

## What Can Be Done To Get Older People On-Line

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Many older people do not use the internet and are unable to access many critical online services. But, new research from the Ofcom Consumer Panel finds that certain groups of older consumers would get connected if they are given the right kind of support to help them overcome their fears. The "Older people and communications technology" qualitative research shows that older people's attitude and character are the key determinants of whether or not they are online. The research suggests that the many older people who initially rejected using the Internet may get connected if they had the right support, assistance and learning environment. They said that courses designed for and run by older people, together with mentoring schemes would encourage them to get online.

Colette Bowe, Ofcom Consumer Panel Chairman said:

"the Panel takes older people's ability really to use this technology very seriously. This is my generation; and many of us are not as engaged in today's rapidly evolving communications world as other people. With more and more local and central government services online, as well as the best deals for commercial services, people who are not connected will find themselves increasingly excluded in today's world."

Figures from the Consumer Panel's 2006 market survey indicate that as many as 60% of people over 65 don't understand the term broadband, and over half do not take up Internet access because they see no benefit being online.

With an increasingly ageing population, the UK could find that many older people are cut off from all sorts of services because they are not using the internet. This new research is a move by the Consumer Panel to understand what makes some older people use communications technologies, and what the barriers are for those who do not.

Speaking at a workshop to discuss the report findings with key policy-makers, government and industry, Colette Bowe said:

"We want the Government's digital strategy to use the lessons learnt by organisations that are already helping older people to go online.

The UK Government has just committed to halve the gap in Internet usage by 2010 for groups at risk of exclusion such as older people. The Panel will work closely with the relevant government departments to achieve this aim in the UK."

### Key findings

Attitudes towards Internet access are more complex and varied than anticipated. The research revealed four distinct attitudinal groups:

'Absorbers' had learnt to use computers at work and are now part of the digital age. The diverse range of 'self-starters', who had no training at work, demonstrated that factors such as age, income, location and health did not appear to be barriers to take-up.

Non-users were largely consistent in the reasons they gave for not using the Internet: many were afraid of the unknown, of their ability, of breaking the PC, or of appearing foolish. The majority of non-users are the 'disengaged', and they showed an unexpected interest in going online. The minority, the 'rejecters', from busy grandmothers to contented hobbyists, saw no benefit in using the internet. Hosting today's workshop is the first step in a year-long programme for the Ofcom Consumer Panel to advise policy-makers and the communications industry to understand and tackle these issues.

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Notes for editors and CSEs

The Ofcom Consumer Panel was established to advise Ofcom on the consumer interest in the markets it regulates. The Panel is independent and sets its own agenda. Visit [www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk](http://www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk) for more information about the Panel as well as a copy of the UK consumer research.

The Older people and communications technology workshop is being held on July 5 2006 with key policy-makers in government, industry and older people's charities. The seminar will look at: the barriers, enablers and solutions affecting older people's levels of connectivity; what the experiences are of organisations in delivering programmes to help older people get online; how existing policies help or hinder engagement; and how future policies need to be shaped.

The Panel's survey, The Communications Market: 2006 revealed that one-in-three older people own just one of the four communications technologies (landline, mobile, Internet, digital TV).

For a copy of Older people and communications technology and The Communications Market: 2006' please visit our website [www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk](http://www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk) or contact Julia Guasch at [julia.guasch@ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk](mailto:julia.guasch@ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk) or on 020 7783 4027.

Colette Bowe, Ofcom Consumer Panel Chairman, and Chelsea Pensioner John Carbis, who runs the Chelsea Pensioner internet cafe, is attending the workshop, are available for interview. Please contact Sin Evans.

The UK has signed up to the [EU agreement](#) to halve the gap in Internet usage by 2010 for groups at risk of exclusion. This agreement also looks to increase: people's internet skills; the accessibility of websites and broadband coverage.