

Why difficult?

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H. Bouma, Why difficult? Gerontechnology 2007; 6(1):1. Many products are difficult to use despite available remedial information. The 10th year of existence of the International Society for Gerontechnology (2007) is a suitable time to start creating products inclusive for the general target population inclusive of ageing people.

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Why is it that so many products are difficult to use while healing information has been available for a long time? The answer cannot be that the mismatch between design and real use has been deliberate. Perhaps the commercial pressure was so high that no proper attention could be paid to user requirements. Technical development may have been meeting unexpected delays with a fixed marketing date, leaving little time for the design process. Or, user requirements have not been made explicit in the product specification (spec), or the designer had no adequate working knowledge of user interfaces and methods. Finally, tools and methods for designing a proper interface may have been unavailable. If ageing people are among the target group, the situation is even more critical.

Proper education of researchers, marketing specialists, product managers, and designers seems the only practical answer. In many design schools, this has been practised for some time, with the Royal College of Arts (RCA, London) in the front rows^{1,2}. In addition, basic texts are available on methods and issues in designing products

for ageing people. They tell which perceptual, cognitive and motor functions remain constant and which functions show decline³. With ageing all variables show increased spread so that the average fallacy, that is, designing for the average is designing for nobody, has to be avoided. Learning requirements, technology generations⁴, and motivational issues have to be considered. Or, design for everybody above certain limits in vision, hearing, memory, and motor skills: universal or inclusive design⁵ also, misleadingly, called design for all.

Since fundamentals, design guidelines, methods, and exemplar applications are available, no defensible reason remains for the creation of difficult-to-use products. Specs should address the specific target group with its relevant information rather than the too-general consumer. At the start of 2007, the 10th year of existence of the International Society for Gerontechnology, I call on all professionals involved in creating products to make them inclusive for the general target population inclusive of ageing people.

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