Immigrants and the Internet

Helen Paola Almánzar

Immigrating to another country is kind of scary. You don't know where to start when you arrive at a new place. There's a feeling of starting from zero. It could make you feel excited or anxious or both! In this situation, the internet can help.

Use Apps to Stay Connected

When I first came to the U.S., the internet was a lifesaver. During the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, I could stay connected with my family in the Dominican Republic. I felt less alone and homesick. It was not the same as being face-to-face with my loved ones, but at least I could see them on the screen and hear their voices. It was a relief to know they were fine.

I use apps like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook to see what is happening in the lives of my family and friends. Social media keeps me close to my network of friends. I feel more connected to them than in the past when we just had phone calls.

Find What You're Looking For!

When I arrived in this country, I wanted to start practicing my English, but I didn't know where to start. I called the library but couldn't find the answer I was looking for. As an introvert, it was difficult to ask the right questions. So instead, I used the internet to find an English class. I found one in my neighborhood. I felt comfortable because they spoke Spanish. I called them, and that was how I began to make a connection with my local community.

When my husband moved to Providence, RI, he wanted to find new friends in the area. He used websites (like www.MeetUp.com) to find others interested in computers and cooking, his hobbies. This is how my husband connected to the community.

Here is a tip for new immigrants: Don't just search for immigrant groups. Do what my husband did and find people with the same interests and hobbies. This is a great way to meet people in your new community. It helps you merge with your new society.

Get Help Belonging to Your New Place

One of the positive things about being an immigrant is that you can create yourself again. You can learn a new language, discover a new culture, and find new ways of living. You will have to find a new job, figure out where to buy groceries and clothes, find schools for your kids, learn to drive on neighborhood streets and wide highways, navigate public transportation, and understand how to pay your bills (online or by mail). These daily routines make a life. They help you belong to a place. If you don't know where to begin, the internet is an incredible tool.

The internet can help you find answers to your questions. Using Google search, you can find articles on any topic in any language. You can use YouTube to look up how to make things or fix things. On Twitter, you can read and comment on all kinds of discussions. You can find online places to buy or sell just about anything—used or new. The internet helps us be independent and self-reliant.

Government Offices in the Palm of My Hand

As an immigrant, I find it useful that the internet makes government offices available in the palm of my hand. When I started my citizenship process, I went to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website. It provides all kinds of information and resources about your immigration options, as well as tools to help you prepare the forms and find citizenship classes.

WORLD EDUCATION

But Beware!

Keep in mind that the internet can be also be overwhelming. It provides almost too much information, and let me tell you, it is confusing and frustrating sometimes! For instance, you might accidentally apply for a job that no longer exists. You could get incorrect information about where to pay your bills. You might find an apartment to rent, but the address is wrong. All these things can waste time.

Sometimes websites are not just incorrect, they are dangerous. Bad websites give fake information. Sometimes, they might promise you prizes and gifts, but really they are just trying to get your credit card information. Even worse, sometimes they pass on "viruses" that can mess up your computer or your phone. So before you enter a website, look for sites that are secure. Look, for example, for those sites that end with: ".net," ".gov," ".edu," and that start with "https."

A Final Thought

The internet is a powerful tool for immigrants. We can learn new things, meet people, and make connections in our local community, all while staying connected with our friends and family in our original home. It's true that moving to a new country can be scary, but the internet can help make everything more familiar.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, what are some of the main ways immigrants can use the internet?

2. When you use the internet, what are two things you should beware of, according to the author.

3. What are some positive and not positive experiences you have had using the internet?

Helen Paola Almánzar is an ESOL student at the Genesis Center in Providence, RI. She is from the Dominican Republic, and has a degree in Architecture and International Business. She has a passion for the arts and loves to travel and spend time with her family.

WORLD EDUCATION