

5 reasons many seniors are afraid of the internet (and what you can do to help)

In Security Knowledge by Vincent on April 21, 2016 | Français, English, Deutsch

Albert is 69 years old. Last Christmas, Albert's 39-year-old son bought him a tablet with touch-screen display, thinking it might prompt him to go online and read the news. After all, Albert loves the idea of getting news and checking the weather forecast at any time of day.

Albert's son had high hopes for his father's new tablet: He imagines he might even be able to share with Albert some of the inspiring articles he finds online. Who knows, they might even cheer up Albert and give father and son more to talk about?

To Albert, his learning curve seems very steep: Whether it's real or imagined, Albert is deeply intimidated by the internet.

He has heard stories about dangers lurking in the online world, and he's afraid he might fall prey to an online scam. Albert consoles himself with the thought that he's probably not missing out on much more than nonsense memes and a collection of cat pictures. After all, the Internet might just be a waste of time.

Albert is seriously considering this tablet has been a complete waste of money...

Is the internet simply another place to waste time on silly cat pictures?

Do you think Albert's 39-year-old son understand his father's fear of the Internet and why he can't simply 'get over it'? The author can attest: His son (me), has little or no understanding of why his father won't switch on the tablet and experiment with it.

However, having researched and written this article, the author has gained a new feeling for the many reasons senior citizens might hold themselves back from embracing the internet.

Let's uncover why senior citizens like Albert are fearful of venturing online, and why, a few seniors have embraced the world of opportunities available to them online, and could never turn back to a life offline.

1. There is a divide between seniors and the rest of the population using the internet

Albert's story is backed by statistics. In the USA, only 59% of people over the age of 65 use the Internet daily, as opposed to 86% of all adults under 65. There is good news for those of us online: The number of elderly going online is increasing every year.

The world continues to see a rise in seniors accessing the Internet. Many countries now have active Government and non-profit programmes that teach older people how to use the Internet. Those that don't have those services often have access to enthusiastic children or grandchildren who hopefully have the patience to teach their elders to use a computer or tablet.

Especially for the elderly, the internet can be a way of accessing not only information but a way of keeping in touch with friends and family that might not have otherwise been physically possible.

2. Poor Eyesight and other disabilities make it difficult to use the internet

Many seniors admit they have difficulty using the internet due to a disability. Poor eyesight is commonly cited. According to research on Pewinternet, two out of five American seniors have a "physical or health condition that makes reading difficult or challenging".

At least poor eyesight is becoming less of an excuse to avoid going online. Nowadays, there are some great reading solutions online, such as text reading software and text enlarging software that magnifies text. In fact, text magnification is now a built-in feature on most modern computer browsers and operating systems.

Albert doesn't have this problem – he has a great pair of glasses and a large tablet with pinch-to-zoom. So no excuses there.

3. Older people without internet access are disadvantaged because they miss out on important information

For most of us digital natives, access to the Internet feels like a fundamental right, such as access to fresh water or sanitation. The UN has declared internet access to be a human right. However, many seniors who have never used the internet might not see what all the fuss is about.

It's hard to describe the benefits of social media to someone who has difficulty switching a computer on. Simply using email or browsing news would be a great start for people like Albert.

Rather predictably, not even half (48%) of non-Internet-users believe they are missing out. Amongst regular senior internet users, the majority (79%) agree that their offline counterparts are missing out on information.

Clearly, once Seniors join the online world, online technology becomes an integral part of their lives, making it easier to interact socially, run daily tasks such as finding a plumber or paying bills online. The internet rapidly becomes a part of daily life for many seniors embracing its' convenience.

4. Surprising fact: Older adults using social media sites socialise more frequently than non-users

Like many people, Alberts friends and family is spread out all over the world. Like many seniors, he finds it challenging to socialise in person, especially as he no longer drives a car. This seriously affects his ability to participate in social activities.

According to Pewinternet research, some 81% of seniors that use social media socialise with others on a daily basis. Whereas only 63% of seniors that don't use social media socialise with others daily. Those using social media get out socially more often!

It appears that social media offers an additional 'venue' to socialise, and perhaps indeed, to plan in-person meetings and social events. Seniors who use social networking sites such as Facebook to socialise online are more likely to regularly socialize with friends, whether online, in person, or over the telephone, compared with seniors who are not social networking site users.

Ironically, becoming active on social media sites leads to more social interaction – not social isolation. Given that Albert struggles with loneliness and isolation, social media might just be part of the solution.

5. Increasing online threats mean older users face real dangers online

Albert has heard about the many threats there are online, and as we can attest at Emsisoft, there are some very real threats online. No-one is immune to these threats. Unfortunately, some online criminals target seniors for their lack of skills online and use this to exploit their advantage.

Albert might do well to heed some practical advice from the MSICS in the USA, which can help senior citizens avoid getting caught out by online threats.

Internet users should avoid emails or social media messages that:

- Offer "free" gifts, prizes or vacations, or exclaim, "You're a winner!"
- Offer discount prescription medications or other "can't miss" deals.

- Appear to be from friends or family members, but the message is written in a style not usually used by that person, has numerous misspellings, or otherwise seems unusual. This is an indication your friend or family member's account may have been hacked.
- Appear to be from official government agencies, such as Social Security Administration, or banks, requesting personal information.
- Set ultimatums such as "your account will be closed," or "the deal will expire" to create a sense of urgency, and trick the victim into providing personal information.

Naturally, an article like this wouldn't be complete without recommending that any PC user should have up to date up to date anti-malware software. Emsisoft is proud to have a high percentage of senior users, and we frequently hear that seniors find our anti-malware easy to install and manage.

Did Albert ever learn to use his tablet, or did he give it to charity?

The author is pleased to report that Albert is getting past his aversion to his tablet. His caregiver recently enrolled him in a free programme called 'Senior Net' which teaches seniors to work with technology.

Gradually, the digital divide is being bridged. Who knows, father and son may soon be sharing stories online – anything is possible!

Don't let age become a barrier to seniors participating in the online world. If you're a computer-savvy person reading this, you could consider setting up a PC for a senior family member, client or friend. When you do this, consider setting up high quality, easy to use anti-malware software right from the start. This will keep seniors safe from harm and ensures they can confidently explore the online world, and perhaps even enjoy an enriched social life!