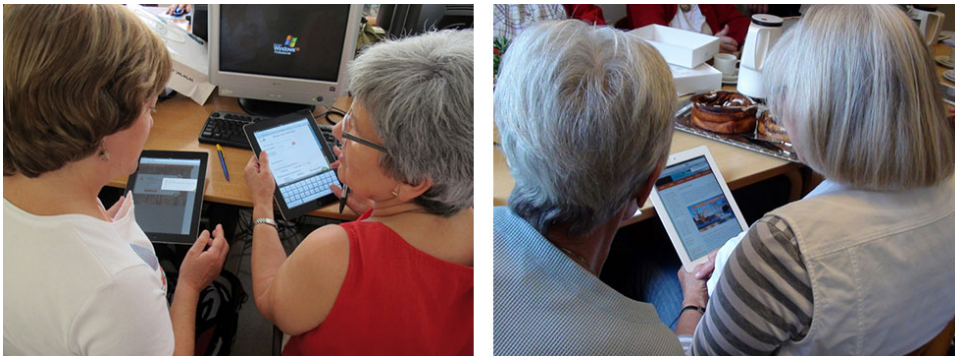


Digital Single Market

Projects news and results 19/03/2014

Social networking comes of age

As a group, older people don't embrace online living as readily as their grandchildren might. Many have concerns about social networking sites; others are unfamiliar with ICT or simply don't see the point. Thanks to Life 2.0, that may be about to change.



A woman in Finland needs a lift to a meeting, and someone online has offered to take her along. Migrants in Barcelona set up a group to learn Catalan; new members join and they all meet on- and offline.

There is nothing unusual about stories such as these, apart from the fact that the people involved are all over 65 – an age group that doesn't always take to new technologies. Life 2.0, a project funded under the ICT-PSP scheme, has listened to their concerns and built a platform that meets their requirements.

WHAT OLDER USERS WANT

Prospective users in four pilot locations – situated in Denmark, Finland, Italy and Spain – helped to formulate the criteria for the new platform, which the project then set out to address. Key considerations included the target group's predominant unfamiliarity with ICT and its diffidence towards the openness of most social networks.

It also emerged that older users' main interest lies in staying in touch with their local contacts. In contrast to younger generations, which use social networks to overcome geographical distances and – sometimes – to replace direct social contacts, older users find this kind of application helpful in linking

to their local context and the real life around them.

The platform's simple and user-friendly interface is one of its main assets. About 120 people are currently using the system in the four pilot locations, for example to partner up for the weekly shop, to form bowling teams or to update each other on their holidays. The platform is also open to local organisations, businesses and services of interest to the users.

AN ONLINE EXTENSION OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Earlier social networking applications for senior citizens were designed along the same lines as any other social platform. Life 2.0 is the first platform built specifically for and jointly with older users.

This approach helped the project to understand that big buttons and large fonts are a side issue: the real challenge lies in building a platform that generates trust and seems relevant. More specifically, the test users requested a closed application rather than an open one – a network older people feel they can trust, because they know who is involved – and local content of direct relevance to their daily lives.

These two criteria shape the application. They also have implications for the growth of the network, as expansion of the type experienced by many other social networking applications would defeat its purpose. In order to preserve its local focus and a reasonable level of user confidence, the platform will expand by nodes, that is, by forming new communities, with a provider the members trust.

Rather than projecting elderly people into the virtual space, Life 2.0 thus generates an augmented reality that provides more and better information about the local community. It increases the chances for senior citizens to meet, to help each other and to maintain their independence.

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