November 2012

Panel newsletter

Latest news…

Nudge or Compel?

Speaking at the launch of the International Longevity Centre (ILC) report 'Nudge or Compel? Can behavioural economics tackle the digital exclusion of older people?', Panel Chair Jo Connell stated that unless fundamental action is taken, the digital divide risks becoming a digital gulf as the distance increases between those who are online and those who remain firmly anchored in the offline world. Highlighting the Panel's significant work in this area, Jo said that while "solving the problem of digital capability isn't easy – it's a quest we cannot fail – and working collaboratively allows us to leverage a wealth of experience and innovation."

The ILC report, supported by the Nominet Trust, examines the main reasons why people in general, and older people more particularly, don't use the internet, and concentrates explicitly on the area of behavioural choice. Analysing data from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA), the report highlights a number of behavioural traits which accompany internet usage, particularly amongst older people. The report goes on to explore the potential of behavioural economics in tackling digital exclusion and examines whether behavioural economics might be used as an intervention to encourage use of the internet among older people. It makes a series of policy recommendations using "nudge" tactics to achieve greater digital inclusion for older people. You can find the ILC report at http://www.ilcuk.org.uk/images/uploads/publication-pdfs/Nudge_or_compel.pdf

Switch on to technology month

November was *Switch on to Technology* month and the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) has been providing information about useful products and how people can make the most out of them - as well as giving consumers the opportunity to try the latest products at free technology taster events.

Over 50 free technology sessions were held across the UK, in conjunction with Action for Blind People and local sight loss societies. There were up to four different workshops held in each location, covering mobile phones, the internet, computers and eBooks and downloadable audio books. The RNIB provides a range of beginners' guides to similar technology which are available online or by calling its Helpline on 0303 123 9999 as well as podcasts.

Mind the Digital Gap, a Strategy Paper on making IT Accessible

Panel Member Bob Twitchin writes that AbilityNet, the UK's leading charity on accessible IT, has been working to tackle social and digital exclusion by creating a world where accessible IT is available to improve the quality of life for those with disabilities and accessibility needs.

In September 2012 AbilityNet commissioned Kevin Carey, a leading contributor to thinking about digital accessibility, to produce a policy paper to review citizen/consumer access to digital information in the public domain. In November, in response to Kevin's paper, AbilityNet produced 'Mind the Digital Gap', a proposal for a new strategy to ensure digital inclusion, which was launched at the House of Commons. The policy paper provides a new perspective on how to create an environment whereby technology is accessible to the millions of disabled and elderly people to ensure that they can engage in the digital economy and not become digitally excluded. Kevin's report and AbilityNet's strategy are available for download from http://www.abilitynet.org.uk/mindthegap

Dconferences

Martyn Sibley, co-editor of Disability Horizons has launched an innovative and new venture - Dconferences. The first Dconference 'disability and the internet' brings together fourteen disabled people and organisations. The purpose is to share, learn and progress together through the conference. Speakers explain how the internet has helped them with their disability in a variety of ways: education, employment, care, relationships etc. All contributors have pre recorded their talks, so all you have to do is visit the Dconference website, register for free with your email and consume at your own pace. Transcripts are available on each audio entry for hearing impaired people.

Inclusive Design - Everybody Technology

Panel Member Bob Twitchin notes that Robin Christopherson - Head of Digital Inclusion for AbilityNet - states that, until recently, technology was designed for the 80% of people with working legs, arms, eyes and ears. The 20% with an impairment of some kind, dyslexia, or age-related condition that affects dexterity and the ability to learn or remember – had to rely on expensive specialist equipment designed especially for the 'old or disabled', often based upon outdated and less sophisticated technology. However, he argues, more inclusive technology is emerging, exemplified by Apple's mobile iDevices.

The concept of Inclusive Design is well recognised, and an important resource for designers is the Inclusive Design Toolkit, sponsored by BT, and developed by the University of Cambridge, Engineering Design Centre http://www.inclusivedesigntoolkit.com/

Robin uses the phrase "Everybody Technology" to sum up his ideas on Inclusive Design and argues that to be truly inclusive devices need to be:

- Mainstream devices at mainstream prices, aimed at the broad customer base; not primarily designed for the disability or elderly markets
- Providing the full range of functions expected of a mainstream device with a wide choice of input and output methods (to cater for a wide range of differing abilities) that afford access to all of those functions

Designers don't have to build a device that includes every last input/output method used by people with different disabilities – only to build in a few and make the rest work by providing the necessary 'hooks' (drivers and APIs). He states iDevices form the heart of many more complex solutions for users with severe and often multiple disabilities.

He challenges designers to make products more inclusive:

- Work with disabled users as 'extreme users'. Designing for them will result in products easy for mainstream users.
- Use the 'extreme user' treatment throughout the design process for simpler devices. A modern fridge may have a touchscreen but is it reasonable to build in drivers for a digital hearing aid? By considering everybody you'll consider all the possible input and output methods your customers use and can decide which are impossible to include.
- Semi-smart devices (such as microwaves, bathroom scales or blood-pressure monitors) could perhaps enable smartphones to be the voicebox of devices that would otherwise be mute, or the remote control of a device that would otherwise be too fiddly to use.
- If it's too costly to put speech or voice recognition on fridges, ATMs or TV set-top boxes, include 'hooks' to talk to devices (such as an iPhone) that already have those capabilities.

For more information visit http://www.rlsb.org.uk/theidea

Scotland's Digital Strategy

As reported in the October newsletter, one facet of the Scottish government's digital strategy is for Scotland to be world class by 2020. In October, the government committed itself to defining what this might mean by December of this year and Panel Member Mairi Macleod attended a brainstorming session this month looking at what it might mean in terms of infrastructure, but also from the point of view of the consumer. She argued that for Scotland to be world-class there would no longer be a digital divide, or digital exclusion, and government would have recognised that early, planned intervention will always be necessary to keep it that way. World class would mean that broadband is seen by all as an essential utility, everyone – individuals and businesses - will understand how being digitally connected can be a benefit and there will be near universal usage. People would be confident in using the internet for what they need it for and have access to good broadband speeds and a good mobile signal pretty much everywhere they go in the country, no matter which provider they use.

Equipment and websites would be designed from the start for accessibility and ease of use and there would be support readily available. In particular, in order for consumers to make the most of world-class infrastructure, the Scottish government urgently needs to invest in supporting the journey online for those who are not fully digitally connected, as argued by the Panel in its report 'Bridging The Gap'. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0040/00404183.pdf
http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/research/bridging-the-gap:-sustaining-online-engagement

Go ON UK

Panel Chair Jo Connell this month attended the launch of Go ON UK's range of new resources to help create the most digitally capable nation in the world. These include a map of the digital skills and attitudes of the entire UK population which emerged from a review of the published literature from the last eight years of internet users and non-users Go ON UK User Map

As recommended by the Panel in its report Bridging the Gap, there was also a recognition of the need for an agreed definition of digital capability and the skills needed to enjoy the full benefits of the internet. The identified three key skills areas are: to communicate, to find things and to share personal information, together with the ability to stay safe online have been used by Go ON UK to form the Basic Online Skills. Go ON UK Founder partners have also signed up to the Digital Skills Charter that states that everyone in the UK should have these Basic Online Skills. They are now incorporating these basic skills into their own training programmes. And Go ON UK have called on UK plc and the Government to do the same. The Booz report published at Go ON UK's launch also documents the enormous social and economic benefits that digital skills bring to individuals and organisations. There's an estimated 16 million people in the UK without these basic skills.

City developments

Panel member Chris Holland, who also attends meetings of the Advisory Committee for England on behalf of the Panel, reports that there is much interest in developments in cities - where superfast broadband and better connectivity can underpin thriving economic growth and a better on-line life for citizens.

Chris said "The Committee has recently had excellent presentations from representatives of Manchester and Bristol both of which have high ambitions for maximising the potential of world class connectivity. Manchester is aiming to have superfast broadband to all homes and businesses by 2015 along with wi-fi on public transport, and similarly Bristol is aiming for citywide superfast availability, along with wi-fi access across 80% of the city. The importance of engaging with businesses and consumers so that they can get the most out of these services has not been overlooked - showcasing the advantages of world class connectivity and encouraging usage are key part of the plans."

National Consumer Week 2012

National Consumer Week 2012 took place earlier this month and centred on the theme of Cold Calling - Don't Buy It. As part of the week, Citizens Advice launched a report 'The claims pests' exposing how claims management companies harass people in order to get a £2 billion cut of PPI compensation. Citizens Advice have said that claims management companies should be banned from cold calling as new figures show 9 in 10 people surveyed were pestered by calls, emails and spam texts from these firms within 12 months - with seventy two per cent about making a claim for PPI.

Citizens Advice is urging consumers to put the phone down on these cold callers and go straight to their bank to make a claim. Claims companies take around 25 per cent of a person's successful PPI claim in charges. Data from Citizens Advice Bureaux across the country found people were spending, on average, over £1,100 in fees for something they can do themselves for free.

MiCommunity

Age UK London's recent MiCommunity project has used intergenerational volunteering to build a stronger sense of community and connectedness between young volunteers and older people, through digital inclusion. The model is simple - schools work with local Age UKs and together they open up school IT facilities to older people in the community, and offer volunteering opportunities to their students (16-18). These young volunteers deliver one to one sessions to educate older people about computers and technology and in return improve their employability and personal development. The team have produced a 5 minute film about the project http://vimeo.com/42773892

The model also gives opportunities for employee volunteers to get involved in running short drop in sessions for older people. With tea and cake they become a 'techy tea party' helping older people 1:1 with light touch digital engagement ie how to send a text message or how to download images from a camera. If you'd like to know more about the model please get in contact with Natalie Turner, Head of Programmes, Age UK London on 0207 820 6774 or email nturner@ageuklondon.org.uk For further information and links to the full evaluation and step by step toolkit visit the Age UK London MiCommunity webpage http://www.ageuk.org.uk/london/our-services/micommunity-project/

Government Digital Strategy

The Government Digital Strategy launched this month sets out how government will redesign its digital services to make them so straightforward and convenient that all those who can use them prefer to do so. The strategy has been developed collaboratively across government, as part of the Civil Service Reform Plan and will be followed up with departmental digital strategies, to be published in December 2012.

The strategy describes how delivering services digitally will result in savings of £1.7 to £1.8 billion each year, and commits government to 14 key actions including "Raise awareness of digital services so that more people know about, and use, them"; "Take a cross-government approach to assisted digital, and help people who have rarely or never been online to access and use services" and "Use digital tools and techniques to engage with and consult the public".

Spam texts fines

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has served monetary penalties totalling £440,000 on two owners of a marketing company which sent out millions of unlawful spam texts over the past three years. This is the first time that the ICO has used its power to issue a monetary penalty for a serious breach of the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations (PECR) since these powers were approved in January 2012. The ICO is also currently considering issuing penalties to three other companies believed to be acting in breach of the regulations as the office continues its crackdown on the illegal marketing industry. http://www.ico.gov.uk/news/latest_news/2012/spam-texters-fined-nearly-half-a-million-pounds-28112012.aspx

The ICO has also set up a survey which people can use to send us the details of any unwanted marketing texts and calls. The information provided is being used to help identify those companies responsible.

Trust lacking in price comparison websites

A previous study by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) said that consumers could collectively save up to £240m a year by using price comparison websites effectively. In its latest report on price comparison websites, the OFT said these websites had brought a "major step forward" for consumers in getting better value for money. Yet it said that a review of 55 different sites had shown that many could improve on their privacy settings, their complaints process, the way results were displayed, and clear identification of who was operating the site.

General conditions resources

Ofcom has launched a new central location on its website to house guidance on the General Conditions, providing a reference point for consumer and industry stakeholders http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/telecoms/ga-scheme/general-conditions/general-conditions-guidelines/background/. The resource supplements that at http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/telecoms/ga-scheme/general-conditions/general-conditions-guidelines/ which contains an explanation of the purpose of the General Conditions, a short history of their creation, and some general guidance about whom the General Conditions apply to.

Future Directions in Rural Development

A new report from the Carnegie UK Trust 'Future Directions in Rural Development' draws out some of the key issues facing rural communities in the 21st Century including access to broadband, digital participation, the importance of local enterprise, community ownership and a more 'enabling state'. The conclusions of the review are that a supportive and responsive government is required at a UK, devolved and local level. Action on all of these levels is needed to: address regional level inequalities; build capacity in local communities; and mitigate against any unintended consequences of macro level policies at a local level.

Lack of demand for high speed broadband is biggest barrier to achieving EU digital objectives

Lucilla Sioli, head of DG CONNECT's Economic and Statistical Analysis unit, has called for the EU to place greater emphasis on promoting consumer demand, rather than attempts to stimulate the roll-out of high-speed networks. She presented figures which suggested that although 50% of European households now have access to 100Mbps connections, only 1.3% of Europeans have 100Mbps subscriptions. Ms Sioli also stated that the main reason for this trend was not price or

availability, but lack of skills, with the majority of Europeans not knowing what they would do with next generation broadband.

Age UK publish new policy position paper

Age UK has published a new policy paper noting that while, in general, older consumers are the same as consumers of any age and face similar problems, normal consumer problems are exacerbated by age discrimination and stereotyping, poor design and poor selling practices. Until these issues are addressed, businesses will miss out on the £109bn that older households spend each year. In addition rogue traders continue to target older people with scams. It also notes that the Government is making significant reforms to consumer protection systems and local government funding for trading standards work is expected to fall.

Age UK have developed a set of principles that take account of the issues faced by older people which we consider can be applied across all consumer markets. The six principles are: Access; Choice; Safety; Information; The right to be heard and Redress. You can read the paper at http://www.ageuk.org.uk/PageFiles/21016/ConsumerPolicyPositionPaper,%20October%202012.pdf

Which type of communicator are you?

Ofcom's Communication Market Report revealed that the UK is now texting more than talking. Further analysis of the research looks at the methods and frequency of communication, as well as people's attitudes towards it. The study classifies adults into one of five groups, divided by the ways they choose to communicate and how often: 'Always on' (22% of adults), 'Enlightened' (19% of adults), 'Middle-of-the-road' (22% of adults), 'Conventional' (21% of adults) and 'Detached' (16% of adults)
http://media.ofcom.org.uk/2012/11/13/which-type-of-communicator-are-you/

Half of internet users unsure if content is legal

One in six people online believed they downloaded or accessed content illegally over a three-month period this year according to the findings of the first wave of a large-scale Ofcom consumer study into the extent of online copyright infringement among internet users aged 12 and above. This ongoing research will identify trends over time, examining infringement of copyright on music, films, TV programmes, software, books and video games. According to the report, 47% of users cannot confidently identify whether the online content they download, stream or share is legal or not – highlighting the importance of increased efforts to educate and inform consumers. http://media.ofcom.org.uk/2012/11/20/half-of-internet-users-unsure-if-content-is-legal/

Boosting Consumers' Access to data

Consumers will be given new powers to request their personal customer data from business, helping them manage their money better and make better lifestyle choices as part of the 'midata' programme, under new measures announced by Consumer Affairs Minister Jo Swinson. Following a consultation this summer, the Government has announced that it will look to legislate if companies fail to comply with the voluntary release of consumers' electronic data. Under new plans, companies would have to release data they hold relating to a consumer's consumption or transactions in an electronic machine readable format, upon request.

The power to legislate would be focussed on three 'core' sectors initially: current accounts and credit cards, the mobile phone sector and energy - with an additional power to extend the legislation to other sectors if appropriate. http://www.bis.gov.uk/Consultations/midata-review-and-consultation?cat=closedwithresponse

Avoiding a capacity crunch

The scale of demand for data in the UK is illustrated by Ofcom's Infrastructure Report update which shows that 20 million Gigabytes of data is now being consumed in a month over the country's mobile networks. That's the equivalent of downloading 5 billion music tracks. Ofcom has also

noted that, by 2030, demand for mobile data could be 80 times higher than today. To help meet this demand and avert a possible 'capacity crunch', more mobile spectrum is needed over the long term, together with new technologies to make mobile broadband more efficient. Ofcom is preparing plans now to support the release of spectrum for future mobile services, possibly '5G', when the spectrum becomes available.

The plans aim to draw on the 700 MHz frequency band, which is currently used for digital terrestrial television, as part of future harmonised spectrum planning across Europe and the rest of the world. Releasing the new frequencies can be achieved without the need for another TV 'switchover'. Ofcom's plans also seek to ensure the long-term future of digital terrestrial TV (DTT), which performs an important role in providing low-cost, near-universal access to the public service TV channels. This can be achieved by ensuring alternative frequencies are available for DTT when the next generation of mobile broadband is introduced towards the end of the decade. For the vast majority of viewers, moving DTT to different frequencies will require a simple retune of existing TV equipment. However, a small minority of consumers may need to change their roof top aerials – likely not before 2018. Ofcom plans to work from an early stage with aerial installation groups and retailers to minimise any impact on viewers.
http://media.ofcom.org.uk/2012/11/16/ofcom-unveils-plans-to-avoid-mobile-capacity-crunch/

OFT Online shopping enquiry
The OFT has launched a call for information to explore the extent to which businesses are monitoring online shoppers and how they use such consumer information, including whether they change the prices they offer individual shoppers as a result. The OFT will consider business and technological developments in the online shopping market, consumers' understanding of how their information is used and whether they are being treated unfairly in law as a result of any firms using this practice.

The OFT will be gathering information over the next six months and would like to hear from interested parties including online retailers and software providers. It will publish its findings in Spring 2013. http://www.oft.gov.uk/news-and-updates/press/2012/104-12

November's Panel meeting
This month's Panel meeting included:
- an update on mobile coverage
- discussion of priorities for Ofcom's Annual Plan
- an update on DTT co-existence
- a presentation on economic geography

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