



16 Reasons Why the Elderly Struggle with New Technology

Barriers Seniors May Encounter to Learn Computer Skills

1. Big gap in technology

Our world became digital. Older adults were in their twenties when the first mobile phones started to come on the market. They didn't grow up with a cell phone or a smartphone in hand, the gadgets in their times were quite simple. Computers were big, phones had wires, cars used gas and to watch a movie you would go to the cinema. Now with the internet and all the smart devices you can replace almost all types of equipment from the past with only one. A simple laptop nowadays is much more powerful than some secret research computers from the 80s and it weighs just 2 pounds. Life now is way different than in their youth days. The gap is huge, it becomes bigger every day, and seniors just can't catch up.

2. Lack of perceived benefit or need

Some seniors who are not using the Internet don't think they would get much out of doing so (Gitlow, 2014). Seniors tend to be very task-oriented when learning computer skills and need to understand exactly what the benefit of learning technology will be before they are motivated to do it (Callahan, Kiker & Cross, 2003).

3. Negative feelings about social media

Older adults who have not used social media may have very negative views about using a computer for social purposes (Vroman, Arthanat & Lysack, 2015). Older adults dislike social networking in part because they fear it will have a negative effect on their face-to-face social interactions. They may be frustrated that communication modes have changed so drastically from phone calls and personal visits to emails, WhatsApp and Skype. It may help to point out that seniors who do venture into social networking have reported benefits in terms of social connectedness and increased interactions as some seniors now set up Skype or Facetime sessions with their grandchildren, rather than waiting for the eventual phone call (Gatto & Tak, 2008).



4. Fear of the unknown

As humans, we have been always afraid of the unknown. During the evolution, humans who were leaving their area were risking to be attacked by a bear or a tiger or got into place without water, food or shelter. This caused a higher mortality rate between them and the number of people returning back after long trips or doing new activities was very low. This is why being afraid of something that we didn't do before terrifies us. Our adrenaline level jumps up placing us in the prehistoric era and engaging our animal instincts to survive. Our heart starts beating like a hammer, our muscles become tense and ready to run or fight. And because our animal side is activated our brain becomes cloudy, we think just about how we can escape this situation. Being afraid is part of our DNA.

5. Fear about Internet safety

Some seniors may be afraid of putting any personal information on a computer and won't want to learn computer skills until they feel safe going online (Fausset, Harley, Farmer & Fain, 2013). This can be addressed early on by talking about Internet safety and best practices, such as creating strong passwords, adjusting privacy settings, and not posting personal information such as physical address or vacation dates in social media.

6. Computer anxiety

Many seniors are fearful they will break the computer and may be extremely hesitant to touch the computer or to "play around" with the computer. That anxiety will make it difficult to learn the necessary skills. You should try to show your seniors that the computers are not as fragile as they thought.

7. The biological part of the struggle

Another part of the puzzle is our brain. It's a separate alive mechanism which changes and evolves every second of our life. Inside our brain there are millions of connections happening every second, It's by far the most sophisticated computer.

When our body becomes older our biological processes change and it can affect our brains as well. These changes can affect mental function, even in healthy older people.



For example, some older adults find that they don't do as well as younger people on complex memory or learning tests.

There are some researches that prove that our brain functions start to decline from the mid-20s. According to Harvard Medical school: "Some brain areas, including the hippocampus, shrink in size. The myelin sheath that surrounds and protects nerve fibers wears down, which can slow the speed of communication between neurons."

8. Tricking memory

It's very uncommon for seniors to forget their keys in the house and spend some time trying to find them. Unfortunately, this is another drawback of aging. As we age, we start to forget a lot of things that we don't use in our day-to-day life.

I will tell you more: the memory needs some exercise too, but we mostly finish using it extensively after we graduate from college. In our lives and jobs, we barely get to the same level of intensity as we had in school.

That's why it's very understandable why after 20-30 years of not adopting any new tech we have big troubles to figure out how to use an iPhone. A memory challenge is one of the hardest possible. Everybody knows the feeling that you know something but you just can't remember. It's like torture, like our brain takes us in hostages.

However, some stimulation can dramatically increase our memory and tech is one of them. New technology can help seniors to keep their memory fresh and agile.

9. Hard to focus

But it didn't stop there. One more reason why it's difficult for seniors to adapt to new gadgets is a lack of focus. This is something that we all experience when we need to learn or understand a subject that we are not quite excited about.

Our brain is constantly trying to jump around and think about dozens of events happening around us. We think about what we gonna do next, about groceries, kids, a phone call that we need to make, passing car, somebody's loud conversation. We leave in the world of distraction and because this world changed so much in the last 30 years it's even harder for seniors to deal with it.



10. Vision loss

Affecting an incredible number of Americans, vision loss can be as varied as the seniors who experience it – from simply the need to don a pair of reading glasses to total blindness. And it's very common in older adults, with one in every three elders over age 65 experiencing some form of eye disease that impacts vision, like glaucoma, cataracts, macular degeneration, among others. This makes difficult to be able to use technology.

11. The power of habit

The power of habit is one of the strongest features of humanity. Waking up, having a cup of coffee, taking the same road to work. We do it over and over again even without thinking. Being a senior means that we used the same phone with a wire for 40-50 years or watching the same TV with the same TV channels.

It's hard to adapt something new when you used to some old technology that still works and you are comfortable with. The elderly have a long relationship with simple things that are now replaced with new smart devices, each of these devices requires some learning process.

12. Lack of time

Learning something new takes some time and usually, this is what we don't have. Each of us has some routines and finding some extra time can be a big challenge. In plus learning is a process and it requires a lot of time invested upfront before you can feel the benefits. Time management is a crucial piece of a puzzle if you want to succeed.

13. Price

New tech is not always cheap, sometimes it's quite pricey. New phones and computers can cost up to a thousand dollars and it can be a very big barrier if you want to adopt new tech. It's not easy for retired people to buy an expensive device when they have to pay for their mortgage and groceries.

14. Rushing

Rushing is one of the issues when the seniors get excited about some specific technology but they are not ready for a learning curve. They get disappointed when they



realize the complexity of new gadgets or smart devices and give up right before starting to understand it.

15. Procrastination

This is a good one and we all fall for it! Procrastination is the worse enemy of the elderly with all their routines and habits. It's so seducing to say that we start learning new tech tomorrow and when tomorrow comes we just put it off. We find thousands of excuses just to not start it on.

16. Not setting a goal

If you don't know what you want to achieve in one week, one month or one year is hard to get there. Goal setting is essential to managing your time well, especially if we want to adopt new technology. The right goal helps you to fight distractions and be more focused. As a result, you can achieve greater results.