a type of website, which includes regular entries of discussion, happenings, thoughts, or other material. An individual person or group of people may maintain a blog. Blogs can also include pictures, videos, links, news, or any other relevant information.

Blogging is simply a great activity for the residents, providing empowerment, self expression, responsibility, purpose and an overall sense of well being. Family members and friends of residents can also benefit from the residents' blog for they can subscribe and read about the facility happenings or resident news.

All you need to start a blogging group is a computer, internet access, interested residents and signed permission slips or consent forms. Residents who are blogging as part of this special group should give their written permission to have "their work" posted on the internet. It's also important to remember that any resident photos, videos, birthdays and such should have written permission from each participating resident or legal guardian. I also recommend you receive permission from the administrator or your supervisor.

There really are no right and wrong ways to maintain a blog, however, here are some basic tips and ideas to help you and your residents make the most out of the blogging experience.

- 1) Find a free blog host. There are many free blog hosting companies available to choose from. Common ones include:
 - www.blogger.com
 - www.wordpress.com
 - www.mashable.com/2007/08/06/free-blog-hosts lists over 40 + free blog hosts
- 2) Define the purpose of the blog and stay on topic. Is this a blog that discusses the activity events at your facility or is it about life in the facility? Perhaps it is a blog that discusses residents' rights, legislation and advocacy for seniors or is one that focuses on past experiences. It's really up to you and your residents, but choose some type of topic and stick to that. You may even choose to have different blogs, for example, maybe the men would like to have their own blog about sports, whereas the women discuss recipes and cooking tips.
- 3) Stay current. If the bloggers are reporting on industry news, events and such, be sure it is current information and that the facts are correct. The residents can surely voice their opinions regarding subject matter, but be sure that it clearly stated that the content of the blog is meant to be an editorial.
- 4) Title and dates. Be sure the information is current and that each entry is given a title. This will help readers find the information and attract attention.
- 5) Create visual interest. Don't forget to add pictures and videos if available to create a more visual blog. However, it's imperative you receive written permission from each resident that is pictured on the blog.

- 6) Create a schedule or timeline. How often will your group meet to blog? Weekly, daily, monthly? Of course residents who are independent may choose to blog whenever the writing bug bites them!
- 7) Grammar and spelling. Although this isn't a writing contest or school, grammar and spelling is important so be sure to check each posting.
- 8) Keep it simple. Remember that the most important part of the residents' blog is for the residents to have fun, express themselves in a whole new way and create meaningful activity.
- 9) Recruit help from high school students. If you don't have time to facilitate this type of group, then make it a project for the high school students. Using your intergenerational program for technology related projects and activities sparks interests from the students and takes some pressure off of the Activity department.
- 10) Advertise your blog. You want people to read the blog so let the family members, staff, corporate headquarters, the media, etc. know about your resident blog. This can also be a fantastic marketing tool!

If you do start a blogging club, please be sure to let me know. I'd like to let others know about your facility blog. Good luck and happy blogging!