

Living 50plus

Social Media No Longer Just Child’s Play

The Internet and related technologies have been a game-changer for people of all ages. The instant connectivity made possible by these advancements has been valued by young adults and children for years. But now social media is attracting an entirely different demographic — seniors.

More than just a method of channeling information to the comfort of home, the Internet and the various social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram, are ways for older adults to stay connected with friends and family. For seniors faced with mobility issues, social media helps to bring the world to them.

Despite the stereotype that seniors do not want to learn to use new technology, many seniors are getting on board. Findings from the Pew Research Institute show that social networking use among Internet users ages 50 to 64 grew by 88 percent between April 2009 and May 2010. The research also found that the percentage of those 65 and older using social media grew from 13 percent to 26 percent during that same stretch. Although young adults continue to be the primary users of social media, older users are gaining momentum and sur-



passing youth in the number of new users.

Individuals who are not yet utilizing social media to manage their communication efforts may be inspired by these benefits to doing so.

- * Photo and video sharing: The majority of photos being taken today are digital, as fewer people are making prints of their photos. Rather, they are being shared via e-mail or through social media sites. Grandparents can see their grandchildren in photos in real time. Also, if they’ve managed apps that enable video sharing, they can view and chat with relatives who live miles away, just as if they were sitting across the table.
- * Conversations with

family: In a world where families are no longer centrally located, communication may be lacking. Despite the prevalence of mobile phones, fewer and fewer people seem to pick up the phone and make calls as they once did. Instead, they’re texting and updating social media posts. They’re also e-mailing one another. Older adults who have no access to this technology could be left out of the mix. This is a way for seniors to stay close to family.

- * Convenient check-ins: At times when a full-blown conversation may not be practical, having a quick method to check in with a loved one can make social media advantageous. Men and women can send a quick text to their parents to find out how they’re feeling or if they need anything. Such ready access can provide some peace of mind to adults concerned about their elderly parents.
- * Online shopping: Seniors who don’t get out much or who cannot safely drive a vehicle might not be

able to shop as often as they would like. Having Internet access and experience with browsing Web sites enables older men and women to shop from reputable Web sites who ship items directly to the house. With the vast array of items now sold online, anyone can have their choice of items and not be forced to settle because of their age.

- * Improved feelings of well-being: Avoiding feelings of isolation and loneliness can benefit older men and women. A study by Dr. Shelia Cotten, a sociologist and associate professor from the University of Alabama, Birmingham, revealed that Internet use was associated with a 30 percent decrease in depressive symptoms among older adults who used it regularly, while other studies have shown similarly impressive results.
- * Working the mind: Going online, chatting on social media or simply writing an e-mail works areas of the brain. Typing also helps improve manual dexterity. These factors can be beneficial for seniors looking to stay sharp.

Using the Internet as a form of communication is a growing trend among the 50-plus demographic. It enables them to stay connected with family and the world in a variety of ways.

How To Cut Costs On Data Plans

There have been a number of must-have trends throughout history. While in years past the hottest commodity was the in-demand toy or gaming system, today people cannot seem to get enough of their technological gadgets, most notably smartphones and tablets.

Evolving phones and handheld computers have revolutionized how people communicate. By the end of 2011, market research from Nielsen indicated that 50 percent of mobile phone users in the United States relied on smartphones over standard feature phones. Due to the numerous abilities of a smartphone, including the ability to browse the Web, send e-mails and texts, as well as play streaming video and games, smartphone users must sign up for a data plan to make



every-thing possible. People may be unknowingly spending more than they have to for these plans.

Consumer Reports says that the average cell phone user spends \$600 per year on basic mobile services. When texting and other smartphone features are added in, the cost balloons to \$1,800 per year. There are ways to cut these costs considerably if you simply pay attention to details.

- * Don’t bundle up just yet. Regular voice service has lately become a cheap commodity. In an effort to make more money, phone companies are pushing higher-end

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Parent

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mobility or loss of mental faculties also may be indicative that it is time for a loved one to receive care.

Questions to ask

Although taking on the care of an aging parent may seem like the best idea possible, particularly for a senior who is very afraid of losing his or her independence, it may not always be in either party’s best interest. Before anyone determines what will be done to help a relative, it’s best to answer a few questions as straightforwardly as possible.

- * What type of care does my parent need?
- * How soon into the future is that type of care bound to change?
- * Can this care be handled by someone who comes into the house, such as a visiting nurse?
- * Will my parent feel comfortable with an outside person helping with day-to-day care?
- * What are my parent’s limitations?
- * Am I capable of handling this on my own?
- * Can I afford an adequate care facility?
- * What are my local facility options?
- * Will this type of care affect my own personal well-being?
- * Can I handle this emotionally and physically?

Any person facing the prospect of caring for an aging parent can realize that there is help available, as well as many different peo-

ple who can help guide a decision. The first resource is to ask siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins to weigh in on the situation to help the family come to a consensus.

There are also social workers who specialize in this sort of thing, as well as financial consultants who can spell out the pros and cons of different types of care and help determine the most affordable option. This can also go a long way toward helping determine the course of action.

The burden of caring for a parent can take a physical and mental toll on a person. Knowing there is a support circle available can ease one’s mind and enable caregivers to make rational decisions that are in everyone’s

best interest.

Caring for a loved one who can no longer care for him- or herself is something that many Baby Boomers

are facing on a daily basis. Although it may be a touchy subject, it is worth exploring what you will do before the situation becomes urgent.

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