Coding for Adults: Newbies Only

Darien Library

Adults

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Free

Byline

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Coding for Adults was a no-experience-necessary introduction to HTML and CSS. Using resources found within Codecademy and Common Sense Media, the event required $0 beyond staffing. Attendees ranged from interested parents looking to understand what their children are learning in elementary school and college, to former 90s-era web developers, to others just looking to learn a new skill.

Advanced Planning

I am by no means a coding expert, but I have dabbled a bit in Python and use a bit of HTML for our library's website. Leading up to the event, I brushed up on my HTML skills by completing the Codecademy HTML course. Codecademy is interactive, free and a great simple tool for anyone who wants to try their hand at learning a new language (or several!). I also familiarized myself with Codecademy's resources for educators.

These lesson plans break down learning objectives, putting coding terminology (which can often sound/feel like a foreign language) into clear concepts. While anyone can truck through Codecademy's courses, it's important to be able to explain what is actually happening when patrons string together a bunch of brackets and letters and what they're learning as a result. We wanted our community members to walk away learning a few lines of code, yes, but more importantly, we wanted to empower them to know that they can continue learning, creating and expanding on their new skill.

Marketing

Coding for Adults was part of a larger library-wide tech series we offer every winter. The event was included in all our normal publicity, including webpost, email blasts and our calendar of events, but also as part of this larger series. Because our tech series has events for both children and adults, I have a suspicion that part of the interest was parents looking for things for their kids, but also seeing a class or two they might be interested in attending for themselves.

Budgeting

Codecademy is a free resource. This program cost us nothing besides staff time!

Day-of-event Activity

We began the class with this silly video. I then did that annoying teaching thing where I asked everyone to introduce themselves, answer the question "What is the Internet?" and explain why they were here today. This helped break down some of the awkwardness and tension that can happen in a small group of strangers. After introductions, we all set up accounts on Codecademy. This is a super simple process: all the attendees needed was an email address, password and username. No confirming accounts or anything extra!

I then explained that we'd be working our way through Codecademy's first 13 lessons together; while each attendee had their own computer, if they ran into a problem with their code, they were to ask a neighbor to have a look at their string. Maybe their neighbor would notice a forgotten caret or letter, or spot another minor error that always leads to the frustrating "oops! your code doesn't work!" This helped create an atmosphere of "we're all in this together."

At the beginning of each new lesson, I asked attendees to reiterate what they'd just learned. One lesson was about HTML tags; another on headings; inserting links and pictures, etc. Asking participants to explain what they'd just created made the experience that much more impactful: anyone can follow easy directions, but explaining concepts and practices shows a real mastery of skill.

After our first eight lessons, we did a 10-minute bathroom and stretching break. After staring at a computer for an hour, this was much needed!

Program Execution

Our technology center holds 12 participants, so we capped registration with that number in mind. After filling up, we had over 20 people register for the waitlist, so this will definitely be a program we offer again in the near future.

Our audience was very evenly mixed: several parents looking to understand what their children are learning in school, one startup owner who wants to see what his engineer is doing, a former 90s-era web developer who wanted a refresher, a math teacher, and several other people just looking to learn a new skill. During our break, one participant brought in her young daughter to show her the code she had created. The daughter was stunned and didn't believe her mom had actually done

that!

Targeting this event to our adult population was important to us. We're always hearing from parents that they love our youth offerings, but they want a chance to learn, explore and create, too! This desire was expressed at our Coding for Adults class.

Advice

While Codecademy is great at keeping track of user progress, that can create some confusion when students see their teacher's screen. When attendees created their new accounts, all of their lessons started and looked exactly the same. Mine, because I had already used Codeademy a bit, had old, cheeky lines of code I had written previously. If teaching a similar class, start out fresh with a brand new account so your screen will look exactly like your attendees' screens.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

More Programs

Jun 18, 2015
Children (9 and under)+ | □□
Image



No Fuss Minecraft Programs

Audiences:

Audience
Children (9 and under)
Dec 28, 2015
Children (9 and under)+ | □□
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Hour of Code

Audiences:

Audience
Children (9 and under)
Jun 10, 2015
Young Adult (17 - 20)+ | □□
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Sunday Morning Computer Help for Seniors

Audiences:

Young Adult (17 - 20)
Intergenerational