Rise of the Silver Surfers

'Silver Surfers' are the fastest-growing group of online users – older people have caught on and realized it's never too late to have a change of attitude. There are incredible benefits that new technology and gadgets can bring to enhance and improve day-to-day life.

As life continues to jog along and you enjoy falling into a pattern of behaviour and familiar ways of doing things, it is easy to get left behind and slow to a walking pace as new types of technology become available. Even terminology changes and it may seem like you've missed the technology boat and decided it's all too hard. However! Don't be discouraged. There are many exciting apps, websites and gadgets that have been designed to improve your life at any age.

Taking time to upskill yourself on how to use digital technology safely and to become a little more tech savvy can open up a whole new universe of opportunity.

Let's explore the choices.

Connect with loved ones

Jumping online can help you make and maintain vital relationships with friends and family through online video, chat groups and social media. Particularly important throughout the Covid pandemic when we were unable to leave our homes or travel overseas, connecting online was a lifeline for so many. Not only for meetings, use this technology to have a family video chat with those spread across the world. Set up a Facebook page and search and connect with your friends so you can do fun, feel good things like share funny pictures and comment on photos. As you learn to use social media you will need to know how to protect yourself online by being aware of avoiding scams and fake social media profiles. If someone you don't recognize asks to be your friend, do not accept! You cannot be as trusting in the online world as you'd expect – remember to not take people at face value and don't be afraid of appearing rude by not accepting a friend request or blocking a person who seems a bit suspect. Chances are that cute trusting looking lady in her profile picture is actually an opportunistic dude looking to make some quick cash offshore!

Enjoy the convenience of internet banking

Gone are the days when banks are only open Monday to Friday and close at 5! All major banks offer easy to navigate online banking 24/7 where you can simply view all your accounts, transfer money and pay bills and invoices quickly and conveniently. If you're not on a desktop or laptop then use the bank's app! You can connect by sending an email and avoid queues. If you need to see an ACTUAL human to discuss more complex banking transactions, it's straight forward to make an appointment through the contact us tab and visit your local branch.

Online shopping

Shopping online is an efficient and cost-effective way to overcome the weekly groceries battle. You can put your lifetime skills of catching the best deals at the supermarket into new use online too, as supermarket shopping sites use a list of weekly specials and make it easy to compare prices. Keep in mind that by shopping online you're overriding the associated physical challenges you may find you're beginning to battle at the shops as you age. Instead you can sit in the warm comfort of your slippers and fleecy jumper to get whatever morsel has caught your fancy recently…as well as topping up the tea, coffee and toilet paper.

When it comes to payment, you'll be charged a small service fee which covers a staff member collecting your items off the shelves, and the cost for delivery. Be careful using public WiFi -and make sure you use a strong password and use a different one for every account. It's a good idea to use a two-factor authentication on every account you can for an extra layer of security. When you whip out your credit card, use a well respected payment service that will protect you if something goes wrong, or consider using a disposable credit card (like Prezzy Card) where you can only spend what has been pre-loaded. Make a regular habit of checking your credit card statements to make sure your card hasn't got into the wrong hands.

Access to interesting websites and information

What's your hobby? Even if you're into some really wacky stuff I can guarantee there will be an enthusiast group out there with at least a basic website or Facebook group you can join. Immerse yourself in whatever it is that floats your boat and connect with people who love it too! Read, observe, scroll till your heart's content but remember to think before you publish anything online as it's almost impossible to remove completely – even if it's later deleted or modified or you've changed your mind. When you're using social networks, remember your p's and q's and avoid using language or pictures that could offend others or embarrass you. Most importantly, keep your personal information private, and don't post photos of others or share their information without getting their permission first.

Gaming and VR:

I'm not talking Mario Carts or Dungeons and Dragons – although if you're into that we won't judge! If you're new to computers, start simple with a game you're familiar with or enjoy already and build on that. Games such as Sudoku, Mahjong, and Solitaire are great for older adults who enjoy challenging themselves mentally. Simulation games such as SimCity are designed to mimic real-world activities and can be fun for people who enjoy managing and building things. There are also exciting adventure games which involve exploration and puzzle-solving – try Myst, The Witness, or Life is Strange. Keep it casual with games that don't require a lot of time or effort and can be played in short bursts if you don't have a great attention span or much time. There are lots of fun options like Candy Crush, Bejewelled and Tetris. Game designers are beginning to cotton on to designing games more specifically suited to the older generation. An article relating to Game Design for the Elderly on Australian website hellocare.com.au investigated this further, speaking to game designer for Mini Mammoth Games, David McCann. His message is that developing games for the elderly is an exciting and innovative approach to aged care, and game developers should prioritise creating an accessible and engaging experience for this demographic. "The positive effects of games have been well-documented" and there is ample opportunity to use games as a tool to motivate and engage elderly individuals.

In the same category as gaming, but providing a different, more immersive experience, you'll find Virtual Reality (VR). For the uninitiated into this virtual world, VR creates a computer-generated experience like nothing you've encountered before. VR equipment involves a headset and a type of hand held controller in each hand. Once the headset has been fitted you will be able to view an animated 3D image with realistic dept h and colour which makes you feel like you're

actually INSIDE a full depth film, with the ability to interact with characters and the environment using the controllers and body movement. The type of physical interaction

varies depending on the game chosen for the level of ability of the player. For older people there are a range of more passive VR games suitable for their personal interests and physical abilities which would offer a wonderfully new and exciting experience. VR suppliers are beginning to open lounge style facilities in shopping centres where people from all walks of life can pay for a session on VR. Aged Care facilities can bus groups of residents to one of these lounges as an outing so they can enjoy an energising, safe new experience. It's interesting to note that trials of VR on residents at different stages of dementia have shown an improved quality of life, including reduced wandering and anxiety among residents.

Photography and video

Digital cameras have really come a long way. So many enjoy the instant gratification of point click and view and mobile phones make this so easy. Even those with a below average understanding of technology can navigate to the camera icon and push the button! Try adding a filter to adjust the colours and tone of your picture or edit with a free, easy to use tool like CapCut then share it online. As mentioned earlier though remember to gain permission first from people you've snapped a photo or taken a video of it you plan to share it on online.

Tips on how to teach an elder in your life the basics:

Do you know someone who needs your help navigating tech right from the start – or maybe just needs a leg up as they already know the basics? Teaching older people to use technology can be challenging, but with patience and the right approach it can be a rewarding experience for you both. Break it up into easy to digest chunks so not to overwhelm either of you while you're just getting started:

Basics: Teach them how to turn on their device, navigate the interface and how to use the basic functions like the keyboard, mouse, touch screen and home button.

Keep it simple: Avoid technical jargon and use simple language. Break down the instructions into small steps and if possible use visual aids like diagrams, pictures or videos to help them understand.

Be patient! Everyone has their own way and speed of learning. Encourage them to ask questions – even if they think they are silly! Offer positive feedback when they make progress and be encouraging.

Practice: The more they practice the more they'll build confidence and reinforce what they've learned.

Use real-life examples: Illustrate how technology can make life easier and practice by using video chat or ordering groceries online.

Provide support: Be available to offer ongoing support once you've finished your session. You could suggest resources like online tutorials or help forums.

Make it fun! Try playing games or using apps that appeal to their personality or sense of humour. There are games and apps designed to help seniors learn technology which keep them engaged and motivated to continue learning.

Ref: Aged Advisor 2024