

A close-up, shallow depth-of-field photograph of a typewriter keyboard. The keys are dark and metallic, with some showing signs of wear. The background is a soft, out-of-focus bokeh of light-colored, circular shapes, likely the underside of the keys or the lighting. The overall tone is warm and nostalgic.

The Forgotten Digital Generation

Bite Sized Thought Piece

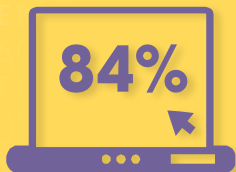
2013

News of the continuing prevalence of online generally comes as little surprise: 84% of all British adults now have access to the web, and more than half of us (52%) own a smartphone (Q2 Tech Tracker Data 2013). However, a small but significant group remains on the periphery of this zeitgeist; lacking the skills and confidence to perform all but the most basic tasks online. Their hesitation to join the digital age is borne partly out of limited capability, and partly out of trust and security concerns (which a lack of capability in turn often serves to reinforce). Still to assert their presence as citizens or consumers in

the digital space, this group represents considerable untapped potential. Understanding their needs and devising an online strategy that is both simple and seductive enough to engage them can provide an invaluable competitive edge in today's digital marketplace.

EXPERIENCES OF THE INTERNET: ACCESS AND CAPABILITY ONLINE

The prevailing typology when discussing the digitally disengaged is often that of an elderly person, for whom the advent of the



84%
of British
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52%
Almost half
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adults own a
smartphone

Source: Tech Tracker Q2 2013



internet is a relatively recent occurrence (the MediaCT Technology Tracker revealed that in the second quarter of 2013, 35% of adults over 65 had no internet access, and 8% had access which they did not use). However, while they form an important subset of the digitally isolated, the elderly are by no means its sole constituent. There are college leavers who only use Facebook; there are parents whose children set them up with an email address so they can communicate with family and friends abroad; and there are those who will only use the internet for search purposes, being reluctant to transact due to security fears.

While some in this group believe that the internet has had a negative effect on social skills, and try to conduct their lives with minimal online engagement, others appreciate its potential and would like to become more competent. Ultimately, most feel that they must try to keep up, to avoid being left behind.

'I felt very ashamed actually at one stage when I couldn't keep up. I felt a stigma of not being able to use a computer at all when I was at work and it did become a little bit of a joke, and that was quite unpleasant.' (Male, Age 56)

The primary defining characteristic of this digital demographic is the limited role that the internet plays in their lives. Capability impacts confidence, limiting the activities that they are willing to attempt online. Many have a fear of making mistakes, worrying that they will somehow 'break the internet'. Even those going online daily have browsing habits that are very narrow in scope: activities tend to be limited to a bare minimum of searching, browsing and email. The issue is generally not one of restricted access; these users often have access to several devices, which they often use to only a tiny fraction of their full potential.

'I suspect I'm a bit of a technophobe actually, I always think I'm going to break something or ruin something; I've never been particularly adept with anything technical.' (Male, 40)

TRUST AND SECURITY ISSUES

While not always a product of low digital literacy, concerns around security and trust online are particularly prevalent in this group. This serves to further limit activity online, particularly with respect to shopping and banking. Even those able to confidently search for information are often disinclined to make purchases online.



This may be a result of security concerns, or because they have had, or know of people who have had, negative experiences (such as buying holidays through companies which then closed down). The two most widespread concerns are identity theft and online fraud.

'I just don't trust [online banking]. People can hack into anything and I'm worried ... if somebody hacks in and takes my overdraft allowance what am I going to do to pay it?' (Female, 42)

Such concerns tend to be based on not only an individual's personal experience,

but also that of their friends, and 'scare stories' in the media. This is exemplified by the large difference between people who fear being hacked (64%, Tech Tracker Q2 2013) and people who have actually experienced it (6%, Tech Tracker Q2 2013).

CATERING FOR THE DIGITALLY DISENGAGED

Despite their reticent internet use, these individuals foresee that the internet will play an increasingly important role in the future, and that we will all be swept

Media 'scare' stories are exemplified by the large difference between people who fear being hacked and those who have actually experienced it:

Source: Tech Tracker Q2 2013



64%

PEOPLE WHO
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6%

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EXPERIENCED BEING HACKED



along; since opting out will involve ever-increasing effort, inconvenience, and ultimately disadvantage.

This recognition is critical: a fear of being left behind in the digital age means that this group is often receptive to any attempts to engage them. This is particularly pertinent for those of us in the media sphere. Fostering the capability

and confidence of this lower digital literacy group will not only be of personal benefit to them, but will also give any brand that does so a unique edge over its competitors. It will be those brands that display such sensitivity that will take this demographic with them as they develop and grow, sowing the seeds for a potentially loyal digital customer base in years to come.

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