

# Using Technology? Positively!

A SERIES OF FACT SHEETS

ON EVERYDAY TECHNOLOGIES AND OLDER CANADIANS

## OLDER ADULTS MEAN BUSINESS!

**Fact sheet #7 looks at the numbers, diversity, consumer power and economic impact of seniors.**

### Who are they?

In 1999, 3.7 million people or 12.3 percent of the Canadian population were over the age of 65. By 2031, 22 percent or nine million people will fall into this age category. The consumer power of older adults is growing. Although they grew up without computers, cell phones, banking machines, VCRs and tape recorders, older adults use some or all of these technologies every day. In fact, older adults are the fastest growing customer group in computer sales and Internet services.

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### Think about it...

The rapid growth of technology and the increasing size of the aging population are happening at the same time. Technology can enhance the daily lives of older adults by providing opportunities to maintain or increase independence. Yet,

older adults have rarely been consulted about the development of technology even though the growing market of older adults is changing the face of the economy.

As a society, we need to address issues such as cost, design and training associated with the unequal access to technology, especially where such technologies can impact upon seniors' independence or their quality of life.

The development of any technology should include the participation of the intended user in all phases, including needs assessment, initial design and evaluation. In general, older adults have been excluded from these processes in the development of new technologies, even though they are often encouraged or required to use **automated banking machines (ABMs)**, computers, **automated voice response (AVR)** answering systems, etc. One of the



greatest challenges ahead is to create and endorse inclusive standards and guidelines for industries that produce products, services and technologies for an aging society. Seniors can benefit from new technology if they have a say in its design and choice in how it is used.

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## Economic Facts

There are wide income differences among older adults. As a group, they are financially better off today than previous generations. The incomes of seniors have risen faster than those of any other age group since the 1980s: they are 18 percent higher in 1997 than they were in 1981 (after adjusting for inflation). These consumers may have more time to find the best value for their money. At the same time, on average, seniors have lower incomes than people in all other age groups except for the 15 to 24 year-olds. To industry, seniors present an attractive but discriminating market. For many seniors, living on a fixed income means they

must spend carefully to make ends meet and to get the most for their money.

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## Communicating with Companies, Banks and Government

As more aspects of daily living become dependent on technology, it is crucial that older adults are not excluded or sidelined from full participation in society. Communicating effectively with service providers is essential whether by e-mail (electronic mail), telephone, **fax machine**, or pen and paper. Canadians should speak out to companies, banks or government departments who use poorly designed technologies or services. Many organizations welcome ideas on how to improve their services and are

### Older adults are not all the same!

Older adults differ more from one another than younger people differ from their peers. Each person is unique and is shaped over the years by many factors such as family history, ethnicity, culture, education, income and work experience. People in their 60s grew up and lived through very different times than people in their 80s. It makes sense that they would differ from each other in their beliefs, expectations and needs and should not be treated as a homogeneous group of customers.

more than willing to discuss an issue. Getting satisfaction often takes persistence. It may be necessary to repeat a request or complaint using different words and to share experiences with seniors' organizations.

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## Older adults have influence

Did you ever stop to think about the influence that older adults have in many areas? Many adults rely on the advice and counsel of their older friends and relatives when making major purchases and life decisions. Older adults are a major force in the voluntary sector. In Canada, the economic value of their volunteer activities is estimated to be between \$764 million and \$2.3 billion annually. Older adults contribute to the economy in important ways. They typically spend more on gifts and charities than younger people do.

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## A fact industry can't afford to overlook

Staying active, exploring new paths, earning supplementary income are all reasons why many older adults continue working and volunteering. In fact, some researchers believe that older workers will be needed in the future as fewer young

adults enter the workforce. Workplace technology will need to address normal age-related changes such as auditory loss, visual deterioration and limited mobility. Investing in technology for an aging society is a "win/win" situation because it lays the groundwork for a more inclusive, user-friendly environment for all ages. The Canadian Standards Association is currently working on a guideline, Design for Aging, that will serve as a general reference for the development of products, services and environments for an aging society. Recently released from CSA is a standard on Barrier Free Design for ABMs.

**Over the next 25 years, 1 in 4 Canadians will be over 60. This should influence the design of everything around us!**

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## Techno Terms

**ABM** - an **Automated Banking Machine**, also known as an automated teller machine (ATM), can carry out ordinary bank transactions such as deposits, withdrawals, transfers, account updates and bill payments. An ABM allows you to conduct these transactions 24 hours a day at your convenience.

**AVR** - an **Automated Voice Response System** is an electronic telephone answering service used by many companies to direct your call to the appropriate person or department and increasingly, by medical and professional offices to book appointments. Most use a 'menu' style, in which you make your choices by pressing the buttons on your phone. This system does not work with a rotary telephone.

**Cellular Phone** - a wireless telephone.

**Fax Machine** - sends and receives printed pages or images over telephone lines by converting the printed material to and from electronic signals.

**Gerontechnology** - a field of study which combines the study of aging (gerontology) and the development of technology. Its main purpose is to understand better how technology impacts upon an aging society.

**Internet** - a very large computer network through which individual computers are connected to internet service providers (ISP) so they can share information. The internet is open to anyone with access to a computer that is connected to an ISP.