AN INTERVIEW WITH

JIL HRDLICZKA
FOUNDER AND OWNER OF KNOWLEDGE NETWORK

Knowledge Network - a company established in 1994 for young children, teenagers and adults to learn how to use the computer as a tool for life and learning- is celebrating its 21st birthday this month.

Knowledge Network is the brainchild of Jil Hrdliczka, the founder and owner of the company. We spoke to Jil about the role the company plays in upskilling our youth and educators, as well as our corporate employees - whose ongoing upskilling often determines their career successes and earning potential.

KNOWLEDGE NETWORK IS 21 THIS YEAR. HOW DID KNOWLEDGE NETWORK START?

Knowledge Network started in 1994 in Rivonia as a technology centre for kids, teenagers and their parents. Children from in and around Rivonia were brought to the centre by their parents to learn how to use a computer to complete their schoolwork, to conduct research, use the Internet safely, communicate electronically, to develop their general knowledge - and for overall development. Many children joined to gain a competitive advantage in their school lives and in life after school. After a few months, parents from as far afield as Springs, Pretoria, Soweto, Lenasia, Glenvista and Magaliesburg travelled to Rivonia with their children every weekend for, in many cases, a few years.

We eventually started a Club for those children who could not get to Rivonia and projects would be faxed, emailed or available via the Internet once a week. Projects were published in local magazines for other children to see. It was amazing.

HOW DID KNOWLEDGE NETWORK BECOME INVOLVED WITH SCHOOLS?

Schools like St Peter's Preparatory School and Krugersdorp High School heard about what the children were learning from their students. The principals or IT Heads then approached us to upskill their teachers to run the same programme in their schools. Their teachers attended the learning methodology course, followed by training in the delivery of the content, which complements government and international curricula, including Cambridge and IB. The implementation of the Knowledge Network programme in the first schools was successful.

Parents, educators and the school governing body saw it as innovative and cutting edge, and most importantly it was fun for all the learners. Some of those leading schools are still implementing Knowledge Network in their schools today. The educators and the learners have been kept up to date with all the changes in technology and the technology learning tools of the day. Most importantly, they are fully equipped with the background knowledge and experience they need to apply their skills set to any technologies introduced into the learning and teaching landscape from time to time.

YOU MENTIONED EDUCATORS ARE TRAINED IN A LEARNING METHODOLOGY? WHICH METHODOLOGY IS BEING USED?

The learning methodology is called ILAMM – Integrated Learning and Mentoring Methodology. I developed it in 1994 specifically for learning involving information technology. Prior to starting Knowledge Network, I started the Damelin Computer School, served as its Principal and on leaving Damelin, was a director and shareholder of the Damelin Education Group. In the time between these two projects, I developed the learning methodology. The most important aspects of the methodology are: it makes learning easy, makes learners e-learning ready, is integrated and is fun for both the educator and learner.

The learning methodology enables accelerated learning and simultaneous development of IT Skills, creativity, lateral thinking, logic, problem-solving ability, life skills, listening, concentration and memory skills, research, planning and time management. ILAMM promotes active learning. Emphasis is placed on development of self-esteem, confidence building and providing learners with the coping skills they need for every learning experience. ILAMM is perfect for integrated learning, multicultural, multilingual learning environments and most learning barriers are overcome by the application of ILAMM.

HOW DOES THE COSTING WORK?

The implementation of the programme is affordable. There is a fee for the educator to be trained in the integrated learning methodology and on the devices and software being used by the school. Many teachers are now having to learn how to use iPads, Androids, Windows-based tablets or computers, Macs, open source computers as well as smartphones to deliver learning. Some schools are now "bring-your-own device" institutions.

Teachers who are attending Knowledge Network training programmes and who are delivering the Knowledge Network programmes in the schools are ready and able to handle any of the devices the schools have selected for their learners. Knowledge Network's focus is using a computer/device as a tool for life and learning – the focus is on productivity – using the tools to complete schoolwork, do research properly, complete projects, communicate and update learners on technology-related social problems like cyberbullying. Back to the costing – there is a fee for the educator to attend ILAMM, then there is a fee per learner per year (which is the same as the cost of one spare rib, chips, salad dinner per learner per year).
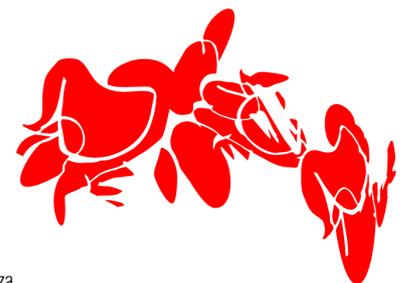
These fees cover all the upskilling requirements for educators and learners involved in the programme.

IS THIS PROGRAMME SUITABLE FOR ALL SOUTH AFRICAN LEARNERS, INCLUDING PREVIOUSLY DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS?

Knowledge Network's slogans are "learning together, working together", "your partner in learning", "behind you all the way" and "we get you there". All learners in South Africa, and other countries throughout the world, can achieve a 100% pass rate for the programme (the pass mark is 70%). We look at where the learners are currently, start there and then build to achieve the end goal.

Knowledge Network®