

Tech Boom(ers)

Go Ahead, Get Social Online
By Sue Botos



One of the most frequently asked technology questions by Boomers and older adults is not that technical.

"They want to know 'If I unfriend someone (on Facebook) would they know?'" says Tak Sato, founder of the Cleveland-based nonprofit Center for Aging in the Digital World, which offers technology instruction to those age 60 and over. "I always chuckle when I get asked that in class."

While folks in their 50s and 60s represent one of the largest groups to embrace the digital world, Sato says that they need to "re-learn" how to nurture online friendships.

"Social media mimics real life. The difference is that in real life, you curate your relationships one person at a time. With social media, you can curate (many) at the snap of your fingers."

Millennials, who don't recall a time without cell-phones and instant communication, just accept technology as normal, says Sato, but even people in their 40s often must learn to shift their frame of reference to virtual.

"Until a few years ago, it was OK not to embrace the digital world. Now it is essential to use digital," Sato says, noting that some companies and organizations only accept communication through email or a website.

For example, people often work into their 60s and 70s. To receive unemployment benefits through Cuyahoga County, everyone must register their work search information. For the first two weeks, the process can be done via phone, but after that, job seekers must report the information on the county website.

DID YOU KNOW?

All 29 branches of the Cuyahoga County Public Library offer free computer training in Microsoft Office, Adobe Creative Cloud, Outlook and more. Go to cuyahoga.library.org for more information.

Self-guided courses are available through "LearningExpress Library," a free resource available to library card holders anywhere with an internet connection.

ADULTS ONLY

People 50 and older may have barriers to overcome when learning new technology, according to the Pew Research Center, including the following:
PHYSICAL: There might be issues such as vision or mobility that make pushing small buttons or

reading screens difficult.
ATTITUDE: It might be hard to overcome the "I've always done it this way, why change?" outlook.
OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN: Many adults need to find someone to help them navigate the technological world.

SECURITY: No matter the age, online safety is a concern.
PRIVACY: There could be worry that the whole world can see anything posted online.
COST: Computing devices might be beyond some older adults' budgets.

BY THE NUMBERS

More than three-quarters of adults 50 and older own some type of computer, and nearly nine in 10 have a mobile device. Almost three out of four adults in their 50s own a smartphone, and over half have a tablet, according to a November 2016 report by G. Oscar Anderson, AARP senior research adviser.

Most people over 50 use their devices for email, surfing the internet and keeping in touch with family and friends. Younger Boomers are more likely than older adults to do other online activities, especially shopping, banking, watching videos or shows, and keeping up with social media.

While young people favor Instagram and Snapchat, older people prefer the social media granddaddy, Facebook, often posting family photos.

CONFIDENCE IS KEY

So what is holding back Boomers and older adults from becoming more tech-savvy? More often than not, it's a lack of confidence, even among those with some computer knowledge, Sato says.

"When we start classes, I tell them, 'Here are your hands-on tablets. Have fun,'" he says.

The center's 16-week course is offered free at area senior centers and provides tablets to students for the duration of the sessions. This year, classes will be offered at the North Olmsted, Westlake and Rocky River senior centers, plus the Rocky River Recreation Center.

Before the first class, Tak meets with each of the 12 students individually, to assess his or her technological understanding. He then adjusts the 10-week curriculum to fits each person's needs. Classes are followed by six weeks of follow-up help.

Many students find the first few weeks a challenge, but as they unlock all that the digital world has to offer — such as free magazines and movies from libraries — they're hooked.

"It's like going to a candy store for them and discovering a new flavor," says Sato's wife and business partner, Mely.

"There's that motivation and curiosity. So far I haven't lost anyone," Sato says. "To build that confidence and that ability to be curious, that is the silver bullet."

Back to the first question: Can you tell if someone has unfriended you on Facebook? Sato says no. The only way they might know is if they realize they no longer hear from you.



Sue Botos fearlessly faces technology, but keeps the Geek Squad on speed dial.

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