

Introducing another World: older people and digital inclusion



A report of qualitative research on the barriers and enablers
to tackling digital exclusion in later life

Age Concern and Help the Aged has worked in partnership with BT since 2005 to tackle social exclusion among older people by promoting digital inclusion. Support of *Introducing another World* is one of a number of activities being delivered through the partnership.

This report is available in pdf format only and was produced jointly by Age Concern and Help the Aged and BT. The pdf is available for download at www.ageconcern.org.uk

Age Concern England and Help the Aged have joined together to form a single new charity dedicated to improving the lives of older people.

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We are also indebted to the research participants who attended and contributed to the group discussions, and to the digitally aware older people who consented to be interviewed for our 'vox pop' DVD.

Foreword

by Age Concern and Help the Aged

The world around us is changing profoundly. We are living in an interdependent and interconnected world during an age that is driven by technological progress. Information and communications technology (ICT) has had a transformative impact on the way that people work, live and play. It has tremendous potential to improve the quality of later life: creating social networks to tackle isolation and loneliness; transforming services to help people live independently at home for longer; empowering consumers; and enabling civil participation. Digital inclusion plays a crucial role in building a fair and equitable society. Technology is no longer an optional extra and we need to ensure that everyone in later life is able to realise the benefits of the new digital age. At its absolute heart, this agenda is about people.

Previous research has shown that digital inequalities tend to replicate and compound existing inequalities by gender, age, race, educational background, geography and disability. Our qualitative research has focused on excluded older people, highlighting their attitudes and opinions, and helping to better understand what is effective in reducing digital exclusion.

The findings challenge the notion that older people are effectively a 'lost cause' when it comes to ICT skills; there is in fact a high awareness, even among people who could be called 'digitally dismissive', of the benefits and importance of ICT. They demonstrate that it is possible to stimulate interest in this group and to support them in their efforts to become digitally included in our fast-changing society.

We have been working to ensure that older people benefit from technological change for many years. Since 1998, we have engaged older people via our online chatsite and discussion forum; we have run annual digital inclusion campaigns (itea and biscuits week and myfriends online week) as well as previous Silver Surfer Weeks and Festivals. Working in partnership with 150 organisations that make up our Digital Inclusion Network delivering ICT projects, we have successfully reached more than 200,000 older people with our ICT training and taster sessions for those new to computers.

Our activity on the ground level has repeatedly shown that imaginative partnerships between government, industry and the community/voluntary sector are key to bringing about digital equality. And to this end, we are delighted to have had the support of BT, which shares our commitment to the digital inclusion of older people.



Tom Wright
Chief Executive, Age Concern and Help the Aged

Foreword by BT

Connecting people is at the heart of BT. As the oldest communications company in the world, we have been helping people to communicate for a very long time. We understand that it is increasingly important for people to have confidence in using technology, as well as good communications skills, to help enhance their lives. We recognise the enormous potential for information and communications technology (ICT) to make a positive difference, not only to the lives of individuals, but also to society as a whole.

With the recent publication of the Digital Britain Report and the appointment of the Digital Inclusion Champion by the Government, we expect to see a substantial increase in digital inclusion activity in the UK this year and next. For older people in particular, it is clear that greater efforts are needed to tackle both social and digital inclusion.

In the UK, 64 per cent of people over the age of 65 have never used the internet. Yet the overwhelming majority of older people who have made the transition to using the internet are delighted by what they can do. This research indicates the approaches that are likely to be most effective in interesting digitally excluded individuals to take on the sometimes daunting task of learning about digital technologies and transforming their lives.

Age Concern and Help the Aged has a crucial role in promoting digital inclusion among older people. We are delighted to work in partnership with the charity, as we have done since 2005. In addition to this research, we have also supported the development of the charity's UK-wide Digital Inclusion Network and training resources.

If you would like to learn more about BT's Corporate Responsibility activities, further information can be found on our website at www.btplc.com/betterworld.

Caroline Sheridan
Director, Corporate Responsibility, BT

I Executive summary

I.1 Introduction

Policy-makers and regulators in the UK are currently debating the future of communications policy in the context of Digital Britain. This government initiative is intended to ensure that, as a society, we are equipped to benefit fully from the digital services and content that now play such an important part in many people's lives. Without such intervention there is the risk of an increasing digital divide, where people without access to the internet at home, or who are unwilling or unable to use it, will miss out or be tangibly disadvantaged as a result.

Previous research in the UK has identified that the combination of higher ages and lower social grades multiplies the level of digital exclusion, with those people who are both over 65 and from the DE social class accounting for 28 per cent of all people without internet access, four times higher than any other combination.

Age Concern and Help the Aged commissioned Opinion Leader to explore the barriers and enablers to reducing digital exclusion, specifically for this demographic group. A total of six focus groups were conducted with people in Croydon (two groups), Birmingham (two groups) and rural Durham (two groups) between 2 and 10 June 2009. There was a particular focus on the next cohort of over-65s, those who are currently in the 55–64 age bracket (four groups). However, the research also included people who are already 65+ (two groups). In addition, the research focused on two categories:

- the digitally excluded, who have little or no opportunity of accessing the internet (three groups); and
- the digitally dismissive, who have (or potentially have) a means of accessing the internet but choose not to use it (three groups).

The research covered three main areas:

- understanding of computers/the internet and perceived barriers;
- potential benefits of using computers/the internet (and disadvantages of not using them/it);
- ways to overcome barriers and enable older people to make use of computers/the internet.

A full sample breakdown, and more information on the discussion approach, is contained in the Appendix.

1.2 Main findings

The main barrier to use of computers and the internet among this audience appears to be a lack of understanding of and confidence with 'how it works'. People struggle to comprehend how to use the actual equipment and require explanation as to 'what to press and when'. A number of fears and anxieties were expressed about 'doing something wrong', as well as about the security of the internet.

There is wide variation in the extent to which people are interested in using the internet. The digitally excluded are more open than the digitally dismissive, as might be expected. Among the dismissive, there are a minority of 'refuseniks' who feel very strongly that the internet is not for them and would be unlikely to be persuaded otherwise.

For others, being dismissive appears to be a way to justify their lack of confidence and this group is likely to be more open about trying the internet if they receive appropriate encouragement and support. In addition, the 55–64 age group tend to be more receptive and to have had more exposure to computers and the internet than the over-65s.

However, a strong sense of inertia prevails even among those who are most interested. Many feel it will be 'too hard' or that they are 'too old to learn something new'.

Affordability is also an issue for some (particularly those with the lowest incomes). However, this appears to be outweighed by other barriers, with several people commenting that the price of computers and internet packages has come down.

Despite a low level of understanding about how the internet works, knowledge of its potential benefits is surprisingly high. Some are already accessing these benefits indirectly through friends and family using the internet on their behalf.

In addition, there is an acknowledgement that the internet is already important (although not necessarily to them) and an expectation that its importance will increase further in the not-too-distant future as the internet becomes 'a way of life' for more and more people.

Our research identified that there are some critical junctures and circumstances that could trigger use of the internet in older people. Examples included taking up a specific interest or hobby, entering retirement, relatives moving abroad, becoming housebound or losing a partner.

A number of suggestions were made to motivate and help people to access and use computers and the internet:

- awareness-raising;
- training;
- subsidies;
- ongoing help.

1.3 Implications of key findings

Reducing digital exclusion in later life will require the removal of a number of barriers, some of which may prove difficult to shift. However, contrary to conventional wisdom, this research suggests that a number of older non-internet users, including some who initially appear to be dismissive, could be encouraged to take up the internet with appropriate intervention.

The demystification of computers and the internet and practical help will be key. A number of specific suggestions for building skills and confidence were made in this research, centred on training and access to help if required. However, there is a lot of help already available that older people don't necessarily know about, so part of the solution may be to signpost this more effectively as well as ensuring that the right sort of help exists for this specific audience.

Building motivation is also critical to overcoming the prevailing inertia. This could be done by:

- Actively promoting relevant benefits to older people, potentially as part of a broader awareness campaign.
- Focusing on specific trigger points and circumstances when older people are more likely to be receptive to changing their attitudes to such technology as well as their habits.

Responses to the 'vox pop' DVD of older internet users shown in the groups suggest that role models could play an important part in building confidence and enthusiasm. It will be important that individuals chosen have recently made the transition to being an internet user, and have overcome similar barriers.

Overall, younger age groups (55–64) and those who are excluded rather than dismissive are likely to be most open to approaches designed to encourage and enable internet take-up.

Specific priority audiences who were expected to benefit particularly from the internet were also suggested in the research:

- those with long-term health conditions or mobility impairments;
- those who live in remote or rural locations;
- those who are socially isolated or lonely.

Affordability was identified as an issue for some in these priority audiences, and it was felt that financial assistance would need to be made available to enable them to take advantage of the internet.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

Policy-makers and regulators in the UK are currently debating the future of communications policy in the context of Digital Britain. This government initiative is intended to ensure that, as a society, we are equipped to benefit fully from the digital services and content that now play such an important part in many people's lives. Without such intervention there is the risk of an increasing digital divide, where those without access to the internet at home, or who are unwilling or unable to use it, will miss out or be tangibly disadvantaged as a result.

Recent research conducted by Opinion Leader for the Communications Consumer Panel identified older people as a key audience who would potentially benefit significantly from the internet, but also as one of the groups most at risk of digital exclusion. Older people themselves tended to regard having the internet at home as being less personally important compared to other groups. The specific barriers for older people identified in this research point both to the 'digitally excluded' (access, affordability and knowledge) and the 'digitally dismissive' (low interest and use).

Other research identifies that the combination of higher age and lower social grade multiplies the level of digital exclusion, with those people who are both over 65 and from the DE social class accounting for 28 per cent of all people without internet access, four times higher than any other combination.

2.2 Objectives

In this context, Opinion Leader was commissioned to explore the barriers and enablers to reducing digital exclusion, specifically for older people from social classes D and E.

The primary focus was on those currently aged between 55 and 64 years, a group that had not previously been a focus of research and was expected to be particularly helpful in understanding how the next cohort of over-65 is likely to respond to an increasingly digital world during the next decade. The research also included people now aged 65+, which represents the current most excluded group. Among both age groups, there was a focus on two categories:

- the digitally excluded, who have little or no opportunity of accessing the internet;
- the digitally dismissive, who have (or potentially have) a means of accessing the internet, but choose not to use it.

More specifically, the objectives for the research were:

- To explore older people's knowledge, attitudes and preferences regarding computers/ the internet.
- To discover any barriers that are likely to prevent older people (or particular groups of older people) from using computers and the internet.
- To understand older people's views on how to overcome the barriers.
- To inform Age Concern and Help the Aged policy development regarding digital exclusion for older people.
- To contribute to the wider debate on digital exclusion.

For the project methodology please see the Appendix below.

3 Barriers to using and accessing the internet

Key findings:

- The main barrier appears to be a lack of understanding of and confidence with 'how it works'. A number of fears and anxieties were expressed about 'doing something wrong', as well as internet security.
- There is a wide variation in the extent to which people are interested in using the internet. However, only a minority can be defined as strong 'refuseniks'. For others, being 'dismissive' appears to be a way to justify their lack of confidence and this group is likely to be more open about trying the internet if they receive appropriate encouragement and support.
- However, a strong sense of inertia prevails even among those who are most interested. Many feel it will be 'too hard' or that they are 'too old to learn' something new.
- Affordability is also an issue for some (particularly those with the lowest incomes). However, this appears to be outweighed by other barriers, with several people commenting that the price of computers and internet packages has come down.

Lack of understanding and confidence

By far the most common barrier is lack of understanding and of confidence. There is a general lack of understanding of how computers and the internet 'work' and 'what to do'. Many struggle to comprehend how to use the actual equipment and require explanation as 'what to press and when'. Computers and the internet are perceived to have a certain amount of 'mystique', making them seem inaccessible and confusing. Most also find the associated language difficult to comprehend. This general lack of understanding leads to a number of concerns and fears which centre on the following:

- **Doing something wrong:** for example, pressing the wrong button and breaking the machine. This fear of 'doing something wrong' is the single biggest concern.

I'm frightened to use it in case I press the wrong button.

Birmingham, 55–64 Excluded

I think you have got to take away the fear factor. It's the fear factor that puts a lot of people off.

Durham, 55–64 Dismissive

- **Feeling foolish:** participants' inability to use a computer/the internet makes them feel embarrassed in front of others, particularly younger family members who can express impatience. There is a sense that, being older and having had more 'life experience', they should know how to use it. This sentiment is particularly prevalent among younger (55–64) people, who feel that they should already have learnt how to use it.

I think to myself I should know that – you get a little bit embarrassed. When I ask my grandchildren how to do something that I should already know, it embarrasses me, so I want to do it myself.

Durham, 65+ Excluded

You appear thick because you're not getting it.

Croydon, 55–64 Dismissive

- **The internet as an insecure environment:** some people express concerns over internet security. Some report having heard about internet fraud from friends or family or having read such stories in the press. Combined with the lack of understanding and confidence of how the internet 'works', this contributes to a feeling of vulnerability and anxiety with respect to the internet.

I'll never think about banking or anything else like that. For me I've got a fear of people getting my information.

Birmingham, 55–64 Excluded

I think that I have still got to get fraud really under control because with internet banking and giving your details away, you haven't got a clue who you are talking to. You haven't got a clue who is hacked in or where they are going...it is that which is the main concern because fraud is just rife isn't it?

Croydon, 55–64 Excluded

- **That they would waste time:** there is a perception that the internet could 'take over' at the expense of 'real-life activities' such as face-to-face socialising. This is partly because older people expect that, as novice users, simple tasks would take them longer. However, older people have also observed the amount of time spent on computers by their children and grandchildren, and are concerned that it could be an 'all-consuming' pastime.

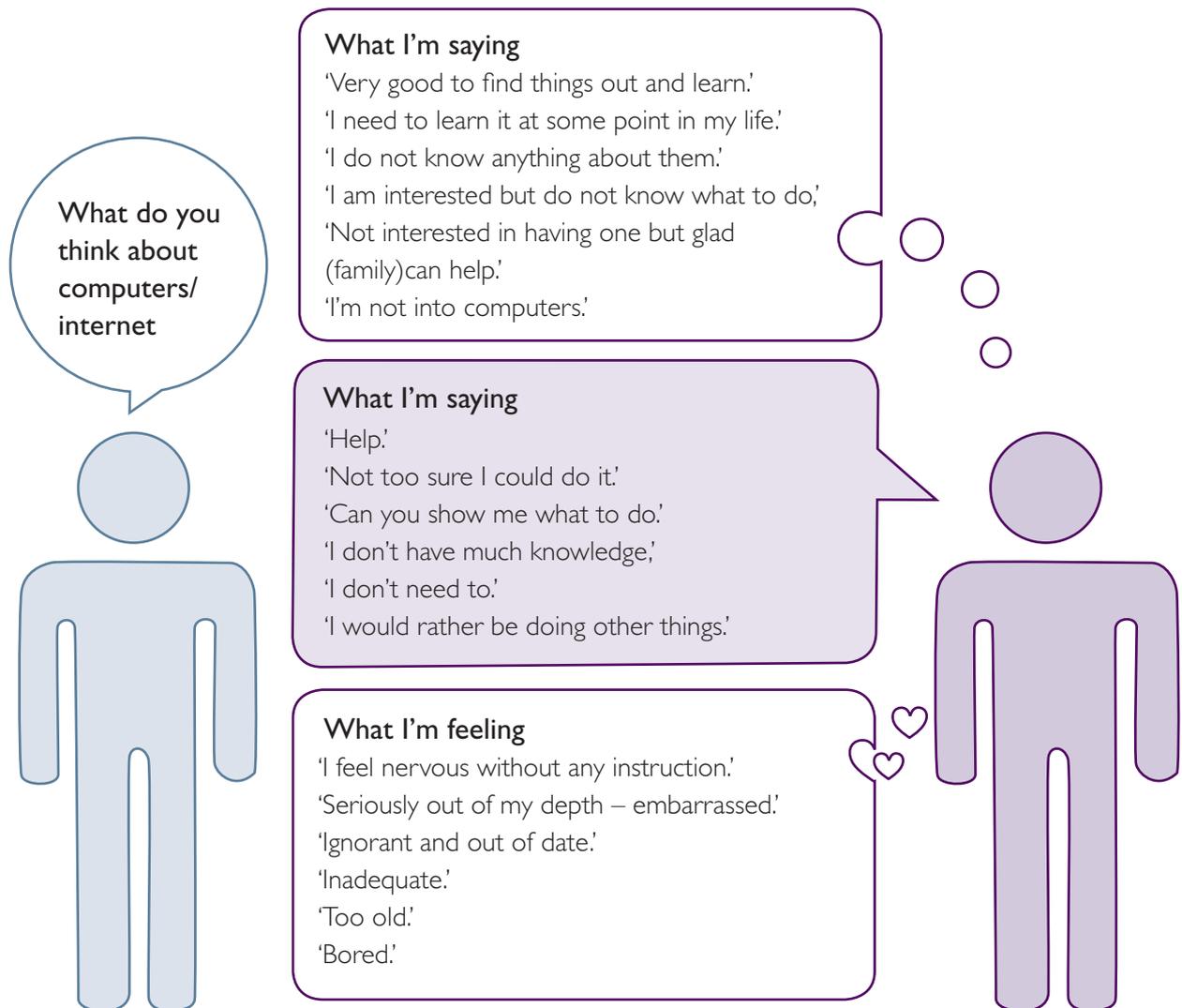
It's not my lifestyle, is it, any more? Why would I sit all day? I did that for years at work, why would I want to do it. Wasting time, I think, a lot.

Birmingham, 65+ Dismissive

I have a friend who about two years ago, she went on a course and she now finds, in her opinion, she spends too much time on it ... she feels that she wasting some of her life.

Croydon, 55–64 Dismissive

The illustration below highlights some of the responses from participants in the 'hearts and minds' exercise. As can be seen, there is a wide range of perceptions and feelings, including a general lack of knowledge, the desire to learn, feelings of inadequacy in using a computer and the total dismissal of computer/internet use as something worth pursuing.



Friend/family member

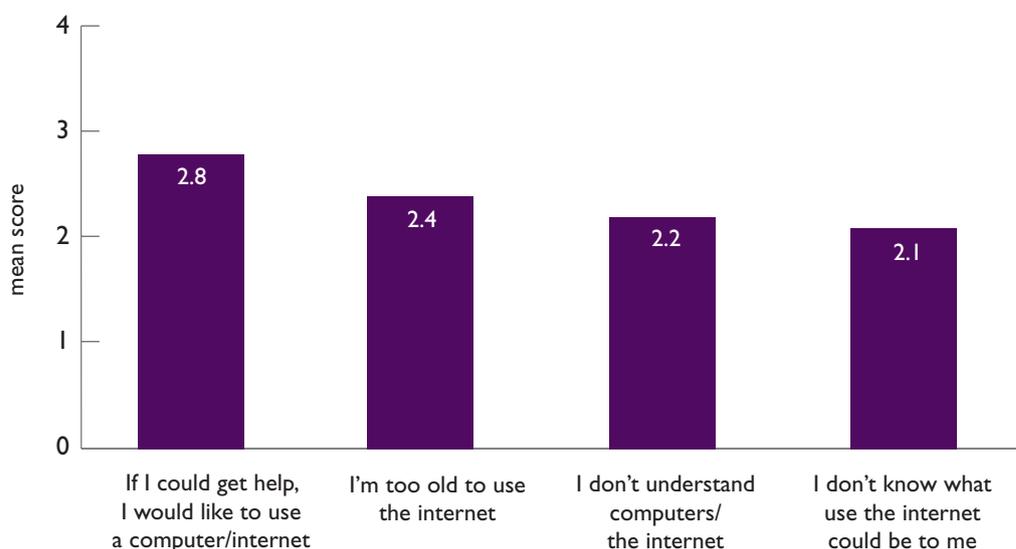
3.1 Wide variation in degree of interest

This research indicates that there is a wide variation in degree of interest in using computers and the internet among older non-users. Overall, more people appear to be open to trying to use the internet than otherwise. This is reflected in the graph below which shows lowest agreement with the statement 'I don't know what use the internet could be to me'. While a minority of strong 'refuseniks' are unlikely to be convinced, for others being 'dismissive' appears to be a way of justifying a lack of confidence.

In the groups, those who are most receptive overall tend to be digitally excluded (rather than dismissive) and younger (55–64 years). Some of those who are most interested have had considerable indirect exposure to the internet and computers (e.g. via children at home, friends or colleagues at work).

Conversely, those who are less receptive tend to be dismissive and older (65+). This group included some who feel very strongly that the internet was not for them and would be unlikely to be persuaded otherwise. Indeed, some of this group had previously turned down offers of help to learn how to use a computer/the internet. However, others who were apparently 'dismissive' indicated that they lack confidence and would be open to trying the internet if they were to receive appropriate support (see graph below).

Attitudes to computers/internet



Q.3 From the following statements, please say to what extent you agree or disagree with them, where 1 is 'disagree strongly' and 5 is 'agree strongly'.

BASE:ALL (48)

3.2 A sense of inertia

A sense of inertia prevailed among even those most interested in computers and the internet. Older non-users tend to feel that computers/the internet will be 'too hard to learn', 'take too much time' and that they are 'too old to learn something new'.

I think I am too old. I am no good with computers.

Durham, 65+ Excluded

This inertia is partly related to the image older people have of computers and the internet – the strongest associations are with 'younger people' and 'business people', and participants were unlikely to identify people their age as typical users.

I suppose I'm led to believe ... that over the last 20 years ... it is something that is almost natural to a 5-/6-/7-/8-year-old ... the inference is that if you're 60 then you're almost at the other end of the scale in acclimatising to it.

Birmingham, 55–64 Excluded

I think that it is just a way of life for them [younger people]. I mean they are using the computer at school at the age of four-and-a-half, five. So it is something unknown, which is my problem ... I don't want to tackle it and it doesn't interest me, but for the children they are so used to the computer and it is part of their life really.

Durham, 65+ Excluded

However, a 'voxpath' DVD showing older internet users helped overcome the sense of inertia. Participants thought the DVD showed 'people like us' who had overcome barriers and were now benefiting from using the computer/internet.

Some significant skill gaps also contribute to the inertia. For example, some participants commented that they had never even seen anyone use the internet and some also had no experience of typing or word processing.

I've never had to use it for work, can't do the whole typing thing either.

Durham, 55–64 Dismissive

3.3 Affordability

Cost and affordability is a barrier for some, particularly those on the lowest incomes. The up-front investment for the hardware is the biggest issue. Many feel that they could not justify the initial outlay given their uncertainty over how regularly they would use it, how personally beneficial it would be and their capability to use it. In addition, some note that the cost of a computer (perceived to be in the region of £300–£500) is a significant expense for those on a fixed income such as a pension.

I think if you're going to spend £500 (and £400 is the cheapest perhaps I've noticed), then if you're going to invest that money you've also got to have the attitude of mind, well, if I've paid £400 then I really better go for it and I can't get to that stage. So I'm not investing the money.

Birmingham, 55–64 Excluded

I think the thing is that it's all right saying you can go and do basic computer studies ... But if you haven't got the money to buy a computer, you can do as many computer courses as you like, but if you can't afford it ... like broadband is expensive. It's a monthly pay out.

Durham, 55–64 Dismissive

I would say it's too expensive an item for me to just get for my holidays, you know, or do shopping...it wouldn't be something that I would be using every day, or every week for that matter.

Durham, 55–64 Dismissive

However, there is also a perception that the cost of computers and the internet has fallen over recent years, and some people mention the availability of 'bundles' as a way of getting cheaper access. Overall, concerns about affordability appear to be outweighed by other barriers already mentioned above.

We just felt that cost really doesn't come into it too much but generally speaking most households would afford a basic package ... it would be just the way that you go and buy a new washing machine or a new tumble dryer or you go and buy a new computer. A computer is just becoming an item of furniture now isn't it?

Croydon, 55–64 Excluded

4 Potential enablers

- Despite a low level of understanding of how the internet works, awareness of what the internet can do and its benefits is surprisingly high.
- Most acknowledge that the internet is already important (although not necessarily to them) and expect its importance to increase further in the not-too-distant future.
- This research identified that there are some critical junctures and circumstances that could trigger use of the internet in older people.

4.1 Awareness of the internet's uses and benefits

Although older people's understanding of how the internet and computers work is often very low, their unprompted knowledge of its potential uses and benefits is often surprisingly high.

The most frequently mentioned uses of the internet and computers include:

- **Finding information:** participants mentioned news and information for education or personal enrichment.

The things you can get off the computers – it's everything basically. You've got knowledge there straight away. Information about everything basically.

Birmingham, 55–64 Excluded

Because it introduces another world.

Birmingham, 65+ Dismissive

You can find things that you normally wouldn't bother with.

Durham, 65+ Excluded

- **Communicating by email:** this was mentioned in both a personal and business sense. While a few also cited social networking sites such as Facebook and Skype, these were generally less well known.
- **Buying and selling:** electronic banking, online shopping, buying and selling through eBay and booking travel were all mentioned.

- **Entertainment:** this was less frequently mentioned overall and on-demand functions such as BBC iPlayer were not well understood. However, some were aware of the possibility of downloading music.

You can get all kinds of music ... and buy all kinds of things, on eBay.

Croydon, 55–64 Excluded

It is worth noting, however, that apart from a few people mentioning doing tax returns online, using the internet for civic or government purposes appears to be least well understood.

The most frequently mentioned benefits of the internet and computers include:

- **Cost savings:** the cost savings achieved by booking holidays and travel online were often mentioned and were highly valued. Price comparison websites were also referenced.
- **Time saving and convenience:** home shopping was mentioned as an example of something that is convenient for all and particularly beneficial for those who are housebound. In addition, participants mentioned time-saving benefits of the internet compared to traditional methods for a range of tasks, including looking for a telephone number, directions or trade quotes.

You can get a quote and sit in the comfort of your own home on the computer and in the matter of ten minutes you can get £200 to £300 off your original quote.

Durham, 65+ Excluded

- **Keeping in touch:** a number were aware of email for keeping in touch with family and friends abroad as well as with younger members of the family.

If you can do that it brings you closer together doesn't it? Instead of travelling down you could see them on the computer.

Durham, 65+ Excluded

I don't know why I don't get it – because I've got relatives in Australia, so I could talk to them.

Croydon, 55–64 Dismissive

- **Specific hobbies and interests:** the benefits of using a computer/the internet in relation to particular hobbies and interests were less frequently mentioned. However, some people had directly benefited from the internet for their hobbies or interests and they waxed lyrical about these specific benefits.

I got help look[ing] up war graves – I'd never heard of it – but he pressed some buttons and went to war graves ... I was amazed – with where he lived, what regiment he was in, where he was shot and where the memorial was in Turkey. All through just putting one name into this war graves site. It was fantastic!

Croydon, 55–64 Dismissive

Most gained their knowledge of what the internet does from their children/grandchildren and/or partners, whom they may have watched use certain functions. A few, particularly in the younger age group (55–64), had picked up information from using a computer at work before retirement. Some participants reported accessing these benefits indirectly through family members or friends using the internet on their behalf.

We tend to rely on the children to do things on the internet, because they are all computer-literate, aren't they, above a certain age. They've been brought up with it.

Birmingham, 65+ Dismissive

4.2 Importance of the internet acknowledged

Even those who are personally resistant to taking up the computers/the internet acknowledge that the internet is already important, albeit not necessarily to them. There is strong agreement that computers/the internet are particularly important for the younger generations (for learning), the working population and those who are housebound or otherwise isolated.

Moreover, they expect its importance to increase even further in the next five to ten years, as reflected in the graph below. There is a belief that the internet is becoming a 'necessity' and something that everyone will take for granted in the future. There is a recognition that more services are already moving online, such as banking, job applications and shopping. This leaves some people feeling excluded, frustrated and 'left behind'. Across the board, there is a belief that people will be increasingly disadvantaged or will miss out if they do not have internet access.

Everyday life now isn't it, everybody uses them. It's like a mobile phone, practically everybody has got one.

Durham, 55–64 Dismissive

Because the future's coming for the computers. If you want to communicate with others, you've got to learn those things.

Birmingham, 65+ Dismissive

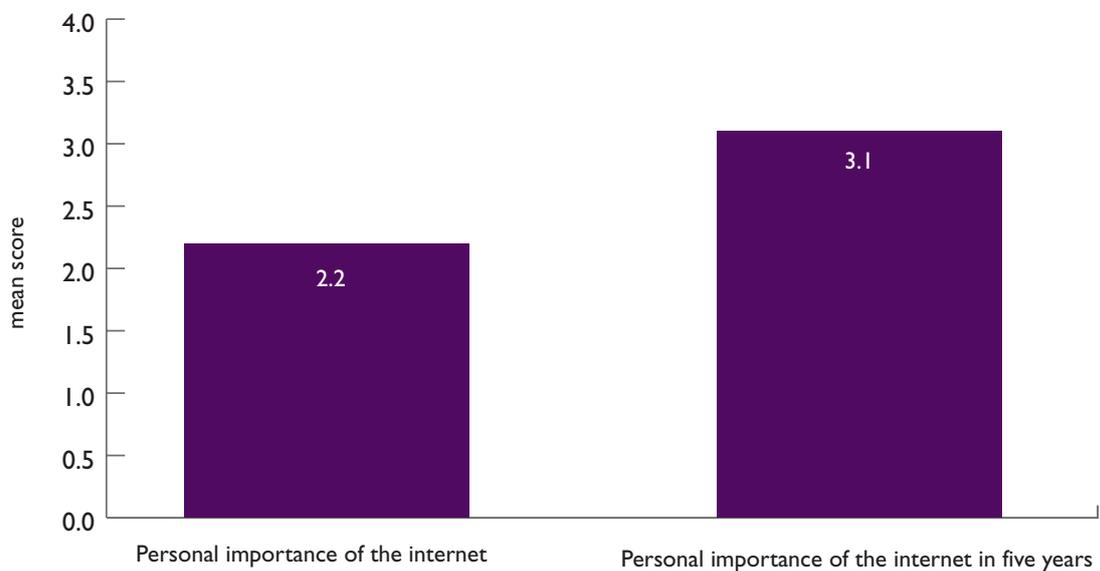
There's an awful lot of jobs you see advertised and all it tells you is what to do on the computer to get an information pack ... So if you haven't got one you don't stand a chance.

Croydon, 55–64 Dismissive

Everywhere you go now, people say, 'Give me your email.' There's not a phone number any more, they say, 'Give me your email ... It's cutting out people who don't want a computer and don't want the internet.

Birmingham, 65+ Dismissive

Personal importance now and in the future



Q.1 On scale 1–5, where 1 is not all important and 5 is extremely important, how personally important to you is the internet?

Q.2 On scale 1–5, where 1 is not all important and 5 is extremely important, how personally important do you think the internet will be to you in 5 years?

BASE:ALL (48)

4.3 Triggers for using a computer/the internet

Some participants reported that a specific use or benefit of the interest had 'triggered' their interest in using the internet. Some examples included searching for information on a family tree or a particular interest like army history.

I would like to do the family tree online; I know you can do that.

Birmingham, 65+ Dismissive

In addition, many of those who feel that they do not need the internet or that it 'isn't for them' appear to be open to learning how to use the internet in the future.

Life changes, I say, 'Never say never'.

Croydon, 55–64 Excluded

A number of circumstances or junctures were identified that could trigger trial of the internet, including:

- **Being introduced to the internet while still in the workforce:** participants in the younger age groups (55–64) felt that formal work-based training, and the ability to put the training into regular practice, would potentially be a good way to get older people onto the internet.

Well, I used to work, and used to do it manually. When they introduced computers, oh, it were fantastic. Absolutely fantastic!

Birmingham, 65+ Dismissive

- **At the point of retirement:** there was agreement across the board that retirement is a good time to pursue new hobbies. However, it was felt to be important that action be taken soon after retirement when people are expected to be most receptive to trying new things and before they become entrenched in a set routine.

You've got to have time to learn. When I retire I suppose that's when I will learn. You can go to college, can't you, during the night?

Birmingham, 55–64 Excluded

- **Incurring a health or mobility issue:** some also felt that a health condition, such as losing mobility or becoming housebound, could herald a specific need to use a computer/the internet.

I supported a family and she hadn't been out of the door for twenty years ... she couldn't, she was disabled ... but the greatest story was when they got the internet. Her lifestyle ... got a lot better through the internet. I mean her shopping was done there ... it changed her life out of recognition.

Croydon, 55–64 Excluded

- **Family moving away:** the importance of staying in touch with family and friends was an ongoing theme throughout discussions. As such, using the internet to communicate with family far away was highly valued.

Well I think there is ... something going on in the family and I am not getting to know about it. So I am thinking to try it.

Durham, 55–64 Dismissive

- **Loss of a partner:** a number of participants spoke of their reliance on their partner for using certain online services. In the absence of their partner, they anticipated that they would need to learn how to do it themselves.

Well certain things happen in your life, like if your wife dies.

Croydon, 55–64 Dismissive

5 Overcoming barriers and leveraging enablers

- A number of suggestions were made about practical ways of motivating and helping older people to access and use computers and the internet:
 - awareness-raising
 - training;
 - subsidies;
 - ongoing help.
- Government was seen to play the primary role in motivating and enabling older people to use computers/the internet, however the private sector and third (non-profit) sector were also seen to play a role.

5.1 Awareness-raising

Participants suggested that an awareness-raising campaign highlighting the specific benefits of the internet to older people would be useful. It was important, they felt, that the campaign featured people in similar age ranges and circumstances to them. In addition to conveying the benefits, a campaign would need to demystify the internet and allay concerns over security and 'things going wrong'.

Participants suggest a range of channels for such a campaign including road shows, public meetings, TV, radio, local leaflets and free monthly magazines.

Well, we suggest [that] to take away the fear, the government could do an advertising campaign on TV, especially for people such as senior citizens, saying that they can have one-to-one [sessions].

Croydon, 55–64 Dismissive

We've got to have advertising. We think they could advertise a bit more and maybe awareness videos ... And the ability for the disabled to get to classes and maybe a mobile video shop.

Croydon, 55–64 Dismissive

5.2 Training

Training designed to be appropriate to older people and their needs was another major theme in the discussions.

For example, it was suggested that training should be delivered via small classes or one-to-one tutorials so that older people can learn at their own pace and are not embarrassed by asking questions in front of a large group. Specific classes for older people were suggested to ensure that they are learning with 'people like them', and the potential for the class to become an informal support network was raised.

In terms of where training should be located, there was a clear preference for a community venue. Some suggestions included village halls, libraries and social clubs. The option of a home-visiting service would also be welcomed.

You need centres so you can actually talk to somebody ... I am hands on ... so I think that a central point, a college or school that is open in the evening where people can go and get free or subsidised training.

Croydon, 55–64 Dismissive

The trainer was expected to be knowledgeable, but patience and empathy were seen as equally important. There were some suggestions about engaging trainers from a similar age and background as themselves.

I would like to learn more. I would like to have instruction from a trained IT teacher who understands [that] older people are slower to learn.

Croydon, 55–64 Excluded

Although family members were considered to be a good resource, there was a strong feeling that relying on family members for training would be unsuitable given their lack of time, interest and patience.

The cost of such courses was not spontaneously raised. However, responses indicate an expectation that they should be offered free of charge or with a subsidy to encourage take-up.

5.3 Subsidies

Although cost is not seen as being as significant as other barriers, there is consensus that monetary incentives would help to encourage participation and learning. Suggestions include:

- Providing those on state pension and other low income groups with free access to the internet.
- Free tuition and home visits for the elderly and people with mobility issues.
- Discounted vouchers for ISP costs.
- Providing free/subsidised computers to the elderly.

We thought that the government [could] give over-55s free TV licences ... so we could [use that money to] get a computer.

Durham, 65+ Excluded

It would be a great help ... if the elderly get broadband free. Because it varies so much now. It all depends which one you are on, some people £6 a month, some people pay £50 a month.

Birmingham, 65+ Dismissive

5.4 Getting started and ongoing help

Older people recognise that they need help getting started, to overcome their inertia and lack of confidence, as well as ongoing support to provide on-demand information and general help in the long term.

To help get people started, there were suggestions for support with installation from computer or internet providers. Ongoing support mechanisms could include a self-help manual/CD, a helpline and technical back-up. There was a general preference for personal help (e.g. a hotline/technical back-up) where people could receive on-demand help tailored to them, rather than do-it-yourself methods (e.g. a DVD).

5.5 Priority audiences for help

During the discussion two priority groups for assistance were identified:

- disabled people and those who are housebound;
- those living in rural and isolated areas.

The internet is perceived to benefit these audiences by providing contact with others and enabling access to services, such as food shopping, that might otherwise be hard to reach.

5.6 Who should help?

Government, and especially local councils, are seen as having primary responsibility for motivating and enabling older people to use computers/the internet. Government is seen as playing a particularly important role in providing training, subsidies and ongoing support and awareness campaigns. Participants also suggest the idea of Government-‘endorsed’ websites, like a quality mark, to combat concerns over internet security and build confidence in the web per se.

However, the private sector (e.g. large retailers, computer manufacturers, ISPs) are also seen to have a role to play, especially with regards to subsidies for the internet. Participants’ thinking is that private companies will benefit from more people using the internet and should therefore ‘give something back’ to those who can least afford to access the internet. The perceived efficiency and dynamism of the private sector would be an added benefit.

You could hire them [computers] and the government pays for the hiring.
Birmingham, 65+ Dismissive

The private sector [could] put so much in and the government matches it.
Durham, 55–64 Dismissive

Additionally, third-sector organisations (particularly Age Concern and Help the Aged) are highlighted as having potential to play a significant role in this area. Third-sector organisations are well regarded by this audience because they are seen to be on the side of people like them, trustworthy, and not motivated by profit. One of the specific roles envisaged for the third sector was providing trained volunteers who could train older people to use the internet and provide ongoing support.

I think if the government took the money [and] gave it to the voluntary sector to deliver, I would be happy with that ... If Age Concern was to do something – it’s got its brand name and its security behind it and people are confident that you would get a good service. You wouldn’t be that confident if the private sector were doing it.
Durham, 55–64 Dismissive

5.7 Learning from the research process

Some specific lessons on how to build awareness, motivation and confidence also emerged from the research process itself. Some of the most helpful aspects of this included:

- Providing an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the issues with others who 'are in the same boat'.
- Providing examples of 'people like them' who are using the internet (through the vox pops). This increased participants' confidence, making them think 'if they can do it, I can'.
- Encouraging people to think about uses and benefits they hadn't previously considered (through the vox pops and scenarios provided).
- Asking participants to develop their own solutions.

Generated more interest. Would like to find uses for me personally. I have always thought of the internet as inefficient. Perhaps it is not.

Croydon, 55–64 Excluded

It has got me thinking about what I'm missing.

Birmingham, 55–64 Excluded

After discussion I feel I may use this service which may be useful to me as I get older.

Croydon, 55–64 Excluded

By discussing the subject, it has started to slightly clear the fog.

Durham, 55–64 Dismissive

Glad to know I am not on my own. From talking in group, feel slightly more confident to persevere and try for myself and not continually ask someone else.

Birmingham, 65+ Dismissive

Hope I can get more training. Would like to learn about the internet.

Croydon, 55–64 Excluded

I have got to go on a computer course.

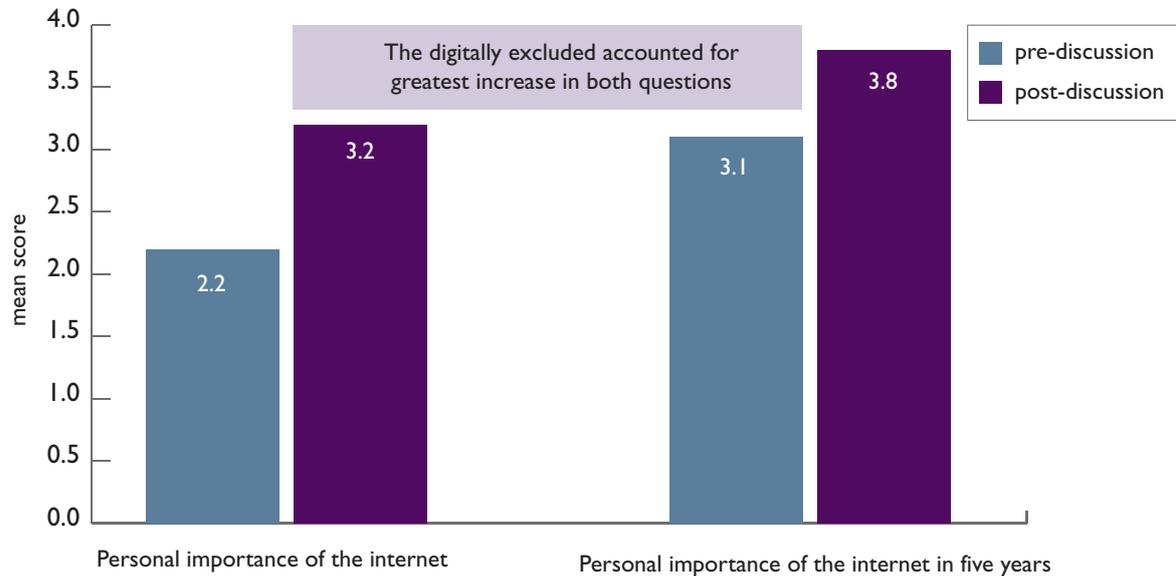
Birmingham, 55–64 Excluded

Has made me want to know about the internet and how it works.

Durham, 55–64 Dismissive

Many said that the discussion had changed how they felt about the internet and computers. The charts below show the change in attitudes about the internet before (grey) and after (purple) the discussions.

Before and after views of the internet

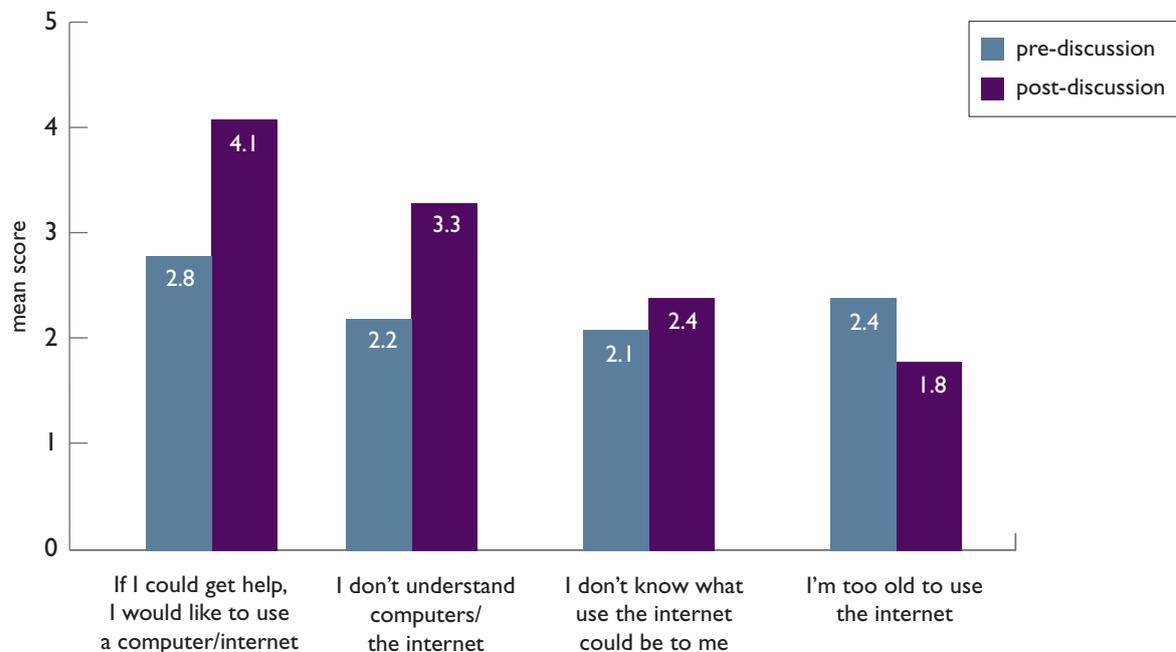


Q.4 On scale 1–5, where 1 is not all important and 5 is extremely important, how personally important to you is the internet?

Q.5 On scale 1–5, where 1 is not all important and 5 is extremely important, how personally important do you think the internet will be in 5 years?

BASE: ALL (48)

Before and after views continued



Q.6 From the following statements, please say to what extent you agree or disagree with them, where 1 is 'disagree strongly' and 5 is 'agree strongly'.

BASE: ALL (48)

6 Conclusions and implications from key findings

Reducing digital exclusion in later life will require the removal of a number of barriers, some of which may prove difficult to shift. However, contrary to conventional wisdom, this research suggests that a number of older non-internet users, including some who initially appear to be dismissive, could be encouraged to take up the internet with appropriate intervention.

Demystification and practical help will be key to reducing barriers and enabling digital inclusion. A number of specific suggestions for building skills and confidence were made in this research, for example, peer training and ongoing support. There is a lot of help already available, so part of the solution may be about signposting this more effectively as well as ensuring that the right sort of help exists for this specific audience.

Building motivation will also be critical to overcoming the current inertia. This could be done through active promotion of relevant benefits and by focusing on specific trigger points and circumstances when older people are more likely to be receptive; for example, at the point of retirement. Participants also suggested that they would be open to an awareness campaign.

Responses to the 'vox pop' DVD suggest that role models could play an important role in building confidence and enthusiasm. Role models should be 'people like them', who have faced similar barriers but have recently overcome these and transitioned into being internet users.

Affordability is also an issue for some people who will require financial assistance to take advantage of the internet. Government and private-sector subsidies on internet connection and 'pay as you go' schemes were suggested as ways to incentivise take-up.

Younger age groups (55–64) and those who are excluded rather than dismissive are likely to be most open to approaches designed to encourage and enable internet take-up. Some specific priority audiences who could be expected to benefit particularly from the internet were also suggested in the research:

- those with long-term health conditions or mobility impairments;
- those who live in remote or rural locations;
- those who are socially isolated or lonely.

7 Appendix: research methodology

The research involved six qualitative focus groups which were held between 2 and 10 June 2009. Groups were conducted across three locations, with two groups each held in Croydon, Birmingham and rural Durham. Participants were free-found by Opinion Leader's local recruiters. A screening questionnaire was used to ensure that set quotas were achieved on age (55–64 and 65+), Socio-economic group (SEG) (all DE) and reason for not using the internet ('Digitally excluded' and 'Digitally dismissive').

Digitally excluded – restricted from internet usage by societal factors that act as barriers to their digital integration and competence, e.g. cost; lack of coverage in their area.

Digitally dismissive – restricted from internet usage by their own personal attitudes and perceptions that make them look unfavourably on the internet, e.g. seeing it as a waste of time; having concerns about security.

Location	Age	SEG	Gender	Ethnicity	Employment Status	Digitally Excluded/ Dismissive	Loneliness
Croydon	55–64	DE	four male; four female	At least two BME	At least four full- or part-time employed	Dismissive	2 or 3 who live alone, 1 or 2 who feel lonely
Croydon	55–64	DE	four male; four female	At least two BME	At least four full- or part-time employed	Excluded	2 or 3 who live alone, four who feel lonely
Rural Durham	55–64	DE	four male; four female		At least four full- or part-time employed	Dismissive	2 or 3 who live alone, 1 or 2 who feel lonely
Rural Durham	65+	DE	four male; four female			Excluded	2 or 3 who live alone, 1 or 2 who feel lonely
Birmingham	55–64	DE	four male; four female	At least two BME	At least four full- or part-time employed	Excluded	2 or 3 who live alone, 1 or 2 who feel lonely
Birmingham	65+	DE	four male; four female	At least two BME		Dismissive	2 or 3 who live alone, 1 or 2 who feel lonely

A qualitative approach was used to explore in detail the barriers and potential enablers to digital exclusion. A topic guide and range of creative exercises were developed to bring the best out of the discussion and equip participants to identify all of the barriers (including the more deep-seated emotional ones), fully appreciate the potential benefits (including those that they may not initially have considered) and put forward their thoughts about what would be most useful in helping older people take advantage of a digital future.

The topic guide covered:

- spontaneous associations of computers and the internet;
- barriers to using computers and the internet;
- potential benefits and disadvantages from not using computers/the internet;
- ways to overcome barriers and enable older people to make use of the internet;
- a short questionnaire on attitudes to computers and the internet which participants answered before and after the discussion to see if and how views had changed.

Exercises included:

- a 'hearts and minds' exercise to explore the barriers;
- a stimulus DVD containing a series of vox pop interviews with older people who do use/value the internet (prepared ahead of the fieldwork);
- a lay strategist exercise to discuss potential solutions;
- pen portraits of older people with particular circumstances to help participants think about what would help people like them.

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