

# Online educational tools help boost career prospects

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There's help online for professionals on Long Island who are looking for tools to boost their career prospects.

An increasingly popular batch of free or low-cost on-demand Web platforms, some with mobile apps for learning on the go, are helping people develop skills to stay relevant and employable, learn the ins and outs of setting up a blog or a business, or find ways to manage time and energy more effectively.

These resources -- with names like creativeLIVE, Skillshare, Udemy and Coursera -- offer training in anything from Twitter basics to

Rock Poster Design to Statistical Molecular Thermal Dynamics, right along with essential computer-age skills such as how to use the ubiquitous spreadsheet program Excel.

Depending on the platform, presenters range from little-known industry experts to top university professors to Silicon Valley rock stars like the leaders of WordPress, Linked-In and Google (x), Google's secret special projects lab.

A big draw for online classes is the ability to learn at your own pace, said Marny Smith, recruiter with Skillfer, a Manhattan-based recruitment firm for startups and tech companies. The programs, some running from a day in length to six weeks or more, are also inexpensive enough to be "available to anyone with access to a computer," she said.

Andrea Feinberg, who coaches women business owners, was recently looking for direction in how to produce a book for Kindle. She turned to Udemy.com for a six-part course, which now costs \$19, taught by "a multi-published Kindle author." From it she learned about publication timing, Amazon fees, options for "enhanced" publishing and how to register as a publisher. Her book, "Less Stress = More Success: A Business Woman's Guide to Reduce Overwhelm and Create a Healthier Wealthier Life," co-authored with 14 other Long Island women, is expected to be Kindle-ready soon, said Feinberg, of Port Jefferson Station.



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While there are many pluses to online courses, some people may "require an extra level of commitment and focus," said Smith. With some, there's also the issue of assessing your progress "if there is no teacher available to bounce ideas off or to give you feedback."

Still, LinkedIn, the widely used social networking website for professionals, is giving some Web platforms a nod, having launched last month a pilot program with a handful of online learning organizations, including Udemy, Coursera and lynda.com.

LinkedIn members in those learning programs will get emails asking if, in one click, they would like to update their profiles with recently completed courses and certificates.

Following is a sampling of online options:

### **creativeLIVE**

At no cost, users of this service can view its one- to three-day workshops as they're broadcast live on the Web, or view them at their leisure for fees ranging from \$49 to \$199. According to the site, popular sessions include "Unlocking the Power of Pinterest," "Photoshop Deep Dive," "Legal Survival Guide for Creative Businesses," and "Google Apps for Business."

This is about people "being able to better themselves," allowing them "to consume educational material in the way that they want," said Ari Meisel, 31, of Bridgehampton, a wellness and productivity coach who last month conducted a two-day workshop on "The Art of Less Doing," which currently sells for \$79.

As a photographer's mate in the U.S. Navy, Carrie-Anne Gonzalez focused on subjects far different from those in the portraits and small boutique weddings she was interested in shooting in civilian life. She said she's upped her game by taking dozens of online training sessions, with several standouts at creativeLIVE.

In a wedding photography workshop she learned a method for finding just the right lighting, and the session was so helpful that even though she watched it live for free, she ended up buying the video so she could review it. "It ultimately changed the way I view light," said Gonzalez, 36, who with a partner owns Carrie Weston Studios in East Northport.

(See also Skillshare, as well as Udemy, which offers a course that Smith recommends -- "How to Negotiate Salary" -- which she said helped her "negotiate a good-sized raise in a previous role.")

### **lynda.com**

Also a site in LinkedIn's pilot, lynda.com, tracing its roots to a physical school launched in the mid-1990s, offers unlimited viewing of its skills-based videos for subscription fees starting at \$25 a month. Subject areas include software, business and design, with "Up and Running with Prezi" - a tool for creating presentations -- among its recent additions. Excel Essential Training is listed as one of the site's most popular courses.

Some users might "come into the service" for just one needed answer, with others spending hours "teaching themselves something," co-founder Lynda Weinman said in a "welcome" video.

The former is exactly what Ellen Williams, 49, of Little Neck, did a few years back when she was a consultant for small businesses. She would check the videos for "those little things you think you know and you don't," especially relating to some esoteric Excel questions.

"Most of the training is in small pieces, so you don't have to start from the beginning," said

Williams, now regional development director for Constant Contact, doing seminars on Long Island. She also offered the service to her daughter, who used it in high school to develop Photoshop skills, she said.

A spokesman said lynda.com is available at no cost at area libraries including Port Washington, Hewlett-Woodmere, Mastic-Moriches-Shirley Community, and Middle Country.

The site also offers gift memberships.

## **Khan Academy**

This nonprofit is a place for those of any age or profession looking to catch up on basics they may have missed in grades K-12. The site, which is free, has a special focus on mathematics, including courses ranging from third-grade math to probability and statistics.

Back when he was in school, Meisel said, he saw little application for trigonometry. Now that he is also accredited as a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, developer in Bridgehampton, he said he realized a trig refresher would be helpful for his work in construction, one reason he signed up two years ago for a Khan Academy course.

The platform also offers no-cost courses in science, economics and computer programming, along with features to help keep participants engaged, such as badges, community-based Q & As and a progress bar for skills worked on and completed.

(Coursera and Codecademy are among other sites that help people develop coding skills, Smith said.)

## **Coursera**

Considered a MOOC -- a massive open online course -- Coursera partners with top universities, offering free online courses for anyone in the world. While some offerings are academic heavy-hitters, others are more "novice friendly," such as Creative, Serious and Playful Science of Android Apps, with a senior lecturer from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Chris Farrell, a partner in a small Jericho CPA firm who was looking to develop some marketing skills, is partway through a nine-week graduate-level Marketing 101 Coursera course with three professors from the Wharton business school.

Progressing at his own pace from the convenience of his home, Farrell, 45, said the experience "enhances my overall knowledge of the topic," though as yet he's found no direct application to his business.

Still, with an average investment of 10 to 15 minutes a day viewing the bite-sized video lessons, Farrell said, "it's so easy it's almost silly not to look into it."

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