Even though I’m getting older...
...I want to be the hero of my life.

5 Wishes to Technology Creators
Five Wishes to Technology Creators is part of a thesis of the same name to be published in the Theseus database in December 2014.

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The KÄKÄTE joint project of the Union for Senior Services and the Central Union for the Welfare of the Aged was launched in January 2010. The main focus of the five-year project funded by RAY (Finland’s Slot Machine Association) is to improve the possibilities of living longer at home and to facilitate the assisting work by means of technology.
Even though I’m getting older…
...I want to be the hero of my life.

So, create me a technology that I can master.

*Five Wishes to Technology Creators* is based on the survey ‘My Wishes to Technology’ carried out under the KÄKÄTE Project in 2012–2013. Elderly citizens of Finland, their close ones and people involved in working with the elderly provided 330 freely written submissions discussing their preferences with respect to technologies for ageing. In the results, the wishes of women under the age of 80 and of people participating in events are emphasized.

The elderly people that provided feedback wish to cope with their everyday life on their own, and their close ones hope that the elderly are capable of using technology by themselves. Even though age affects physical capacity, people want to be competent and able users of the technology they have chosen. Trust in one’s own skills and confidence in mastering of information and communication technology foster the sense of inclusion and security. Elderly people want to live in their own way, understanding and controlling the technology that blends with their life.

*Five Wishes to Technology Creators* communicates the wishes most frequently expressed by the respondents in their own words, supplementing these with survey results related to the hopes and experience of the elderly.

The world’s greatest megatrend is ageing. The senior segment is on the rise. I have the honour to convey the message of the respondents to the technology creators. In order to win, take time to listen to the wishes of our elderly citizens – and exceed their expectations.

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Even though I’m getting older…
…I want to experience the joy of success.

Of course, most of all I would like to have easy and reliable equipment helping me to cope with everyday troubles on my own.

Simple is beautiful.

Clear and understandable information technology without tricks.

Easy to learn, support for coping.

TVs and radios could be simpler. For an old person, difficult things are hard to learn.

A device should work after plugging it in and switching on. If it is too difficult to use, I do not use it.
Coping with life and Heureka!

Most of the wishes concern the user-friendliness of technology. 37% of all wishes are associated with it. Time and again, the respondents describe the technology of their dreams using the words ‘easy-to-use’, ‘simple’ and ‘clear’. The word ‘easy’ alone was used in more than 70 submissions. People's wishes do not include the existing aspects of their everyday life; therefore, the respondents do not feel that they master the use of equipment perceived as technology.

Difficult-to-use technology causes dependence on others’ help. Above all, recurring daily life situations either strengthen or weaken the feeling of coping. Learning and mastering are made possible by technology characterised by inherent usability, with special emphasis on ease of use. We all need a daily dose of the joy of success.

Ease of use is a recurrent wish

Ease of use has been at the top of the wish list and the most important feature of technology in case of many surveys dealing with the wishes, opinions, and experiences of the elderly. They only want to acquire (and are capable of using) easy-to-use services. When VTT’s The Idea Movement of Aging Citizens gathered ideas for the development of cell phone applications and services, almost 4,300 ideas were submitted, and nearly one-fourth of these were related to usability, especially to ease of use. All of this considering that usability-driven ideas were not even requested.

For many older people, the most important wish to technology creators is an easy-to-use computer. Especially in case of information and communication technology, the elderly require user-friendliness, simplicity, and consideration of age-related specific needs. Of the elderly who already use a computer, about one-half consider the hardware and software too difficult to master. Uncertainty about own skills and equipment breakage frightens. Confidence in that assistance for use of technology is always available, and accessibility of maintenance are important for the elderly.
Design for me, and you will be designing for many. Accessible, functional home suits your needs at all stages of your life. None one of us is 180 cm tall at birth and only a few people live out their life in perfect health.

I would immediately use some magic spell to make the buttons larger. The finger must hit the button, without pressing two buttons at the same time. The buttons and controls must be visible and palpable. The sounds must be loud enough. Feedback sounds add confidence. A button may not be too difficult to press, since the force is fading.

The equipment should be tested by real users, such as housewives, instead of engineers. I always press something the wrong way, the device no longer works and I have to call my son to visit me.

Remember that some of us do not have relatives.

Especially as I’m getting older…

….my home is my castle.
The user is at the heart of everything

Would you like using technology that reminds you of the losses you have suffered? Over the years, your strength will wane and the functioning of the senses will change. More than 10% of the respondents wished for consideration of ageing-related changes in the body, above all, loss of vision, in design. The size of letters and buttons, clearness of user interfaces, and multi-channel approach were often mentioned in the submissions. 13% of the respondents wished for user-oriented, universally suitable or individually customisable technology.

Time, money, and effort can be saved by gathering information before commencing development. User experience has often been requested and recorded. For example, elderly people have repeatedly wished for large displays and large text size by default, as well as for clear, separated buttons that you can press even with a trembling or stiff finger. Consideration of ageing-related changes in design also facilitates the life of other user groups.

Daily need is the mother of invention. More than 15% of the respondents dream of improved physical accessibility of the home and the surroundings. Older people face and resolve practical problems every day, thereby developing their creative problem-solving skills. Of the new ideas expressed by respondents, 66% are related to accessibility of home environment. An intangible treasure awaits for pioneers of user-centred innovation.

The castle can be a prison

Elderly people's lives often revolve around their homes. In spite of the difficulties, the desire to cope at one's home is prevailing. They want to rule their castle, even if close ones are there to help. Only 8% of 85–89 year olds were assisted in use of technology – therefore, especially the eldest cannot rely on help of those around them. In such cases, the Technology Creator is the enabler and door opener. For example, information technology could offer hobby activities, information retrieval and communication opportunities for the elderly citizens with the weakest support networks and the greatest problems with moving around outside their home.
I wish for clear applications and consistent user interfaces. I wish the equipment would age more slowly. New things arrive faster than I am able to learn. Hit the brakes – I don’t want to fall off the wagon. Will there be something new and easy-to-use?

If information is only available over the Internet, it makes me furious. Not everyone has a computer at hand.

I need illustrative user instructions in Finnish. There should be pictures, and not a lot of text. Naturally, I want them printed on paper, in clearly visible text. Coping without the instructions would be the best.
Comprehensible information on a tray

Inability to access information discriminates and frustrates. 22% of the respondents wished for technology-related information or information society services to be within easy reach. In order to integrate technology seamlessly with daily life, the instructions for use and guidance must be available. Especially 65+ years old respondents repeatedly expressed the longing for use of unambiguous, clear, plain Finnish language – on the general level and in user instructions in particular. The vocabulary used must be comprehensible for all and not for professionals only. The respondents would also like to receive their information through other channels than the Internet and have printed instructions for use at hand.

15–20% of the 65+ years old respondents needed instructions in plain language, and even more would benefit from it. The need for plain language increases in the older age groups, due to by cerebrovascular disorders, memory disorders, a different mother tongue, and modest education, for example. Understandable technology is easier to approach, successful communication enhances the trust in own abilities. The elderly rated good instructions for use rather highly when replying to choice questions. The ‘clear expression and appearance’ principles should also be utilised in marketing and product presentation.

The Internet is not open for all

The respondents wished to enjoy the privileges of information society and declared that they need clear, slowly updated applications in Finnish, as well as illustrative user interfaces. Even elderly people who already had computer skills dreamed of easy-to-use computers and experienced difficulties in keeping up with the development.

As much as 300,000 75+ year old Finns do not use a computer, and 24,000 elderly citizens have no close ones. Managing one’s affairs online is not a daily routine for everyone. People who have learned to use online services in the past may not cope with this in older age. Alternative ways for offering information and services for different people will remain necessary in the future as well.
Especially as I’m getting older…
....human contact is a source of power.

Cell phones and such could be easier; everyone should be able to master them. I want to keep in touch and take care of my things by myself.

Simple means are the bridge to inclusion. Service TVs, video calls and ‘easy social media’ bring old and new friends to your home. Even the doctor and home care people can sometimes visit you this way.

The phone is a safety factor. Knowing that I can always contact people makes me feel safe. Cell phones and safety telephones may also remind me of things, monitor my condition and mobility, if I want so.

The sense of security is truly important.
The cell phone keeps social life up and running

At best, technology connects people and brings them closer. When asked about good technology for ageing, the information and communication technology was mentioned most often (24% of the submissions). This illustrates both the importance of information and communication technology and the problems experienced with its use. The respondents hope that technology facilitate keeping in touch and help getting things done without outside assistance. Elderly people dream of social life accelerated by new technology and hope for support in daily life from their network of friends²,⁴.

Reliable means of communication give courage

Without the sense of security, a home is not a home. One-fifth of the respondents hoped that technology would improve their security. One-half of the security-related responses specified a reliable means of communication for making human contact without fail and calling help in case of an emergency. The respondents also mentioned reminders and timers as security-enhancing factors.

The cell phone is a safety telephone of the modern times. Most elderly people keep a cell phone at home, at least in the desk drawer. However, the owner feels safer only if the cell phone is with him or her and using it poses no problem.⁶ A safety telephone for both indoor and outdoor use with a decent battery and positioning function is often desired by the elderly, especially those moving around alone³,⁹.

True stories for the security market

People tend to expect that only good things can happen. The respondents mentioned security technology-related equipment the least, which means that such equipment is not familiar to them. Elderly people rely on their good luck, since nothing bad has happened yet, and do not feel the need for security-enhancing technology¹,⁹. The existing users are pleased, while others are reluctant. The manufacturers and sellers of safety telephones should emphasize situations where such telephones have proven helpful and saved human lives.⁹
Even though I’m getting older…
….making the right choice is not getting easier.

It is difficult to choose something on your own; there are so many options. The information shared should be easy to understand. I wish for opportunities to try and practice. I sometimes need to be guided by the hand.

For me, technology is a tool, not an end in itself. Learning something new means stepping over a threshold – I will learn new things if I want to.

It must be attractive, fun and useful. It must be beautiful, without needless tricks and jargon. People of any age may be interested in use.
Force-fed sweets are hard to swallow

Without the possibility of choice, there is no freedom of choice. The respondents admit they do not have sufficient technology-related information or experience. The responses convey a lack of knowledge; sometimes people wish that something already existing were invented. Older people's ability to choose varies. Some eagerly look for information; others are at the sellers’ mercy. For the majority, choosing equipment and understanding of their features is difficult. However, technology does not take root in everyday life without own choice.

Ease of use-experiences pave the way

Besides information, lack of trial opportunities is an obstacle to acquisition – in such cases the wonderful new solutions are of no help in everyday life. The respondents wished for various possibilities for trying out and learning the technology without hurry. Practical experience introduces technology to the elderly and renders their attitudes more positive; rewarding learning experience and ease of use encourage shopping.

Benefits and troubles on scales

Benefits and troubles tend to balance each other out; in many cases, learning-related troubles are considered larger than the possible benefits. Owning technology has no intrinsic value. An elderly person can be expected to use technology if it meets his or her actual everyday needs and is directly beneficial. Striving towards comfort is the engine of choice that drives towards utilisation of technology and facilitating daily life. The willingness to learn is greater if the person has actually desired the device and personally acquired it.

Learning new technology requires constant training, updating and alertness, desire and ability. By the retirement age, the technical and financial support offered by the workplace runs out. Knowledge, skills and experience can be acquired only through new channels. Technology that seems easy, familiar and useful inspires to give it a try. Once using is mastered, elderly citizens become loyal customers.
Support to coping with life

Enabling the sense of coping
- Availability (60)*
- New ideas and tips (25)
- Activation (22)
- Coping with daily life and independent living (11)
- Ethics (5)
- Aesthetics (5)

Maintaining and improving the sense of security
- Usability (148)
- Design (93)
- Security (71)
- Accessibility (62)
- Sociability and inclusion (56)
- Guidance (39)
- Affordability (22)

*The figure in brackets indicates the number of wishes under the category.

Kuvio Concept uniting the ‘My Wishes to Technology’ materials, two main categories and parent categories.
References


