Using Technology? Positively!

SERIES OVERVIEW

This series explores technologies that affect the daily activities of older adults. The fact sheets may be helpful to those who are new users or who may be considering using technology for the first time. Fact sheets 2-7 take a close look at specific technologies and provide tips and strategies suggested by older adults. The fact sheets also uncover myths about aging and seniors' use of technology and look at the challenges facing us as we all grow older and encounter new ways of doing things.

The world-wide growth in older populations is occurring at the same time as an explosion in technology. Thousands of older adults are discovering the many benefits of technology. Yet, credited with making life easier, technology has also created challenges for some as everyday activities such as banking, telephoning, and finding health information may increasingly involve unfamiliar or different ways of doing things. Access, literacy, cost, design, privacy and attitudes, all play a role in how we choose to use technology.

Where you live can affect how you view and use technology

Across Canada, **automated banking machines (ABMs)** have replaced many bank branches. For older adults living in rural areas or who prefer to do business with a human bank teller, this may pose a serious challenge, especially if transportation to the closest full service bank is not available.

High-speed communication is more likely to be available in more densely populated areas, allowing better internet services. In contrast, some remote areas of Canada struggle to maintain and upgrade even **basic telephone** service.

Living in a small community can have its advantages too! In many rural regions, vibrant community groups advocate for improved services and training whereas social isolation can occur in urban centres where people may not feel as closely connected to their community.

Some Barriers...

◆ Initial costs as well as ongoing service charges prevent many people from enjoying the benefits of computers, emergency response devices or telephones with display capabilities.

◆ Poorly designed technologies such as some telephone answering menu systems and banking machines with keys that do not line up with corresponding text on the screen discourage acceptance and promote resistance to using them.

◆ Computer keyboards, banking machines or touch-tone telephones may be difficult to operate for some who experience physical changes, such as visual or hearing loss, or arthritis.

◆ Perceptions that a particular technology is too complex or difficult to learn may deter some older adults from attempting to master a new device.

People aren't necessarily slow in adapting to technology; technology is often slow in adapting to people! Good design is better for everyone.

Myth: Seniors are not receptive to new technologies.

Mythbuster: Recent studies show that new technologies which improve the quality of life for older adults in their homes are welcomed. In fact, older adults readily accept technology when it meets their needs and is explained effectively. Technology can not only improve the quality of older adults' lives but may allow them to remain independent longer.

Sources:

Brown, John Seely and Paul Duguid. *The Social Life of Information*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2000.

Fozard, James L., Jan Rietsema, Herman Bourna and J.A.M. Graafmans. *Gerontechnology: Creating Enabling Environments for the Challenges and Opportunities of Aging*. Educational Gerontology, 26, 2000.

Zimmer, Zachary and Neena L. Chappell. *Receptivity to New Technology Among Older Adults*. Disability and Rehabilitation, Vol. 21, No. 5/6, 1999.

2

September 2001   Prepared by the Nova Scotia Centre on Aging, Mount Saint Vincent University for the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors.

Fact Sheets in the Series

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.

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.