

garry
barker



Thou shalt seek guidance

Whether you reach for the manual or call in the experts, help is always at hand.

IN THE beginning, as the ancient scribes wrote in Genesis, the Macintosh mantra was, "When all else fails, read the manual". And it has been pretty much the same ever since. Mostly, of course, if you kept just pecking away, things on the Mac seemed to work out, at least in the short term.

Apple has always been big on intuitiveness, which means these days that a child of five years knows almost immediately how the thing works.

But what if you are 55, or even several years younger, and are confronted with 21st-century technology more demanding than an ATM and an eftpos terminal? (Though I have seen people wondrously confused by those, too.)

There is no shame in not knowing — only in not doing anything about it, which is where a local outfit called The Web on Wheels comes in. It is aimed especially at older people and those who so far have found computers mysterious.

Founder Vivienne McDonald has worked with older people for 20 years (and won two Australian Achiever awards). She says she has "always been a go-to person with computers". She started The Web on Wheels in 2005, partly because people who used her secretarial business were often older and needed help with their computers.

She has since been joined by Matthew Styles, a Macintosh technician, in running classes and making house calls — hence the name, drawn, of course, from Meals on Wheels.

McDonald says guided, hands-on experience can help overcome what, in many older people, amounts to fear of computers and confusion about their use.

With its easy interface and touchscreen that brings the technology into direct, fingertip contact with the user, the iPad has made getting online

for everything from finding a book to read, to surfing the web or finding your way with Google Maps much easier. But diving in a bit deeper needs help. "All they need is a bit of advice to get them going," McDonald says.

Jo Storm, a former teacher and now a social worker and board member of Blind Sports Victoria, finds her iPad invaluable.

"I have had two corneal transplants and though I can see quite well I find the way you can increase the size of the type in iBooks on the iPad makes reading much more pleasurable," she says.

"I went through the online tutorial when I first got my iPad but I found it difficult to read online. I knew the basics

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but I was really just fumbling about until I came across Web on Wheels through my local newspaper. I signed up for the class and have been really pleased with how much I have learnt."

For example, Storm now uses the Personal Hotspot feature on her iPhone 4 to connect her iPad to the mobile phone network when out of range of wi-fi, which is great for email, she says. She also now uses Skype on the iPad to chat with her granddaughter, who is not yet three years old.

For more information, see thewebonwheels.com.au.

Jobs threatened by iRobots

The new iPhone 5, announced earlier this week, is made in China by Foxconn, a Taiwanese company that employs 1.2 million workers in its factories centred in Shenzhen. They make millions of iPads and MacBooks there, too, and also assemble handsets for



Remember the commandment: in times of technological trouble, thou shalt read the manual, or ask for further instruction.

PICTURE: AP

Nokia, Motorola and others. But how long a workforce of that massive size will be maintained is now in question. Foxconn has announced it will replace at least some of its assembly army with a million robots in the next three years.

Not only that but Foxconn has begun assembly of iPads in a new factory in the city of Jundiai in Brazil. Nearly 200 Brazilian engineers have been sent for training in Shenzhen and an annual output of 6 million iPads is

expected when the factory reaches full capacity.

Whether this means Brazilians work more cheaply than their counterparts in China, where wage rates have risen markedly along with the country's burgeoning prosperity and steeply rising living costs, is unknown. Or maybe it's all about robots, though Brazil's Minister of Science and Technology, Aloizio Mercadante, says the Jundiai factory will have 5000 employees within three years.

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