



# Communicating With Older Audiences

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And

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# First, a little about us...

## Dana Chisnell

- Started as a technical communicator
- Shifted completely to user research, usability, and UCD around 1997-98
- Have done about 70 UCD projects involving 100s of users, including 3 studies for AARP in 2003

## Amy Lee

- Began as a book editor
- Got a Masters degree in Design
- Owned two businesses related to Web design and development
- Now directing the design and usability of the AARP site and supporting OWW



# Some thoughts on older adults

- Watch your stereotypes
  - They aren't online
  - What an “older adult” wants
  - Disabilities: visual, dexterity, cognitive



# *Stereotypes*

## Older adults online

According to the Year 3 UCLA Internet Report, in 2002:

- 72% of 46-55 year olds were online (2000 households surveyed)
- 64% of 56-65 year olds were online
- 34% of those over 65 were online



# *Stereotypes*

## What older adults want

- No one considers themselves “old”
- Be sensitive to the needs of the older adult without making their age the focus
- Remember and respect the diversity of the group



# *Stereotypes* Disabilities

- o **Sight:** Most people are affected by macular degeneration which means your eyesight gets a little less bright over time.
- o **Dexterity:** As people age, their fine motor movements get a little less precise.
- o **Cognitive:** They aren't all doddering and no one likes to be patronized – online or anywhere else.



# Our 2003 Research

- Tested a total of 35 older adults in San Francisco, Tampa, and Baltimore.
- Hands-on, facilitated usability tests
- Exploratory research methods designed to test a combination of issues/preferences
  - Overall graphic design
  - Navigation (content organization (IA) and word choice on labels)
  - Usability of buttons and forms
  - Interest in content areas



# Our 2003 Research

- With 36 more older adults in the same locations conducted group sessions in which participants:
  - Labeled descriptions of content
  - Sorted content into affinity groups
  - Discussed why their labeling and affinity groupings worked better than AARP's





We got some interesting results...



# Surprising Insights

1. Older adults are genuinely excited about the Web
2. Our attitudes about aging is very complex
3. Although older adults are online, they are largely self-taught and rely on family for support
4. There were patterns in the ways older adults deconstructed a home page
5. Older adults muddle over similar but different links
6. Older adults are savvy about searching



# Guidelines for communicating with older adults



# *Guidelines*

## Information Architecture

- Some specific findings
  - How users create mental models of the site
    - Use of the “back” button
    - Using rollover text to preview content in a navigational list



# *Guidelines*

## Information Architecture

- Do's and Don'ts
  - Use consistent labeling to help users maintain context within the site or within sections of the site.
  - Reflect their language
    - “charity” rather than “support”
    - “volunteering” rather than “community”
  - Avoid common Web or computer terms:
    - “browse,” “online community,” “message board,” URL, “emoticon.”



# *Guidelines*

## Content Development

- Some specific findings
  - They read everything on the page before moving on.
  - They were suspicious of our motives.
    - Beware of using redundancy
    - Beware of asking for any personal info
    - Disclose relationships



# *Guidelines*

## Content Development

- Do's and Don'ts
  - Be concise. Levity just means people take longer to deconstruct the information.
  - Avoid “marketese.”
  - Watch “technical” terminology like “login.”



# *Guidelines*

## Formatting and Visual Design

- Some specific findings
  - Good design equals web site credibility.
  - Tended to click on bullets and icons rather than underlined text.
  - Users looked for “anchor elements”, following a predictable path around a page.
  - Users made extensive use of the Tab key on forms.





# *Guidelines*

## Formatting and Visual Design

- Do's and don'ts
  - Use color, size, and position to show topics you want users to pay attention to.
  - Be consistent about how you present interaction elements so users can predict what's clickable and how it will behave.
  - Make sure that images and illustrations are purposeful.



# *Guidelines*

## Testing

- Specific findings
  - When users found something difficult, they assumed the problem was with them, not the site.
  - Users have lots of opinions and love to share them.
  - Users were pretty tired after 90 minutes of testing.
  - Older adults tried harder than other demographic groups to “please” the facilitator.



# *Guidelines*

## Testing

- Do's and don'ts
  - Watch your own misconceptions and stereotypes. Don't let that creep into your recruitment, facilitation or task design.
  - Politely nudge users to stay on task.
  - After the study is over, teach users something they didn't know about the browser, search engines or the Web.



# The Methodology

The importance of understanding  
users' tasks



# *Methodology*

## What to keep in mind...

- Motivation is paramount, so tasks must be realistic
  - Suspicion of interacting with unknown others in message boards
- There's a difference between web experience and expertise
  - 60 hours a week online, but all playing games



# Selling usability in your organization

- Educate, educate, educate. Set proper expectations.
- Be aware of what is already happening out there. Don't reinvent the wheel.
- Look at your different testing options
  - Traditional, facilitated hands-on approach
  - Online tools
  - Usability “lab in a box”



# Wrap Up

- Good Web design for older adults pretty much follows standards of good Web design for everyone.
- Good Web design for older adults does not need to be “boring”. It just must follow the basic tenets of design that you should remember from school:
  - Everything you place on the page must have a purpose for being there.
  - Anything that does not have a purpose should be removed.



# AARP articles about the studies

- “Older Users Help Us Study AARP.org”:  
<http://www.aarp.org/olderwiserwired/oww-features/Articles/a2004-03-03-usability-studies.html>
- “Designing Web Sites for Older Users: Comparing AARP's Studies to Earlier Findings”:  
<http://www.aarp.org/olderwiserwired/oww-features/Articles/a2004-03-03-comparison-studies.html>
- “Recruiting and Working With Older Participants”:  
<http://www.aarp.org/olderwiserwired/oww-features/Articles/a2004-03-03-recruiting-participants.html>
- Also see AARP’s [Older Wiser Wired](#) Web site for designers, usability and user experience professionals, and others interested in fighting the “tyranny of tiny type”.





*Thank you for your kind attention...*

Questions?

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