

COLOMBIAN e-CITIZEN

Bringing Access to Technology
and ICT Skills to all Colombians

Background

During 2008, as part of ECDL Foundation's global digital literacy survey, over 200,000 Colombians completed the digital literacy survey. The completion of the survey was a pre-cursor to ICDL Colombia introducing the e-ciudadano project (e-Citizen). The results from the survey highlighted the great disparity and social divide between those with digital skills and access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the Internet, and those without either digital skills or access.

Based on the survey's results, ICDL Colombia, working with the Colombian Ministry for Information Technology and the Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (National Learning Service) SENA, formulated a project which would up-skill those on the wrong side of the digital divide with foundational ICT skills. This would enable them to engage with the Internet and communicate with individuals and organisations, as well as to actively participate in e-Government, online banking etc.

Project Aims

The project aims to train and certify 75,000 Colombians in the basic use of ICT. According to the current national Colombian ICT plan, by 2019, all Colombians will be connected to the Internet and will be able to use technology efficiently, leading to increased social inclusion and competitiveness. The e-ciudadano project forms an integral part of Colombia's current national ICT plan. Project aims also include: giving Colombians more access to a Knowledge Society, allowing them to book holidays, conduct their banking, access distance education, and access public services online.

e-Ciudadano Project Concept

The e-ciudadano project aims to promote the e-Citizen training and certification to specific marginalised groups initially, and thereafter to a wider national audience. The first phase of the project is aimed at women, youth groups, companies, journalists, and marginalised communities. The project is split into three parts. The first part looks at the recruitment of those without skills to enroll in the e-ciudadano project. The second part looks at how to utilise existing public and private infrastructure to deliver appropriate training. Both of these parts require a significant marketing and publicity effort to create a 'push effect' to get the necessary volumes of the target audience enrolled in the programme. The final part addresses certifying the participating candidates' skills. As the major investor in the programme, the Colombian government is keen to see a return on investment. Certification provides an essential hard metric which shows that the investment in the programme has been successful.

Marketing and Promoting e-Ciudadano

Reaching those on the wrong side of the digital divide and engaging with them through such a programme is challenging. Regular communications channels built around the Internet were obviously not the primary channel used to engage with potential participants who had no internet skills or experience. Nonetheless, they provided an important communication channel to participants once they were engaged in the programme, and also formed an important part of the general media outreach by ICDL Colombia to get supporters, trainers, and organisational buy-in for the project.

In the initial phase of the project, ICDL Colombia built the e-ciudadano website (www.e-ciudadano.org.co) as the central portal for those involved in running/administering the programme at ground level. This dynamic site, in addition to providing an important communications and learning channel for those administering the programme, also provided dynamic content and news stories on those who had completed it, and detailed how it had changed their daily lives and opened up new possibilities. This content-rich portal helped to get buy-in from candidates, supporters, and funders of the programme.

Using the portal as the central support, ICDL Colombia, together with SENA, conducted a campaign of selling the programme to organisations, such as community groups, marginalised groups (e.g. unemployed, women's refuges), and organisations that use a lot of manual labour. This promotional campaign was conducted over a three-month period using direct mail, phone follow up, and on-site visits. The on-site visits helped ensure the buy-in from senior management within the implementing organisations and also educated them on the process of rollout of the programme. With 25,000 people already enrolled in the programme, the e-ciudadano project is now generating its own momentum, with daily enquiries from new sectors looking to participate. Notable figures, such as the Colombian president, took their e-Citizen certification, and country-wide TV and radio coverage highlighted the success of the programme.



e-Ciudadano in Action – How it was Implemented

All the e-Citizen training was provided free of charge, and for the first 25,000 participants, the cost of the certification test was also covered. This was possible through the combined financial support of the company Fundacion Telefonica and also the Colombian government. The project commenced in the two main urban areas of Bogota. Training was made available within organisations where the target groups typically gather, e.g. libraries, community centres, places of work (non-office work places). Typically, training was delivered by volunteers. The training was also supported by specially developed user-friendly online learning system, enabling participants to take the e-learning in a supported environment. Across the two major urban areas, 88 testing centres were established to enable the administration of the e-ciudadano certification tests. The support and maintenance for these testing centres was provided by ECDL Foundation and Webscience A.L, an internationally recognised Automated Test System developer approved by ECDL Foundation.

There were many challenges in getting large numbers of people to participate and successfully complete the e-ciudadano programme. Chief amongst them were: recruitment of candidates, ensuring high completion rates, and the need for assisted learning. The lessons learnt from the initial rollout have been used to refine the project for its nationwide rollout by ICDL Colombia, which will take place in 2010/2011, and for the rollout of other ECDL Foundation certification programmes.



Project Outcomes

Follow-up studies have shown many favourable outcomes of the e-ciudadano programme, with many individual success stories. The common benefits that have been derived from a survey of candidates who completed the programme can be summarised as:

- Increased confidence of the individuals within the participating marginalised groups
- A greater sense amongst participants of the potential offered by the online world
- A reduction of the perceived social stigma and social exclusion within that group
- The e-Citizen certification providing a spring board for many to engage in further ICT learning

e-Ciudadano - The Next Steps

The e-ciudadano project has helped to raise the profile of digital skills in Colombia. While it primarily addresses foundational ICT skills, the importance of higher levels of ICT skills, in particular digital literacy and digital competency, has also been brought to the fore. During 2010, the Colombian Ministry of Education enrolled 800 staff to be trained and certified in ICDL. The Ministry viewed ICDL as being an essential level of competency for staff to be able to work effectively with computers within their department.

The next phase of the e-ciudadano project will see a further 50,000 people from marginalised groups around Colombia engaging in the project during 2011 and 2012.