



https://www.

Age-Friendliness in Virtual Planning

Photo Credit: Silvasstrings (ID30863228) <http://www.dreamstime.com/>

James
Cook

The dissemination of information is important, in that it empowers citizens to access municipal or institutional services. The internet provides an opportunity to directly access a greater amount of information than other types of distribution. This interaction is done through a website, the virtual establishment of a community or organization, that can be accessed at anytime for any reason. Websites are also cheaper than other forms of information distribution making it very appealing for most organizations. With a greater number of seniors using the internet to access services, it is important that consideration of their needs is taken into account. Issues such as vision, motor skills and cognition play major roles in how seniors can access digital information. By addressing these issues, organizations can provide seniors a more satisfying experience, allowing them to extract more relevant information for their needs.

Seniors and the Internet

“Access to information remains a key challenge facing older people, which can seriously impact on their capacity to age well” (Everingham, 2009)

Seniors represent a growing population in society. As of 2011, seniors represented 13% of the population. Within 22 years, it is expected to rise more than 25% (Division of Aging and Seniors, 2010).

This increase in population will also mean that more seniors will be using the internet to look for information. Internet usage for older Canadians has increased over the last decade, but they still remained less likely to use the internet than younger age groups (Allen, 2013).

“Access to information remains a key challenge facing older people, which can seriously impact on their capacity to age well” (Everingham, 2009, 80). Seniors are 18% less likely to use the internet to search for government services. Unfortunately, websites like these have services that seniors could use (Online activities of Canadian boomers and seniors, 2007).

The Government of Canada and the American National Institute of Aging (NIA), through surveys and focus groups, have developed guidelines to assist websites to have a universal design, covering every aspect from font size to the verb tense of action words (NIA, 2009; Division of Aging and Seniors, 2010).



Senior's are using the internet more than ever before, and it is expected to rise for the foreseeable future.
Photo Credit: The Reporter (Western Carolina University)



Figure 1: Font size control button
Photo Credit: City of Winnipeg

Website Design - Vision

Vision and dexterity issues are one of the largest barriers to accessing information. This is due to physical changes in seniors' eyes with the loss of elasticity and yellowing of the lens. This can cause changes in depth and colour perception, lack of clarity, and sensitivity to lights and colours (Becker, 2004).

Word spacing, font size, and typeface can affect the readability of text. **Wording that is well spaced will make a website less cluttered and easier to read.** Font size also plays a role in readability. Using larger font (12 to 14 point font) is generally recommended (NIA, 2009). A font size control button can be an asset as it allows sites that have a stylish design to retain it. An example would be the City of Winnipeg's website, where the font control button allow you to choose between three different font sizes and adjusts the website accordingly (see Figure 1).

For colour perception, creating greater contrast between the content and background will help make the content more detectable. It is also recommended not to use patterned backgrounds or colours similar to the content as it creates additional clutter, making reading more difficult.

Website Design - Content

For information to be effective, it needs to be relevant and appropriate to the user. One study suggests that "The key to effective information service ... is to begin with information needs, and then identify information-seeking behaviours..." (Everingham, 2009, 82). **While it is convenient to make all information available on a website, it can have an adverse effect, leaving the user more confused** (World Health Organization, 2007, 61). The same study found that 20% of seniors did not know that information about services they would most likely use existed, let alone who to call. (Everingham, 2009, 80). While the needs of information seekers are diverse, they can usually be grouped into few categories for simplicity. An example would be the Service Canada website, which groups services into simple categories (see Figure 2).

Another issue is reading comprehension. As literacy declines with age — compounded by the increase in seniors over the coming years — the rate of literacy as a whole will decline for decades (CLC, 2009, 64). Therefore simpler

Vision and dexterity issues are one of the largest barriers to accessing information. (Becker, 2004)

Services for Seniors

- Education and Training
- Employment
- Income Assistance
- Legal Assistance
- Personal Documents
- Savings Plans
- Special Events

Figure 2: Information is grouped into simpler categories for easy searching
Photo Credit: Service Canada

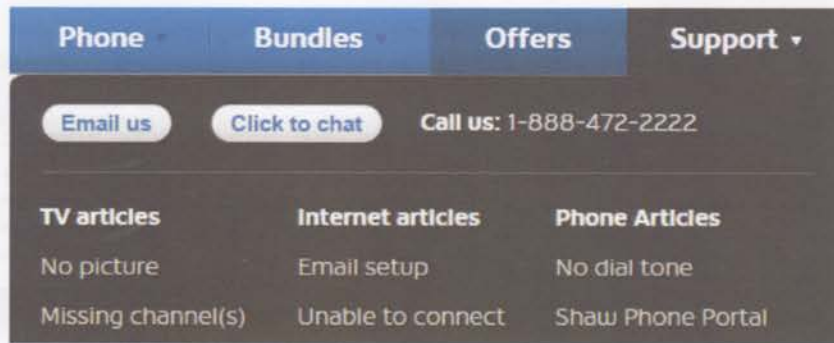


Figure 3: A support button with multiple forms of communication, in case a user needs further assistance.
Photo Credit: Shaw Communication

“The key to effective information service ... is to begin with information needs, and then identify information-seeking behaviours...”
(Everingham, 2009)

language will be needed to effectively communicate, in addition to how the information is displayed.

When listing information, it is recommended that three or four points be the maximum per issue, as that is the number most people can easily remember (Division of Aging and Seniors, 2010). Instructions should be listed and specific for the action in a very clear manner and directed towards the users with words like “you” (NIA, 2009). Jargon and technical words should be kept to a minimum and defined if needed.

Web Design - Assistance



Proper assistance can help seniors overcome barriers they may experience a website.
Photo Credit: Wiser Usability

Another feature to enhance a senior’s user experience is ensuring that assistance is available if they become confused or have additional questions. A site-map can reorient a senior who is lost (Becker, 2004). A help page discussing searching or navigating can assist seniors to continue searching for information.

Contact information should also be included for the website administrator/creator in case seniors require additional information or cannot find what they are looking for. (NIA, 2009) **A phone number is also suggested, as direct contact is preferred, especially when a senior requires assistance** (Everingham, 2009). Shaw Communication provides a good example by providing multiple forms of communication for support (see Figure 3).

Proper assistance can help seniors overcome the above barriers, as seniors can learn from experiences and understand how to approach the website more effectively the next time.

Final Thoughts

For seniors that use the internet, there are still many barriers for effective searching of relevant information. Equipping seniors with the right information can empower them to seek out services they need to increase the quality of their lives (Everingham, 2009). Ensuring that site creators realize and understand these barriers can help in overcoming them. **Research found that seniors could navigate websites easier if they were more compliant with the Making Your Website Senior Friendly checklist** (Hart, 2008, 195). As well, it is important to

have assistance on hand to aid older people should they be unable to continue their search. The number of seniors is growing every year, as is the number of seniors using the internet, therefore this issue will only grow as time goes on. Universal design is extremely important for all web users, as accessibility can help anyone access information and services more effectively.

Sources:

- Age-friendly communication: Facts, tips and ideas. (2010). Ottawa: Division of Aging and Seniors, Public Health Agency of Canada. Retrieved from www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/alt-formats/pdf/publications/public/various-varies/afcomm-commavecaines/AFComm-Commavecaines-eng.pdf
- Allen, M. K. (2013). Consumption of culture by older Canadians on the internet. Ottawa, Ont.?: Statistics Canada. Retrieved from www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-006-x/2013001/article/11768-eng.htm
- Becker, S. A. (2004, 12). A study of web usability for older adults seeking online health resources. *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction*, 11(4), 387-406. doi: 10.1145/1035575.1035578
- Online activities of Canadian boomers and seniors. (n.d.). Retrieved October 11, 2014, from www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2009002/article/10910-eng.htm
- Everingham, J., Petriwskyj, A., Warburton, J., Cuthill, M., & Bartlett, H. (2009, 12). Information Provision for an Age-Friendly Community. *Ageing International*, 34(1-2), 79-98. doi: 10.1007/s12126-009-9036-5
- Global age-friendly cities a guide. (2007). Geneva: World Health Organization. Retrieved from www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global_age_friendly_cities_Guide_English.pdf
- Hart, T. A., Chaparro, B. S., & Halcomb, C. G. (2008, 12). Evaluating websites for older adults: Adherence to 'senior-friendly' guidelines and end-user performance. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 27(3), 191-199. doi: 10.1080/01449290600802031
- Making Your Website Senior Friendly. (n.d.). Retrieved October 11, 2014. Retrived from www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/making-your-website-senior-friendly
- Post-secondary education in Canada: Meeting our needs? (2009). Ottawa, ON: Canadian Council on Learning. Retrieved from www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/PSE/2009/PSE2008_English.pdf