

ARE TELECOM GIANTS PAYING ATTENTION TO CALLING PATTERNS BETWEEN BOOMERS AND THEIR PARENTS?

IMPROVEMENT IN USER EXPERIENCE MAY HELP SENIORS VIDEOCHAT

JUNE, 2011

CURRENT “EASE OF USE” APPROACHES DO NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT LOPSIDED CALLING BEHAVIOR

A survey conducted by Tufts University students taking a Sales and Marketing in Entrepreneurship course may have uncovered a large discrepancy in how communication products are designed to operate, and how the over 65 population actually use them.

While the population of seniors over 65 can benefit from the larger fonts Microsoft provides in its Windows “[accessibility](#)” settings, from the bigger dial buttons found on Greatcall’s [Jitterbug](#) cell phones, from [Clearsounds](#) amplified phone devices, or from a slew of products listed in Laurie Orlov’s [Age In Place Technology Watch Market Overview](#) ¹ – it seems that no one has analyzed nor developed products that parallel the behavior of caller and person called.

A better understanding of how the over 65 population uses communication technology, and designing products and services that take this behavior into account, can have multimillion dollar implications for industries spanning the handset, display, phone and video communications, computer, social networking and software space, among others.

What stood out the most in the survey was the overwhelming direction of call initiation: **77 % of boomers said they were the ones to initiate the call to the older relative**, suggesting that most of the time the older relative is simply answering a call. Yet, the products and computer communication services available to seniors are full of buttons and screens that do not differentiate between caller and person called.

As for intergenerational videochats – which was the main objective of the survey - an easier senior-facing user interface and/or device may be what is needed to get the technophobic generations, their children and grandchildren conducting more remote visitations with one another.

By Serge Kogan
Founder
g2gConnect



YOUNGER GENERATIONS DESIRE MORE VISUAL CONTACT WITH SENIORS

Gen X,Y,Z (20-45 years old) and boomers (46-65 years old) were asked to describe how often they communicate with their elder relatives through in-person visits, telephone calls, email and videochat, and what they saw as issues in increasing the use of videochat. They were also asked who typically initiates the calls. The questionnaire, summary and responses are found in pages 3-5.

The respondents’ comments on adoption of technology by the over 65 population (see page 3) suggest that in order to be adopted, computer and communication devices and interfaces need to be made simpler.

Recent studies and surveys show that most of the 40+ million US seniors age 65+ live independently in their own homes ², and would like to remain in their own homes as long as possible.

Helping seniors stay in closer, visual contact, with their remote-living family and friends has been the subject of studies that suggest visual connectivity will become increasingly important as a way to reduce isolation, anxiety, depression and caregiver stress ³.

The survey shows that approximately 70% of Gen X,Y,Z’ers and Boomers desire to have more visual contact with elder relatives – yet less than 10% of respondents are currently using videochat programs such as Skype. This desire for greater long-distance connection and the technological challenge it implies presents opportunities for new communication solutions that recognize the difference in a caller’s and receiver’s interface.

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ABOUT THE SURVEY

This survey was carried out in late March and April, 2011, by a group of Tufts University students taking a course in Sales and Marketing in Entrepreneurship, under the guidance of g2gConnect's founder Serge Kogan. The intent of the survey was to better understand how Gen X,Y,Z'ers (20 -45 year olds), and Baby Boomers (46-65 year olds) communicate with their elder relatives. A short survey was sent to the students' friends, parents, and relatives, as well as to senior services professionals in the Boston area. 61 responses were obtained out of over 500 push emails sent.

The responses were aggregated by the age of the respondent: Gen X,Y,Z'ers (aged 20-45) describing how they communicate with parents, grandparents, and elder relatives, and Baby Boomers (aged 46-65) describing how they communicate with their parents and elder relatives. The survey's responses are shown in pages 3-5.

Thanks to the Tufts student interns for their interest and dedication to this project: Allison Wahl, Hanson Gong, Adam Arazi, Michael Oppong, and Arthur Wei.

Technology providers interested in better understanding how to accelerate sales of their products and services to the Baby Boomers and the senior population are encouraged to use this survey as a starting point, and conduct more in-depth analysis specific to their interests and needs.

REFERENCES

1. Laurie Orlov, Aging in Place Technology Watch, [Market Overview . May 31, 2011.](#)
2. Healthy@Home 2.0 – AARP Report by Linda H. Barrett Ph.D. April 2011. <http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/health/healthy-home-11.pdf>
3. Use of Videophones for Distant Caregiving: An Enriching Experience for Families and Residents in Long-Term Care Journal of Gerontological Nursing Vol. 34 No. 7 July 2008, by Demiris et al. <http://www.jognonline.com/view.asp?rID=29454>

SURVEY RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS

Gen X, Y, Z'ers engage with their elder relatives via phone calls, in-person visits, email and videochat. Boomers are trying videochat with their elder relatives, but run into difficulties.

Majority of Boomers call or visit their elder relatives weekly. Gen X,Y,Z'ers call or visit their elder relatives monthly or just a few times per year.

There is an overwhelming interest on the part of Gen X,Y,Z'ers and Boomers to see their elder relatives more frequently

Communication between the generations is usually initiated by the younger generation. This is more prevalent with Boomers, 77% of whom are the ones initiating contact with their elder relatives.

Email as a form of communication with elder relatives is more prevalent among Boomers than Gen X,Y,Z'ers

Sample respondents' comments on technology issues: videochat services are too complex, my elder relatives are not computer literate, my dad is not comfortable with technology.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Serge Kogan is pioneering the use of visual communications as a catalyst in bringing the aging, Boomer and younger populations closer to one another. Since 2010 he has engaged with over 500 seniors and dozens of senior living communities to better understand the technology adoption process for the over 65 demographic. Serge is an experienced market development executive with over 25 years experience in the electronics, telecommunications, semiconductors and financial services industries. He regularly participates in conferences and affinity groups looking to create new business opportunities in telehealth, aging-in-place and living independently markets. Serge held sales management, marketing and product development roles at iSuppli, Interleaf, Digital Equipment and Eastman Kodak. He graduated from Cornell University with Bachelor and Master degrees in Electrical Engineering, and received his MBA from the University of Rochester. In 2010 Serge founded g2gConnect, which he advises on a regular basis.

ABOUT G2GCONNECT

g2gConnect is pioneering investigation into understanding intergenerational communication behavior and ways to accelerate adoption and commercialization of solutions that help seniors and their families live richer lives. To support our work and participate in our experimentation, please contact us at info@g2gconnect.com or call us at 508.471.3710

SURVEY RESPONSES

General Findings

There were 61 respondents, 79% were from Gen X, Y, Z (ages 20-45), 21% were Boomers (ages 46-65). Of Gen X,Y, Z'ers elder relatives, 67% live independently, and 33% in assisted living or with some form of assistance. Of Boomers' elder relatives, 50% live independently and 50% in assisted living or with some form of assistance.

How do Boomers and Gen X,Y,Z'ers communicate with their elder relatives?

Both Gen X,Y,Z'ers and Boomers connect with their elder relatives through a combination of in-person visits and phone, even using Skype as an audio communication tool (presumably to save money in overseas calls). Furthermore 14% of Gen X,Y,Z'ers also used videochat as a way to engage with their elder relatives, while none of the boomers did.

Use of email

A small percent of both age groups use email in conjunction with other forms of visitation / communication. It is worth noting that a larger percentage of Boomers use email with their elder relatives (31%) than Gen X,Y,Z'ers do (15%). This might be due to the fact that the younger generations communicate less with email than through other forms of written communication – e.g. texting – which is not common with the over 65 generation.

Baby Boomers' Comments

“My Dad is not that comfortable with technology.”
 “Videochat / Skype is too complicated for my mom.”
 “My mother is 84 and never wanted to learn to use a computer.”
 “My mother is not computer savvy. Not interested in email.”
 “No computer available to relative with dementia.”

How frequently are Boomers and Gen X,Y,Z'ers talking to or visiting with their elder relatives?

The majority of Gen X,Y,Z'ers indicated they call or visit their elder relatives monthly or a few times per year; while over 50% of Boomers call or visit their elder relatives weekly. This might be indicative that the boomer generation needs to stay in closer contact with their parents and elder relatives 65+.

Who usually initiates the call – is it the younger person, or the elder relative?

Gen X,Y,Z'ers indicated that 52% of the time they initiate the call to the elder relative, while Boomers indicated that 77% of the time they initiate the call to the elder relative. This is important to note as it may signal a need for boomers to stay more connected with their aging relatives. It may be indicative that older citizens do not feel comfortable manipulating the increasingly smaller and more complex devices used for telecommunications.

How important is intergenerational visual contact?

Approximately 70% of respondents, regardless of their age, indicated they wished to have increased visual contact with their elder relatives.

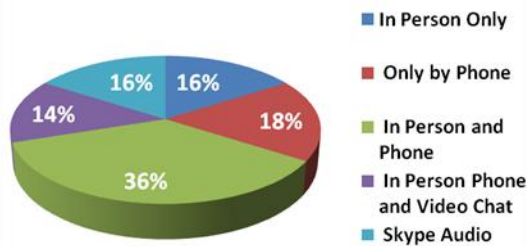
How predominant is the use of videochat technology in intergenerational communications?

38% of Gen X,Y,Z'ers indicated they engaged in videochats with their elder relatives, while 15% of the Boomers responded they have tried videochatting with their elder relatives. Most of the videochat experience has been using Skype. However, gauging from the respondents comments (see below), “engaging” in videochats may have not always been successful .

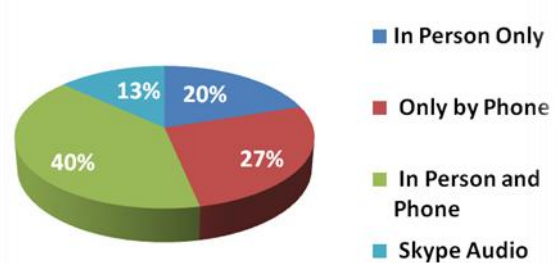
Gen X,Y,Z'ers Comments

“Skype is great. However, my grandmother does not really know how to use a computer besides using it to check her email.”
 “Videochat services are too complex for my elder relatives to use.”
 “I usually don't videochat with anyone. I find it a little awkward.”
 “Videochat only worked with my elder relatives when someone was there to assist them.”
 “My elder relatives are not computer literate.”
 “Many of my elder relatives do not own a computer, and language barriers make it difficult for them to learn that technology.”
 “It would not be possible to communicate through videochat because my grandmother would be confused with her Dementia.”
 “Technology + Old people = Problem.”
 “My elderly relatives don't use computers and don't know what Skype, iChat, etc. are.”
 “When trying to videochat, there are sometimes technical problems.”

**Respondents 20 - 45 Years of Age
How Does Respondent
Communicate with Elder Relative?**

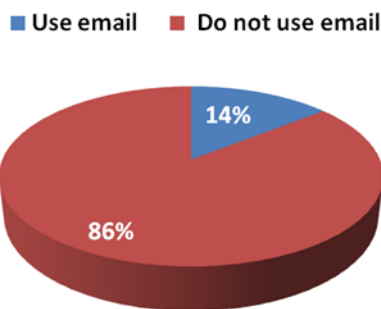


**Respondents 46 - 65 Years of Age
How Does Respondent
Communicate with Elder Relative?**

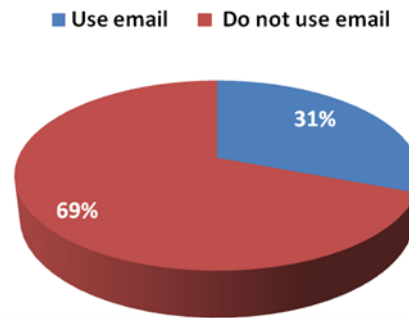


	In Person Only	Only by Phone	In Person & Phone	In Person, Phone & Videochat	Skype Audio
20-45	16%	18%	36%	14%	16%
46-65	20%	27%	40%	0%	13%

**Respondents 20 - 45 Years of Age
Use email with Elder Relative**

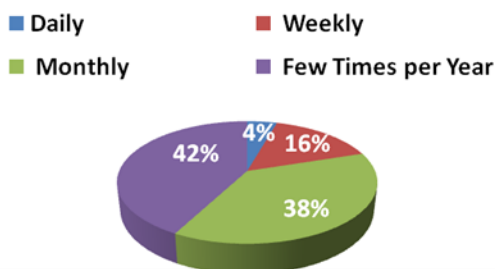


**Respondents 46 - 65 Years of Age
Use email with Elder Relative?**

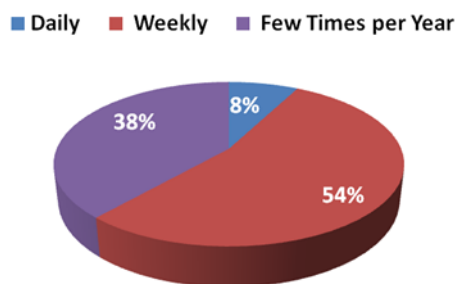


	Use email	Do not use email
20-45	14%	86%
46-65	31%	69%

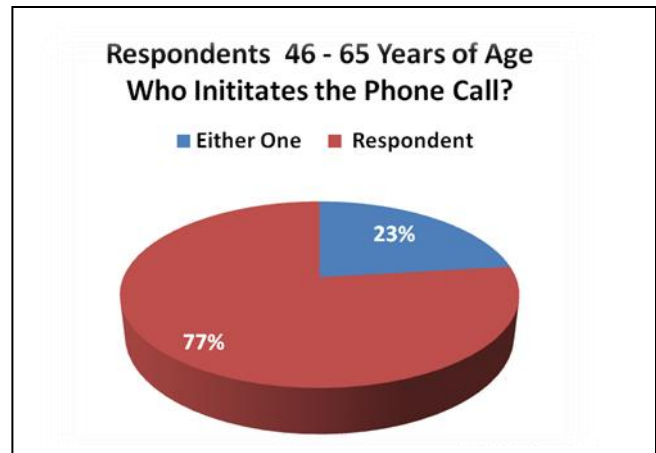
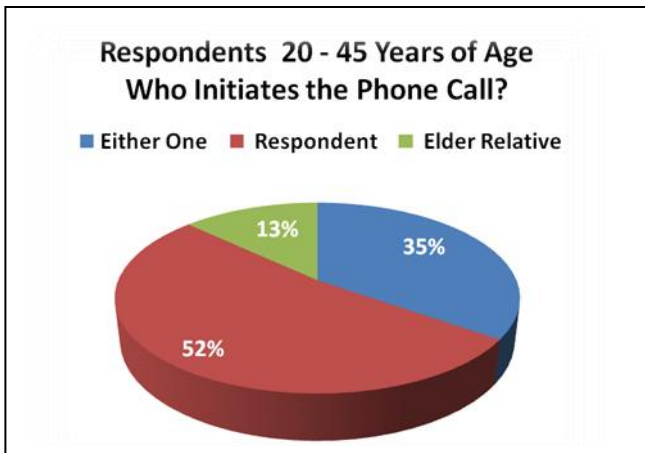
**Respondents 20 - 45 Years of Age
Frequency of Communication with
Elder Relative**



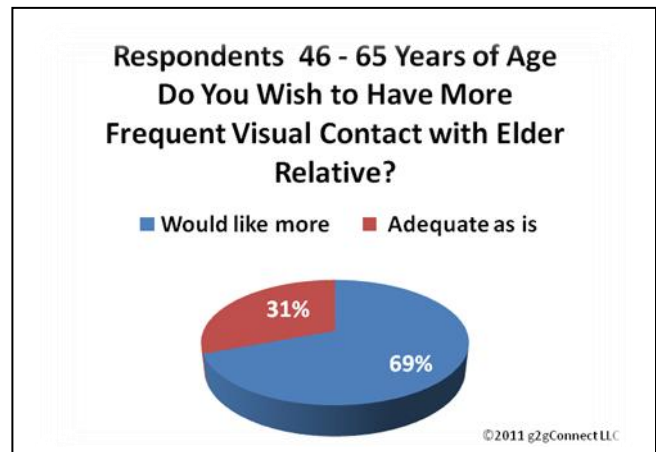
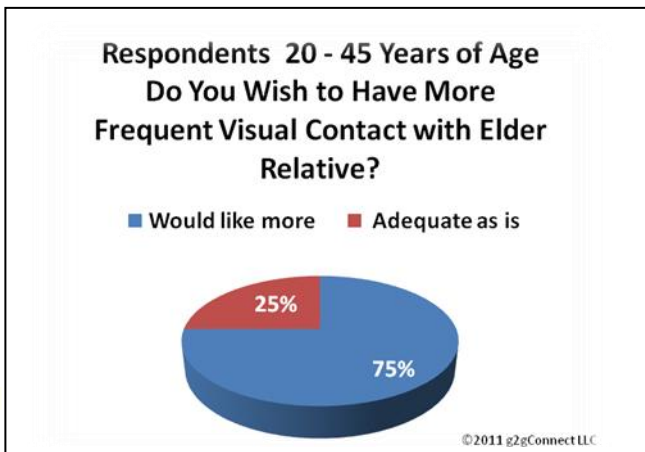
**Respondents 46 - 65 Years of Age
Frequency of Communication
with Elder Relative**



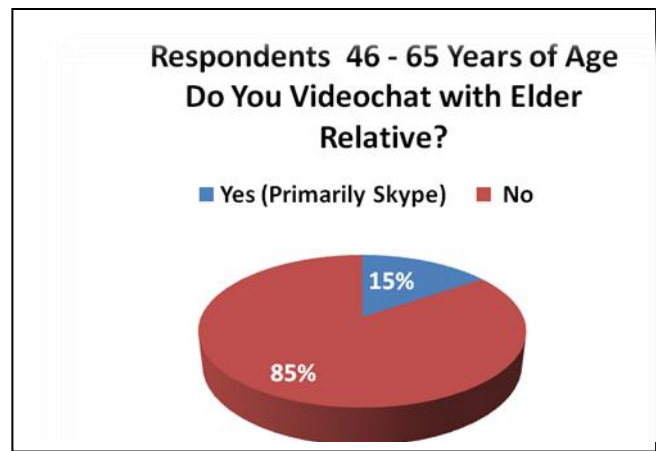
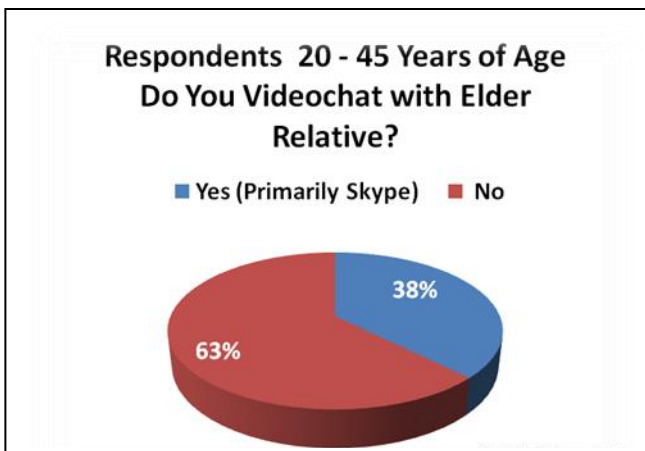
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Few Times per Year
20-45	4%	16%	38%	42%
46-65	8%	54%	0%	38%



	Either One	Respondent	Elder Relative
20-45	35%	52%	13%
46-65	23%	77%	0%



	Yes	Adequate as is
20-45	75%	25%
46-65	69%	31%



	Yes	No*
20-45	38%	63%
46-65	15%	85%

*** Note**
 In an earlier question some respondents indicated they don't videochat, while in this question they said they use Skype. This inconsistency might be explained by comments where the respondents indicate that they tried to videochat but have experienced difficulty doing so.