

PEER

Dare to be wise!



***A one to ten for encouraging
participation of older people on
social platforms***

Guidelines for Operators of 50plus platforms and 3rd Age Universities



FOREWORD



Anne-Sophie Parent, Secretary General of AGE Platform Europe

AGE has been a stalwart supporter of the European project “PEER – Dare to be wise!” since its inception. This project seeks to make 50+ platforms more attractive for non-formal and informal learners and AGE welcomes these new guidelines for Web 2.0 tools to support people aged 50+ in using social networks for learning purposes.

The breadth of these guidelines relates to both technology and learning and they support the sharing of information and the transfer of knowledge and experience between individual users which make them particularly relevant and user-friendly for both trainers and older on-line users. They also take into account that people aged 50+ are a diverse group with different degrees of ease in using new technologies and online tools such as the ones developed through this project.

In particular, AGE welcomes that the key elements of learning in Web 2.0 *settings involve placing the learner at the centre of the learning process* and we see this as a welcome shift from traditional teaching to learning where the onus is put on the learner. Moreover, we stress the need for the application of a comprehensive “Design for all” concept as well as an inclusive approach to applying these tools which need to be equally accessible for people with disabilities. We also welcome the opportunities provided by these tools to facilitate dialogues, debate and discussion around topics of interest to users.

AGE is keen to promote the use of these Web 2.0 tools among our members and our wider contacts and to encourage them to provide regular feedback as we believe this will enable platform operators to upgrade the design of the platform in a way which reflects users’ needs and their actual experience of using it.

INTRODUCTION

Older people are increasingly enthusiastic about online learning. Web 2.0 tools, as interactive and collaborative of the internet, can empower them to gain and/or pass on knowledge to others, maintaining cognitive ability as well as developing interests in a range of subject areas. A key challenge for Operators is supporting platform members in their interest while gaining and sharing knowledge.

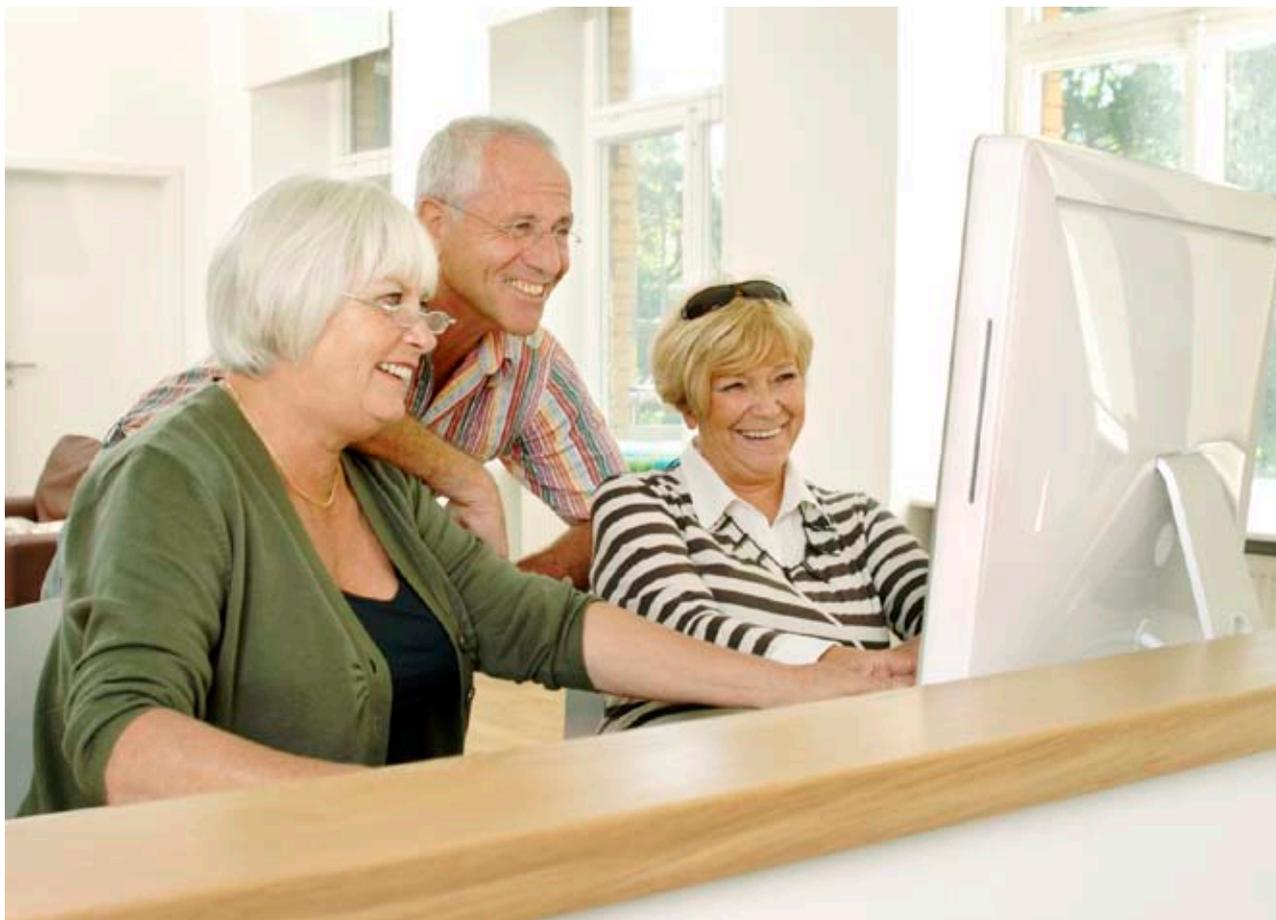
These guidelines aim to support moves towards the transition of your service by suggesting the use of Web 2.0 tools for learning purposes on online social networks by adults 50plus. They address operators of online platforms for adults 50plus as well 3rd age universities which offer online collaboration and other interested institutions.

The guidelines comprise, on one half (recommendations 1-5) recommendations related to technology, and on the other half (recommendations 6-10) suggestions related to learning. All in all they will give insight in to tools for fostering activities on the platform by supporting exchange and learning among older adults.

The guidelines are based on research activities, conducted within the European project “PEER – Dare to be wise!” (2011-2013). PEER’s purpose is to make 50plus platforms more attractive for non-formal and informal learning and in particular the virtual exchange among adults 50plus (“peer-to-peer learning”).

Follow PEER on its project website <http://www.peer-learning-50plus.eu>

RECOMMENDATION 1



Link: Selection of supportive Web 2.0 tools: http://www.peer-learning-50plus.eu/en/attach/WP3_D6.pdf

Support adults 50plus with Web 2.0 tools that cater for their needs

Your online platform can become an interactive learning environment with only small changes introduced by Web 2.0. They support the ability of individuals to express themselves, pass on experience and knowledge and be able to be dignified, valuable and recognised. Well-designed user-oriented Web 2.0 tools are supportive in providing a structured overview of information traffic. They make your participants connected to the world outside your secure system.

The following types of Web 2.0 tools are suggested to serve your members online peer learning:

- A secure file repository to store different file formats and media types.
- File sharing tools to upload and download shared content.
- Commenting tools for exchanging and discussing knowledge, experience and opinions.
- Audio and video conferencing tools to facilitate group learning.
- Planning tools for appointments and other events.
- Bookmarking tools to organize relevant information.
- Collaborative tools to work jointly on a particular topic.

Don't forget to explain the Web 2.0 tools' benefit to your members!

RECOMMENDATION 2



Understand what drives older users away from technology

Trust, security and reliability are crucial in motivating older learners to share information, particularly personal data. Although each Web 2.0 tool should be trustworthy it is vital for the adults 50plus to feel secure while using them. Providing adequate information on technology and content handling will increase the sense of security of your users.

Reliability of infrastructure

- Stable Web 2.0 tools with 24/7 access is a priority in maintaining motivational environment with learning purpose in mind.
- Clear statement of the main goal of the Web 2.0 tools should be provided in order to avoid misunderstandings.
- Instructional video clips, informative texts, updates on software changes and explanations for any new features as well as providing a help-desk can be helpful and contribute to better understanding and thus more extensive use of the tools.
- Avoiding legal or technical jargon will attribute to understanding and therefore increase the reliability.

Reliability of information

- Only reviewed links or information on the use of postings should be provided.
- Reassurance has to be given that personal data is secure towards third parties and that the option for anonymity exists should the members wish.
- Users should be aware they have the possibility of deleting the information they post and that they are in full control (and responsibility) of the information they produce and share on-line.

Where possible, avoid commercial articles and advertisements as they are generally perceived as undesirable by adult 50plus.

RECOMMENDATION 3



Links:

- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0: <http://www.w3.org/TR/2008/REC-WCAG20-20081211> (link checked in 01/2013)
- Understanding WCAG: <http://www.w3.org/TR/2012/NOTE-UNDERSTANDING-WCAG20-20120103> (link checked in 01/2013)
- Techniques for WCAG: <http://www.w3.org/TR/2012/NOTE-WCAG20-TECHS-20120103> (link checked in 01/2013)

Accessible and usable Web2.0 tools for adults 50plus

Although adults 50plus vary in their capabilities and needs, offering Web 2.0 tools that are easily understandable, customisable, adaptive and have an attractive design will highly increase the participation and motivate them to learn. Clear navigation and a well organised user interface are also important aspects of accessible Web 2.0 tools for your members. Take a “Design for all” concept as your principle.

The main usability criteria which Web2.0 tools should provide include:

- No registration for the Web 2.0 tool.
- Provision of simple instructions and guidelines on how to use the tools, preferably explained by video clips or pictures.
- Options to select received information and messages easily and related to personal interests; functionalities which keep track of the interaction structure.
- Forgiveness: the tools should be “forgiving”, meaning mistakes in using them must not lead to a blackout or drop-out of the tool.
- Fun in use.
- Overcome language barrier by allowing the users to express and read in his/her own language.

The main accessibility criteria which Web2.0 tools should provide include:

- Provision of a clear and logical structure.
- Avoidance of technical jargon in instructions.
- Avoidance of downloading options where possible, both for extra features and information.
- Clearly identifiable links.
- Designed in at least font 12-point type, with easy access to changing its size.
- High contrast of the text.
- All information should be available by first sight.

The higher the usability and accessibility of your tool, the more comfortable the users feel and the more enthusiastic they will be to use it!

RECOMMENDATION 4



Link:

PEER learning package: http://www.peer-learning-50plus.eu/results/peer_learning_package

Include available adapted tools on your platform

A core aim within the PEER project is the provision of a set of selected Web 2.0 tools which are adapted to the older learners' needs. They are offered free of charge and they cover several demands of adults 50plus.

On the PEER website adapted tools are offered as “PEER learning package” for download which can be integrated into existing platforms:

- **Sharedocs** is a free file hosting service that offers cloud storage, file synchronisation, and client software. Accessed via the World Wide Web, after registration on the platform this tool allows your members to store large volumes of data, for example photographs and videos, and share them with friends or colleagues. This tool is completely secure and only members of our platform can access documents and files.
- **Polly** is an online scheduling tool that allows the user to ‘poll’ a number of people to ascertain their availability for a meeting or an event. Users create a poll with a selection of dates and times for participants to choose from. Also voting regarding different options is possible.
- **Meet&Share** is a tool that enables users to access Audio/Video conferencing software and instantly set up a conference online. Users can use microphone and/or webcams, share documents on a Whiteboard as well as have the capacity to share their screen and record meetings.
- **Talkmaster** is a chat function that enables users to get in direct contact and communicate amongst each other. It can be used for exchange concerning learning contents, direct questions or other topics that need to be discussed in a direct way.

On the PEER website you will find instructions on how to install the tools on your platform!

RECOMMENDATION 5



Links:

Methods regarding how to involve adults 50plus in feedback loops can be found in:

- http://www.peer-learning-50plus.eu/en/attach/WP2_workshop_methodology.pdf
- http://www.peer-learning-50plus.eu/en/attach/PEER_D7_Assessment_Workshop_Methodology.pdf

Regarding quality assurance the PEER project offers an overview about instruments and as well guidelines:

- Web 2.0 tools and older people – an overview of quality assurance instruments:
http://www.peer-learning-50plus.eu/en/attach/D14_quality_instruments.pdf
- The quality assurance framework http://www.peer-learning-50plus.eu/en/attach/Peer_D15_final.pdf

Encourage feedback for further development of Web 2.0 tools

The involvement of your members in the further development of implemented Web 2.0 tools on your platform increases participation and the sense of belonging. Involving members is also an advantage for platform operators to be able to design the platform according to the users' needs.

Take users' attitudes and experiences into account and let them participate:

- Invite your members to give feedback on your current offering.
- Invite them to make proposals for the development of new content, structures, applications, design and support.
- Alternatively, provide online feedback tools, such as polls and personal communication forms regarding the service.

Involvement of the end-users was the central approach taken in the PEER Project. During participative workshops they proposed useful applications, shared their ideas and commented on the proposed solution with great enthusiasm and engagement.

Your users' input will be valuable!

RECOMMENDATION 6



Link:

PEER learning package: http://www.peer-learning-50plus.eu/results/peer_learning_package

Ensure a code of conduct exists

A key consideration, important among adults 50plus, is the way communication is given and received. Like in face-to-face contact, older adults often prefer a polite and well – mannered interaction. The same holds true for virtual contact. Therefore some ‘netiquette’ rules concerning polite language and respectful communication patterns are proposed.

Create a code of conduct and ensure compliance with it:

- Messages from the platform system should fit to this code. They should be polite and comprehensible and the content should be accurate and clear.
- A dedicated person should be nominated and made known to users, who may wish to get in touch should they experience any uncomfortable situations such as misunderstandings and interpersonal conflicts. Furthermore, this person should facilitate compliance with the code in case of inappropriate content and be responsible for monitoring the platform for abuse.
- The code could be supplemented by a ‘netiquette’ which could be created by members themselves on occasions of exchange and common learning.

Let your members feel confident in their exchange with each other to help them feel comfortable as members of the platform!

RECOMMENDATION 7



Let adults 50plus feel that your Web 2.0 tools are personalised

Adults 50plus are a heterogeneous group, more so than any other age group! They therefore prefer options to personalise the settings in the use of Web 2.0 tools.

Offer flexible Web 2.0 tools on your platform for example:

- to create other forms of personalized and self-directed learning.
- to meet like-minded people in learning and study groups.

Adults 50plus should feel that they have their data and files under full control:

- It is therefore recommended to offer a clear data management process which is explained step by step including information on how files can be saved, changed or deleted.
- It is also important to make transparent for the members, who will have access to the data.

Give the users the opportunity to personalise their learning process in order to create a self-directed and individual successful learning experience!

RECOMMENDATION 8



Reflect the motivational aspects in learning settings for adults 50plus

Adults 50plus' main motivation is to share experiences and information with others in such a way that they feel connected and noticed by the community and administrators.

Your members are not simply interested in questions and answers, but rather in dialogues, debate and discussion around their topics of interest. Therefore, it is important to respond to specific motivations which range from seeking information on the communities' website; looking for, and providing, advice, guidance and opinion; engaging in meaningful discussion; and forming new relationships with others.

In order to identify what motivates your members:

- Try to find out their interests, demands and expectations, for example by setting up polls, enquiries and scanning the discussion for ideas relevant to your service.
- Take into account your members' self-image, abilities, competences as well as skills and social relations.

Offer members real world related topics and subjects, and contact with other interested users who would like to discuss and debate!

RECOMMENDATION 9



Invite adults 50plus to challenging learning activities

If learning activities are related meaningfully to their everyday life, adults 50plus are more inclined to tackle new subjects or even to take risks and learn new things via Web 2.0 tools.

The key elements of learning in Web 2.0 settings involve placing the learner at the centre of the learning process which is a shift from traditional teaching to learning.

It may be helpful to know that adults 50plus:

- Value knowledge exchange in interactive group settings.
- Want to know who the other users are – this means they want to get insight into the profile of other platform members.
- Prefer to exchange knowledge with people who are active ‘exchangers’ and not only passive ‘consumers’ of others contributions.
- Prefer joint problem solving in a creative way, with guidance by a moderator or ‘champion’.

Therefore, propose the active and reciprocal exchange between the users by:

- Fostering the general interest in learning with Web 2.0.
- Designing learning activities that are engaging, diversified and attractive.
- Suggesting meaningful, relevant and challenging learning subjects, and offering various activities.
- Letting them shape and create the learning activities.
- Inviting them to common reading and exchange about books /literature.

Let users feel they are the most important part of your learning offer!

RECOMMENDATION 10



Offer support with a personal touch and foster peer to peer approaches

Both technical support as well as social support is pivotal to strengthening safety and trust and fostering community building.

It is important to provide direct **technical** support to the platform members, preferably through email exchanges with the platform helpline. Another option is the availability of a telephone advisor for much of the time; however, this can be costly in terms of staff time. Technical support should be provided within 24 hours. FAQs work out well too in many cases. Support in the shape of a 'buddy' can also increase older adults' confidence in using the tools, as well as the reliability of the platform.

However, support should not only be provided via the platform itself. Adults 50plus also appreciate technical support coming from the online community provided, for example, on the message board.

Related to **moderation** of knowledge exchange processes a peer-to-peer approach is recommendable:

- Therefore it is necessary to train older adults who want to contribute to the service of the platform both in a didactic and methodological as well as in a technical way to guarantee qualified learning support.
- Peer to peer trainers offer a form of volunteer service and need to be recognised and appreciated both from the side of the operator as well as from the other users. Find ways to guarantee a form of appreciation.
- It is also helpful to organise regular meetings and activities for inter-personal exchange of experience and knowledge amongst the members.
- Setting up a number of moderated groups to help people provide support to each other is highly recommended.

Overall, see your members not only as passive consumers but as active participants who are able to contribute to the success of your 50plus platform!

FURTHER INFORMATION

European landscape 50+ platforms

If you would like to look at other platforms to receive some inspiration please use the European Landscape of 50+ platforms which was developed within the PEER project. It shows all EU countries on a map, you can click on each state to get a list of 50plus platforms there.

Link: <http://www.peer-learning-50plus.eu/fiftyplusplatform/map>

Motivating older people to use 50plus platforms

These briefing notes are based on the report “*Motivating older people to use 50plus platforms for common learning.*”

Link: http://www.peer-learning-50plus.eu/en/attach/PEER_D3_Summary.pdf

Third Age Online Handbook

Within the project “*Third age online*” (TAO) a handbook was released on Wikiversity on how to involve older adults in community’s activities. Available in English.

Link: <http://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/TAO/Handbook>

Recommendations by W@ve 2.0

You may also want to read a) the guidelines “*Web 2.0 Best Practice for Senior Citizens*” developed in the W@ve 2.0 project. Also a survey about Web 2.0 needs for people over 55 years of age was carried out and summarized in b) a survey report. Moreover, c) guidelines for adult education projects were developed: a social computing roadmap for senior citizens. All three documents are available on the W@ve 2.0 website in English:

Link: <http://www.wave2project.eu/wave2project/index.jsp?idPagina=17>

eLiLL good practice criteria

One result of the project “*e-Learning in Later Life*” (eLiLL) was a good practice criteria guideline for education projects and activities for seniors with the use of ICT. Available in English and German.

Link: http://www.elill.net/pdf/kriterien_fuer_gute_Praktiken_EN_DE.pdf

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