

londonage

Age UK London Magazine • Spring 2013



Digital inclusion

Are you in?

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make you smile?**

Comment

Samantha Mauger
Chief Executive
Age UK London



Digital Inclusion is an important issue, made all the more imminent by the government's strategy of 'Digital by Default'.

At Age UK London, we are attempting to work on these issues in a number of ways. We are dedicated to supporting older people gain the digital skills they need to access and use online services that are both essential and social. We are also bringing the issues concerning older people to the attention of policy makers, in an attempt to make the transition easier. Finally, we want to encourage policy makers and local councils to provide solutions to these problems in local communities.

In this issue, Dr Ellen J. Helsper, from London School of Economics and Politics, and Emma Solomon OBE, Managing Director of Digital Unite both tackle questions surrounding 'Digital By Default'. We also celebrate MiCommunity, Age UK London's Digital Inclusion programme and hear from five older Londoners who tell us how they feel about Digital Inclusion.

Finally, there are articles about older people finding work in London and older people from across the world who have settled in our great city.

We hope this edition of London Age will make the issues surrounding Digital Inclusion, and the solutions, much clearer.

S. K. Mauger

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Top news

Woolwich Age UK London Shop

Age UK London's latest shop was opened in Woolwich yesterday by the Mayor of the Royal Borough of Greenwich, Councillor David Grant. The Mayor, who is a long term supporter of the borough's local Age UK, described the new premises as 'splendid' and welcomed the bright new shop and advice centre as a positive addition to regeneration in the Powis area. The new retail hub is the second to be opened in London and sells new and high quality donated clothing, bric-a-brac, accessories, gifts and cards. The shop is being run by a dedicated team of staff and volunteers and will help to raise much needed funds for older people.

Address 112 Powis Street, Woolwich, SE18 6LU
Telephone 020 8854 3624



Healthwatch City of London

Age UK London are delighted to announce that it has been appointed as the delivery support organisation for the City of London Healthwatch, from April 1st 2013. Sam Mauger, CEO of Age UK London, said: 'Healthwatch City of London will give each of the 7,400 residents in the City a voice when it comes to the issues of health and social care. Healthwatch City of London looks forward to working with the local community and helping them engage and work with health and social care providers'.

Social Care event

Positive Ageing in London and Co-operatives London are hosting an event called 'Social Care - A Co-operative Approach', an event focusing on how the aspirations and needs of an ageing population can be met through ownership and control. This is a unique opportunity to have your say and help to design better, more inclusive services. This event is free to attend and lunch will be provided.

When Monday 29 April 2013, 10.30am – 3.30pm
Where Toynbee Hall, 28 Commercial Street, E1 6LS
Keynote Speaker Ed Mayo, Secretary General of Co-operatives UK

To reserve your place, please contact Janine Aldridge on jaldridge@ageuklondon.org.uk or phone **020 7091 2593**.

Moneywise

Age UK Camden was awarded funding by the Nationwide Foundation to provide benefits and financial advice to older people from Black, Asian, Minority, Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) groups in Camden, many of whom do not have English as a first language. A particular aim was to reach older Somali speakers (aged 50+). Consequently, the Moneywise project was launched in February 2010 and has now finished after three years.

The Moneywise project model centred on training bi-lingual volunteers to provide relevant information and advice, through outreach sessions hosted at local community groups and organisations which already help BAMER clients. The intention was to address clients' current financial exclusion, increase their confidence when engaging with the benefits system, and reduce anxiety and isolation.

Read the report here www.ageuk.org.uk/camden/ and fill in the questionnaire at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/TCGLBCP>

Digital by default and the risk of excluding older people

By Dr Ellen J. Helsper, Lecturer in Media and Communications at London School of Economics and Political Science discusses the 'Government Digital Strategy', the reasons people don't use computers and what's being done to help them.

In 2012, the UK government implemented the Government Digital Strategy (GDS) which includes making services Digital by Default. All interactions with government are to be digital, transacted over platforms such as the internet or mobile devices and services, such as Universal Benefits, will be available in digital formats only.

Around 20% of the population uses 80% of government services such as benefits and other support. This section of the population is made up mostly of the unemployed, those with lower education, those with disabilities, and older people. It so happens that these groups are also overrepresented amongst the 20% who do not use the internet and amongst those that make only very limited use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) or lack the confidence and skills needed to access digital services effectively.

For example, 70% of older people indicate being an internet non-user. Amongst older people those who are most at risk of missing out in a world that is Digital by Default are those who have lower levels of education, have not had steady employment and are socially isolated. This has led to the emergence of a 'digital underclass', a section of the population which suffers from a range of socio-economic disadvantages and who are, therefore, being left further and further behind online.

Simple solutions such as providing free access are no longer sufficient to get people online.

Currently, the main barriers to engaging with ICTs are a perceived lack of skills and of interest. These barriers are added to the barriers that have been around for longer; a lack of quality access to ICTs and the costs of having to keep technologically up to date. Amongst older people in particular we have seen an increase in the number of barriers over time, those who are now offline indicate that not only access and costs are a problem but also skills and interest in engaging with ICTs. Simple solutions such as providing free access are no longer sufficient to get people online.

Thus to comply with the promise that groups that are less likely to access the internet will not be abandoned, the GDS has instigated 'Assisted Digital'. Assisted Digital is not concerned with helping people online or providing skills training in this area. It entails that once a service is digital



by default, someone, a trusted intermediary, will transact with the government on a digital platform on behalf of those who cannot or who feel uncomfortable doing this themselves. The problem with this scenario is that these individuals often lack adequate support networks and the confidence to know how and who to ask for help.

'All interactions with government are to be digital, transacted over platforms such as the internet or mobile devices and services, such as Universal Benefits, will be available in digital formats only.'

Academics and non-government organisations are pushing for a more sensible debate in policy making that takes into consideration the socio-economic circumstances of those who are likely to be left out. So that digital inclusion strategies form part of a broader framework that deals with social inclusion and personal well-being for everyone and not just those who have a head start in the digital age.

Further reading

- 1 Cabinet Office** (November, 2012) Government Digital Strategy <http://publications.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/digital/strategy/>
- 2 Go On UK** (2012) This is For Everyone. The Case for Universal Digitisation <http://www.go-on.co.uk/>
- 3 Helsper, E.J.** (2009) The Aging Internet: Choice and Exclusion from Digital Services of the Elderly. Working with Older People, 13 (4), 28-33. <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/journals.htm?articleid=1936980>
- 4 Helsper, E.J.** (2011) The emergence of a digital underclass. Media Policy Project Brief 3 <http://www.scribd.com/doc/60556197/Policy-Brief-Emergence-of-a-Digital-Underclass>
- 5 Helsper, E.J. & Reisdorf, B.C.** (2013) A quantitative examination of explanations for reasons of internet non-use. Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social networking, 16(2), 94-99. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23249243>

Championing a digital solution for older people

Emma Solomon OBE, Managing Director of Digital Unite and Chair of the Age Action Alliance Digital Inclusion Group talks about the digital exclusion of older people, the national digital by default agenda and one enlightening solution

As founder and Managing Director of Digital Unite, I have been helping older people to use computers and the internet for 17 years and in that time much has changed. Computers have got smaller, phones have got smarter and cameras do more than just take pictures.

Today, digital skills are a must-have; to be without them is to be at a disadvantage on many levels. The Government's digital by default agenda makes this even more acute as they plan to get those every day transactions with the citizen online. From managing and claiming benefits, to paying for car and council tax, delivering such services digitally would realise a potential £1.2 billion worth of savings over the next three years alone.

That's a huge incentive for ministers, but with over 7 million people in the UK still having never used the internet and around 6.3 million of those aged over 55, it's a huge challenge also. The digital inclusion of older people is now critical, not just for older people themselves but for wider society and its digital aspirations for the future.

Why older people aren't online

Over and over again we have seen fear coupled with lack of knowledge and awareness as the key reasons why older people have not got online. Indeed in a recent report, 78% of retired non-users cited lack of skills as a key reason why they're not online and nearly 9 out of 10 (88%) said it was down to lack of interest. Yet once online they fly. Our own research among the over 55s who were using the internet showed that 86% said being

online had improved their lives. It had helped them to feel part of modern society (81%), save money (82%), feel less isolated (72%) and keep better in touch with friends and family (57%).

Older people need to be enthused by the wonders of modern technology, to see how it can be relevant to them and how it can make their lives better, easier, more connected. Our award-winning Spring Online campaign is testament to that.

Every year, as part of this digital inclusion drive in April, hundreds of free taster events are held around the UK for local older people. Just giving them a helping hand to try out the internet at a venue close to them can be life-transforming. Take John who, at his event, was helped to set up his utility bills online, create an email account and send an email to a friend; 'At 71 I never thought I would do this, I am so glad I came'. Or one lady who in her 100th year took to using the mouse and keyboard like a duck to water and subsequently informed her son she wanted a laptop.

These stories are just a small example of how a taste of digital technology can lead to an appetite for learning, exploring and using the internet as part of everyday lives.

A solution of size and scale

So how do we support older people more widely so they don't become even more digitally disenfranchised at these times of great change? Better still, how can we use the digital by default



agenda as an opportunity to show recipients the huge, life-changing benefits technology offers?

The Age Action Alliance Digital Inclusion Working Group, of which I'm honoured to be Chair, is all about finding real and practical solutions to those very questions. With over thirty members representing a wide range of organisations, the Group aims to make a tangible difference to the digital inclusion of older people. That may be by influencing others, supporting each other, combining assets, exploring new ideas and making bold suggestions.

'Today, digital skills are a must-have; to be without them is to be at a disadvantage on many levels'

One such suggestion is to create a formal framework to support the development and work of Digital Champions, those who can use their skills and enthusiasm for digital technology, to help others get online. From the feedback we've received from those who've completed our own Digital Champion courses we know how effective the right training and support can be in achieving impact and reach among non-users.

For example, 8 out of 10 (80%) who completed our courses said it had given them new ideas and techniques for helping people to get online and stay online with over half (55%) seeing an increase in the number of people they helped as a result. The following feedback from one course participant sums it up nicely: 'I just feel so much more confident about supporting people now in this way, it's great to know I did something 'official' to underpin it all. If anyone asks me now, what makes you able to do this, I can say, I did a special course and I've got a certificate. I've got some backing behind me.'

I truly believe that only by taking a structured and sustainable approach such as the Digital Champion framework, that adequately supports people to help others get online, can we even hope to tackle this issue of digital exclusion at the scale it demands.

Digital Unite's Spring Online campaign takes place between 22-26 April 2013. To find out more about the campaign and Digital Unite's other services and resources visit www.digitalunite.com.

In their own words

Chizom Ekeh, Communications and Campaigns Officer (Interim), Age UK London, talked to four older Londoners and asked them their views on digital media.

Sam, 73

Lives in Rotherhithe in Southwark

Sam uses computers at his local Age UK and sometimes at the local library.

Sam is a fan of digital media and believes that it is a sign of progress. He enjoys catching up with the news online and uses Facebook to communicate with his family. He usually writes letters using Microsoft Word and sends messages via email. There is nothing he dislikes about digital media. He says: 'I think you have to move with the times and that's no problem for me.'

Sam notes there could be problems for older people who don't know how to use computers if benefits applications move online.

He adds: 'I think there should be an alternative, which should be the old system and that should be available all the time. When you're older it's not easy to learn new things.'



Kenneth, 65

Lives in Southwark, from Yorkshire

Kenneth doesn't own a computer but uses the computers at his local Age UK.

He says: 'I don't use the internet, but I like to play games. I don't use it for anything else but would like to learn to research my family tree.'

Kenneth is content with his current level of knowledge but notes that digital media may bring many benefits to those who know how to use it. In addition to his concerns about child safety online, he warns that if applications for benefits are moved online, lots of older people will miss out.

He says: 'More older people will say they can't be bothered to claim their entitlements. At the moment they're missing out because they don't understand the forms. If they move the process online it will just get worse.'



Graham, 62

Lives in Surrey Quays, a retired postman

Graham has been using computers for the past 30 years and owns a PC and two laptops.

He says: 'The main reason I decided to get a computer was because I suffer from dyslexia. The spellchecker in Microsoft Word really helps me when I'm writing letters or documents.'

Graham is passionate about arts and crafts and uses design software for his work and has also been able to research his family tree.

He says: 'I've traced my family history as far back as 1530 and I've made contact with my living relatives too.'

Although Graham enjoys using digital media he says that the government should ensure that there are alternative options otherwise some older people will miss out.

He adds: 'As I'm dyslexic I don't like filling out online forms. I prefer to be able to make an appointment to meet an adviser at my local Jobcentre Plus and get the support I need.'



Salome, 60

Lives in Bermondsey, works as an Evangelist

Salome uses the computers at her local Age UK and sometimes at the library. She started learning to use computers when she was 50 years old, after early retirement from her job as a chef.

Salome uses her own website, YouTube and Twitter to evangelise online and Facebook to keep in touch with family and friends.

She's convinced that digital media is 'something that everyone has to learn.'

Highlighting its benefits she says: 'It's quicker and gives you easy access to the media. I think it's great for looking for jobs because you can just search and submit your CV online.'

But there are some aspects that make her uncomfortable.

She notes: 'I don't like putting my personal details online. To apply for my bus pass I have to submit my bank details, my date of birth and other sensitive information online.'

She adds: 'It's going to be very difficult for older people to apply for benefits online and there should be training available and assurances that support for older people is always available.'



MiCommunity Project



MiCommunity facilitated young people (aged 16-19) to share their IT skills, with older people (aged 60+), many of whom have little or no IT knowledge or skills

MiCommunity used intergenerational volunteering to build a stronger sense of community and connectedness between young volunteers and older people, bridging differences in age, ethnicity and culture, and challenging negative stereotypes.

What was MiCommunity?

Age UK London was awarded £352,000 by Team London (as part of the Mayor of London's £4.5 million volunteering scheme) and the Reuben Foundation, to fund an intergenerational digital inclusion project called MiCommunity. The funding paid for 1000 volunteers to teach IT skills to older people (aged 60 and over) across London, from June 2011 to May 2012.

The aim of the project was to use digital technology to bring together older people and younger people in the capital.

The project also gave local Age UKs in London the chance to engage corporate volunteers with short IT sessions. As well as working with older, younger and corporate volunteers, MiCommunity encouraged older learners to become volunteers themselves, by passing on their newfound IT skills to friends and family members.

Bringing older and younger people together

MiCommunity was delivered by Age UK London and its partners: seven local Age UKs in London and three Zenos IT Academies. The local computer courses were taught in schools, at local Age UKs, Zenos IT Academies and other locations in each borough. The school-based courses took place in Barnet, Hackney, Haringey, Hillingdon, Kensington & Chelsea, Enfield, Redbridge and Barking & Dagenham, while the 'IT taster sessions' and 'digital clinics' were held in boroughs across London.

By bringing together older and younger people across London, MiCommunity used digital inclusion to educate older people about computers and technology, and in doing so, also helped to reduce social isolation, whilst improving the younger volunteers' employability and personal development.

The project exceeded all of its targets. It was delivered in 20 boroughs and 39 local schools, involving 1324 volunteers and benefiting 1450 older people.



Nick Hurd MP, at a MiCommunity event

Ena Buljko Year 12, Holland Park School Talks about her experience of volunteering in the MiCommunity project.

Last year I was lucky enough to shadow another student taking part in the MiCommunity project at my school. The Year 12 student was teaching her elderly partner how to send an email, I saw such a connection between two strangers who had only just met one another. This automatically attracted me to the project and I was 100% sure I would join next in the next term.

I have been partnered with a lady called Rosalin and I really feel that I have had a connection

with her; I look forward to seeing her each week and enjoy our conversations. I feel that the things I teach her will be useful and hope that she manages to remember them all when she gets home. One week we had the honour of being joined by Nick Hurd the MP for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner, I think he did a good job with Rosaline – he was very funny and he was really patient with her, I think he did well!

Overall, I think the Age UK Kensington & Chelsea MiCommunity project brings together two completely different generations who have had very different experiences in order to connect over modern technology.

FIND OUT MORE

To find out more, visit the Age UK London website www.ageuk.org.uk/london



Can a computer make you smile?

Ben Donovan, Research and Policy Officer for Age UK London discusses whether there are links between happiness and digital inclusion



With the seemingly exponential developments in technology and computing since the relatively humble Spectrum was introduced back in the 1980s, the shift towards the 'Digital Age' has been in progress for many years. Unsurprisingly, the usage of a medium that can provide significant cost savings on traditional methods of communication has proved popular with businesses.

Paper-saving environmental aspects and the perceived ease and speed of using computerised communications, enhanced by more recent advances in mobile-technology, have all contributed to this drive away from traditional communication methods.

However, until now, the option to write rather than type, or post rather than e-mail, has been available for those of us who wouldn't know the difference between an 'iPad' and an 'Android' or who might presume 'Bluetooth' to be a villain in the latest Harry Potter novel rather than a form of open, wireless technology.

No-one could really claim they are uninformed when the message has been provided on an openly accessible web-page... or can they?

The intention to go 'Digital by Default' represents a decisive moment whereby the 'assumption' that people have access to, and are comfortable with, electronic systems is sufficient to justify the shift of onus from deliverer to recipient. No-one

could really claim they are uninformed when the message has been provided on an openly accessible web-page... or can they?

Interestingly, Age UK London recently undertook a study of older Londoners perceived 'happiness' with various areas of their lives and 'ability to use computers and the internet' was in the bottom three categories. Those people who reported low 'happiness' with this area of their lives focused on the dual aspects of it being difficult to learn how to use computers as well as it being difficult to source learning support.

'Paper-saving environmental aspects and the perceived ease and speed of using computerised communications, enhanced by more recent advances in mobile-technology, have all contributed to this drive away from traditional communication methods.'

Difficulties with the financial aspects of paying for computer-training on a pension provide additional evidence for, and made it abundantly clear that, even having a computer is not sufficient to assume access and digital-inclusion.

Furthermore, it is important to note that this study focused on self-reported 'happiness'. It is difficult to ascertain how many respondents who do not have computer access actually had no interest in learning to use computers and, as such, were happy with their current circumstances. Reporting 'happiness' with this particular aspect of living



certainly does not equate to computer-literacy and access. Indeed, it may well be that the opposite is the case for many people and that those reporting 'unhappiness' in this study are therefore likely to just be the tip of the iceberg of the total number of people who would be potentially disadvantaged by assumptions underpinning going 'Digital by Default'.

Evidence from this study, and others, suggests that there are many people who are at risk of exclusion with the re-design of transactional services in April 2013 and the 'Digital by Default' standardisation target of April, 2014.

It is difficult to ascertain how many respondents who do not have computer access actually had no interest in learning to use computers and, as such, were happy with their current circumstances.

Many people are not motivated to learn about computers and the changes are likely to disadvantage them when it comes to accessing information that may well affect them. However, perhaps it is less frequently reported that many people who are motivated to 'go Digital' are finding it difficult to access the support and to finance the learning that would enable them to do this.

Changing organisational systems to reflect a digitised climate is one thing but doing it as part of a broader socio-cultural system that really encourages and supports inclusion rather than pressurising by change or exclusion, is quite another.

Invisible communities

Jill Manthorpe, Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King's College London, gives her reflections on a joint conference from Making Research Count, Age UK London and the Social Care Workforce Research Unit. This year the annual conferences theme was 'Invisible communities: Working with older people from Europe and beyond.'



Who do you think you are?

This is the title of a popular BBC television programme in which many celebrities trace back their roots across the generations. Most stories reveal accounts of migration and movement. Most older people in London today also share such rich stories. Age UK London and local researchers from King's College London shared some of these accounts and the implications for services at a packed conference at the end of January.

One unique feature of this annual conference is that participants are from older people's groups and social services. This is a deliberate attempt to encourage conversations and to reduce the risks of stereotypes. After all, most social workers largely see older people who are very frail or at the

end of life, not older people who are well organised politically or campaigning for their rights. Many older people can see social workers as pre-occupied with paperwork and saying 'no' to requests for help. But the reality is that they probably have more in common than that which divides them.

Many older people see social workers as pre-occupied and saying 'no' to requests for help.

This was reflected in the findings from research presented on the day. The audience heard that older Norwegians living in London generally moved here for love and adventure. They may not want to give up their Norwegian passports and identity. Many go back for a bit of a 'Norwegian injection' of summer sun and mountains.



Professor Karen Christensen outlined the ways in which talking to older people about their life and migration history helps to challenge our own preconceptions.

The conference also heard from Dr Shereen Hussein about older Turkish migrants living in London and the importance for them of community centres and being able to speak in their own language. She explained that many Turkish migrants often worked in their own trades or with family members and may have not had the opportunity to access mainstream London.

Both Jo Moriarty and Dr Nan Greenwood outlined the current interest in equality and access to services. Jo's recent report for Age UK on the Equality Act 2010 is interesting reading and freely available. She suggested that people like to be asked about service satisfaction and usually don't mind giving personal information if they think it will be used sensibly. Nan outlined why ethnicity matters in health and care services and argued

that there were also fundamental principles of care that apply to everyone.

Most social workers see older people who are frail, not older people who are well organised politically or campaigning for their rights.

Jean Lambert, MEP, has a particular interest in ageing and her presentation covered the changes in Europe that affect older people but take time to implement and are often the result of long debate over regulations and politics. This too adds to the rich picture of diversity and sets growing old in London in the context of the UK, Europe and beyond. When asking older people 'who they are' it seems very appropriate to remember these many connections.

For copies of the conference presentations contact Age UK London or access them on <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/kpi/scwru/events/30jan13.aspx>

Adult careers guidance

Gordon Deuchars, Age UK London Policy and Campaigns Manager, discusses the London Assembly investigation into adult careers guidance and Age UK London's response

The London Assembly's Economy Committee has been investigating adult careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) in London. From the start of the investigation, the Committee recognised Londoners aged 50+ as a key group who are not getting sufficient support from careers services.

At a recent meeting, Members asked about the strengths and weaknesses of the way the Government's National Careers Service is provided in London, as well as how careers advice could better assist women, older people, ex-offenders and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

Andrew Dismore AM, Chair of the London Assembly Economy Committee, said: "It's a difficult time for anyone looking for a job, but we heard that London's over 50s are really having a tough time of it. The capital stands to benefit from their vast knowledge and many years of experience, but this does not appear to be happening at the moment. A comprehensive careers guidance service in London should help guide our jobseekers, whatever their age, and go some way to addressing unemployment and skills gaps. We must make sure people are receiving high quality and relevant advice."

Age UK London was one of the organisations which made submissions to the investigation. We argued that the new national Careers Advisory Service should consider the 50+ age group as a priority group and ensure that everyone who needs to can access the necessary degree of face-to-face support.

Nationally, the over 50s have longer spells of unemployment than any other age group, and currently 47.5 per cent of the unemployed have been out of work for over 12 months. They are subject to a significant degree of age

discrimination in recruitment. The think tank Policy Exchange submitted dummy applications for 1,200 jobs, half from the over 50s and half from the under 25s, and found that the under 25s had double the number of positive responses. The Government's welfare-to-work services often fail to help its 50+ clients. Experiences of Jobcentre Plus among this age group are mixed, while the Work Programme is performing considerably worse for the over 55s than for other age groups.

Early intervention is important in addressing these barriers. Careers advice should be delivered promptly, rather than only after a period of unemployment. The initial Jobseekers Allowance claim interview should be a referral to the National Careers Service, who are often based in a Jobcentre Plus, and the Assembly should work with London employers to provide timely careers advice to all those at risk of redundancy.

In conclusion, Age UK London called for key changes to be made in an attempt to help older people in their search for work:

- 50+ jobseekers find it harder than any other age group to move into work, therefore IAG should form part of a core support offer.
- The IAG should be delivered at the start of any JSA claim, as early referral is important in helping people return to the employment.
- The Mayor and partners should work with employers to ensure that all those at risk of redundancy benefit from timely and high quality IAG.
- The new national Careers Advisory Service should consider the 50+ age group as a priority group and ensure that everyone who needs to can access the necessary degree of face-to-face support.

OlderView: Making Technology Mature

Eric Harris, Founder and Developer of OlderView, started the organisation as he believes older people should have input into the design of digital technologies from the very beginning of the process. He explains more for us here.

The ever-increasing pace of technological development has resulted in many things that help us on a day to day basis. We can now see and talk to family members world wide via the internet, pay for shopping using automated tills, and share photos and ideas across social networks.

However, the plethora of opportunities that exist are not being fully exploited by older people. The acceptance and use of new and emerging technologies decreases as age increases. Although there are some well publicised exceptions to this, like Lilly, the 108 year old on Facebook and Twitter or Peter (Geriatric1927) on YouTube, there is a greater body of older people who at best are ambivalent, and at worst stubbornly against, the uptake of new and emerging technologies. The reasons for this are complex and diverse, touching on social, economic and accessibility agendas.

What is clear is that older people's involvement in the development of new technologies is limited, and exclusion from the early stages often results in complete disengagement with the end result. Those responsible for bringing new technological products and services to market could do more to take the needs and views of an older audience into account in how those products and services will look, feel and operate.



Making older views count

OlderView was set up in Autumn 2012 specifically to look into these issues, with the involvement of a community of older people who answer surveys about particular technologies. The subsequent results submitted by the Technology Review Community are analysed and then published.

The rationale behind OlderView is simple; if the design of new and emerging products and services are to 'work' for older users, it is imperative to get active engagement in the design process from this community. Of course there is a danger in generating reviews of technology products and services solely from respondents comfortable in using computers to submit their responses. To address this issue OlderView is working to collect a greater number of responses on paper as well as some mediated through third parties such as care workers.

So what has the OlderView community reviewed to date? Some examples of the products we have looked at include camera phones, self-checkouts and online brain training pastimes. We question whether and to what degree we use these products, if we like them and what elements we would change if possible.

Positive response

We have found that older people are quick to see the potential benefits of new technologies and keen to integrate them within their lives. The majority of respondents have been extremely positive about the possibilities to video conference family and friends, to share interests on chat sites or to book doctor's appointments online. However, there are also many barriers to engagement that result in total or partial digital exclusion.

Our findings point to poor design as a significant factor determining whether new technology is adopted or rejected by our audience. This can be illustrated by the use of the camera found on many phones. When the Technology Review Community was asked to take and send a photo with their mobile phone, over half the community had difficulties of one sort or other. Common issues included confusion over the range of options that were offered to the user (for example, the selection for camera or video setting), ignorance of where the camera lens was situated and simply not being able to read the print on the screen.

Our current favourite design for older people

has got to be Fujitsu's 'smart walking stick', which is specifically designed to help the elderly. This walking stick is Wi-Fi enabled and has an LED display on the handle to help elderly people find their way. There is a bunch of other stuff that the walking stick can do as well, such as monitoring heart rate and temperature, all of which could be beneficial for older people. Although this sort of embedded technology can get a little 'gadgety' and suffer from over complication, its

Despite these problems there was universal acceptance of the benefits of including a camera function on a mobile phone. To follow-up on this survey I demonstrated an 'app' to the members of a local computer drop-in centre that uses the camera on a mobile phone to act as a magnifying glass. There was great interest in this app. Many could see how this could be useful for those times when they forget to bring their glasses with them, or had the wrong ones for reading small print. However, once again, the instructions to download the software in the first instance proved too much of a hurdle for most of the group.

Indeed, the processes involved in downloading and configuring new technology are often enough of a barrier to prevent older people from obtaining the technology in the first place – never mind getting to grips with using it.

Your views valued

I believe older people need to be involved in the design of technology from the very start to break down their exclusion from the digital revolution. If you believe that the views of older people should be integrated within the application of technological advances and you are over 50 years old, please join the community. Visit www.olderview.com and have your say. Article inspired from OlderView blog: <http://socialreporters.net/?p=998>. Contact Eric Harris via email on eric@olderview.com or on twitter @OlderViewTweets

sympathetic design is to be applauded.

What we like the most about this is that Fujitsu is clearly doing some user experience work with older people. This mobile computing device (a simple walking stick) reflects older people's needs and is sensitive to their daily routines. I think the icing on the cake would be some level of customisation for its look and feel, as the choice of walking stick for older people can be very personal.

IN THE HOTSEAT

Q&A **Jacky Bourke-White**, CEO of Age UK Lewisham and Southwark, shares her thoughts about working with older people.

How did you come to be working for Age UK?

I began working in the voluntary sector many years ago as an advice worker. I started work at Age Concern Southwark 7 years ago as Operations Director and became CEO in 2011.

Why are older people's issues important to you?

Older people's needs are often considered last, perhaps because other interest groups shout louder and have higher expectations. I believe it is important that in the current attempts to create a discourse that places older people as unfairly well off in relation to young people, we ensure that the reality for many older people is known.

What services does your Age UK offer?

Age UK Lewisham and Southwark runs day services for people with substantial needs, a healthy living centre, information and advice, support planning, self directed support, lay Inspection and access services.

What concerns do you hear most from service users?

At the moment many of our older people are concerned

about the benefit changes that are affecting other family members. They are also concerned about whether services they rely on will be cut.

What one thing would you ask the local borough to do to improve things for older people?

I would be really pleased to see our boroughs commit to become the first dementia friendly boroughs in the capital.

What has been your best experience in working with older people?

I work directly with our Care Home Lay Inspectors who are all older people and I am continuously impressed by the commitment and wisdom that they bring to the service.

What is your vision for the future of your local Age UK?

Like most, I have concerns about what is happening to the welfare state and how this will impact upon older people and the services we provide. My vision is to continue to provide services that demonstrate to the older people we work with that they are valued members of our communities.

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ISSN: 1357-1109

London Age highlights issues which affect older people in the capital. It is produced to support Age UK London's mission to improve the quality of life for older Londoners and to enhance their status and influence.

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Age UK London works across the capital to improve the quality of life for older people and to enhance their status and influence.

If you have any comment on the magazine content or ideas for the next issue, we'd love to hear from you: delliott@ageuklondon.org.uk

Charity registration number 1092198.
Company registration number 4407861.

Age UK London receives funding from London's local councils.

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MP2210V2APR11 KE047984_11