

M. MARKOWSKI. *Teletalker: An online window to connect older adults*. *Gerontechnology* 2012; 11(2):299; doi:10.4017/gt.2012.11.02.428.00 **Purpose** The 'Teletalker' is a system with an intuitive interface to facilitate online social interaction for older people and persons of other ages. The objectives of the presentation are to gather feedback on the Teletalker concept, to share my early findings of the field research and to generate debate about designs reaching older adults with online connectivity. **Method** I applied research through design (RtD) as a method for the design phase<sup>1</sup>. RtD is aligned to Action Research used in humanities and social sciences. It involves the steps of iteratively planning, acting (i.e. producing a prototype, concept, scenarios), observing and reflecting whilst drawing on interdisciplinary knowledge<sup>2</sup>. The aim is to challenge current perceptions of the role and form of technology. The Teletalker concept originates from re-framing the design challenge after collecting design requirements based on user-centred design methods. Teletalker will be an installation of two monitors with a live video link connecting two places. The monitors (and speakers, cameras, and microphones) will be housed in an attractive shell where no unnecessary cabling is shown. Underneath the screens there will be a hand sensor, which activates the volume, so that one can hear the sound from the other place, speak into it and if interested have a conversation with another person in the other location. At the beginning of June 2012 field research with the Teletalker prototype will start. It will be placed for one week in the communal room of Age UK Barnet and in the atrium of Middlesex University in Hendon. Teletalker will make an (audio)-visual connection, like a window, between Age UK day-time visitors and Middlesex students and staff. The 'view' may generate friendly exchange between people at each end and between generations in both locations. Data about the use of Teletalker will be collected through observation and individual interviews with staff at the day centre, older participants, and people who have experienced Teletalker at the University location. Being visible in the University's atrium I expect Teletalker to generate debate between Middlesex researchers from various fields. Interview feedback will be distributed to the wider community to further debate designs to reach older adults with online connectivity. **Results & Discussion** Results of my literature review and design problem analysis showed that whilst face-to-face communication cannot be replaced by online communication there is some evidence that digital connectivity may bring more benefits than disadvantages to persons over 65. However, current popular Web 2.0 social interaction tools such as Facebook or Skype have not been designed with inclusivity in mind. In the UK half of the people between 65 and 75 years of age have been online (at least once), but only a quarter of people over 80 years<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, feedback I collected on people aged over 65 on online technologies that were specifically designed for older adults, was by and large not positive. In most cases they felt stigmatised by the design. Results of my literature review and interviews showed that older adults generally are willing to learn and adapt to new technologies, but training needs to be flexible and at their pace. Teletalker aims to be intuitive, evoke curiosity around technology in a playful manner and enable people of all ages without computer literacy to interact live online<sup>4</sup>. My research, however, aims to challenge the public discourse on the benefits of online connectivity for older people. Do users of Teletalker have the notion that they are online when using it? What advantages do older adults see in using Teletalker?

### References

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