



European SeniorWatch Observatory and Inventory -
*A market study about the specific IST needs of older and disabled people
to guide industry, RTD and policy*

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Tele-service for Seniors

Video telephony-based support for older people.

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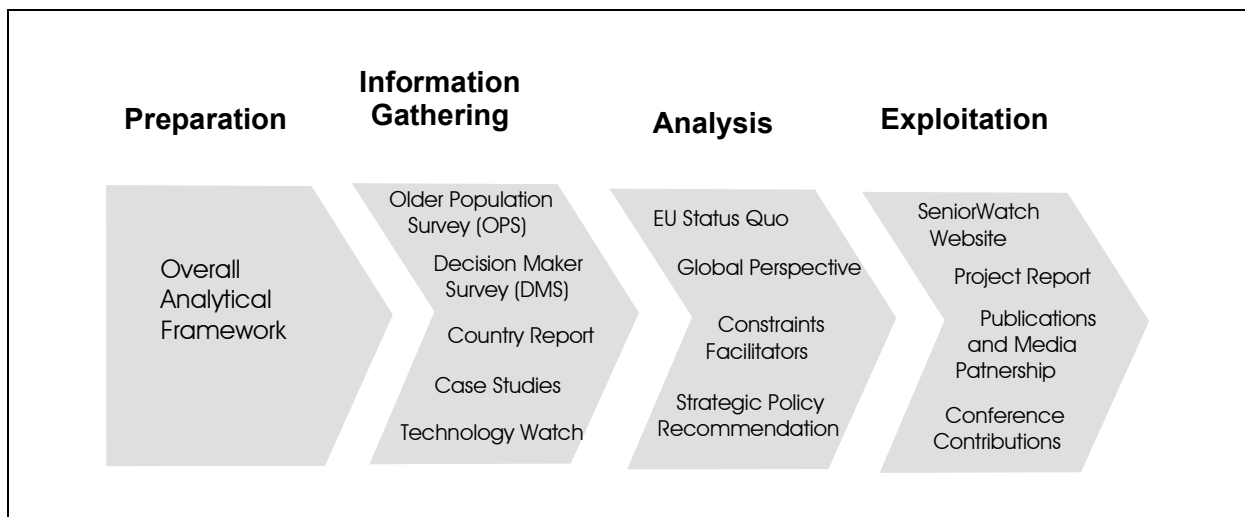
1 Introduction

The SeniorWatch project addresses the need to understand better and to monitor the market dynamics of Information Society Technologies (IST) applications and services targeted at older (and older disabled) citizens. Currently, there is insufficient empirical data about the needs of older citizens which could be met by IST-based applications and services, and a lack of awareness on the part of industry, users and politicians that hampers the rapid exploitation of new market opportunities arising from IST developments. In order to redress this state of affairs SeniorWatch will provide a European single source of empirical information on the market potential of IST-based products and services targeted at older people. The main objectives can be summarised as follows:

- to help and encourage European industry to address the market opportunities, and particularly challenge current competitive advantages of the US industries,
- to enable policy to really influence the current situation and to benchmark achievements between different European regions and countries and to make comparisons with competing world economies (Japan, US) most relevant to the field,
- to inform citizens about what is now possible with the support of IST and, thus, encourage them to demand IST products and services which meet their requirements.

As illustrated by Figure 1-1, these objectives require a comprehensive methodological approach to be applied. On the basis of an overall analytical framework, it integrates a set of complementary research methods such as European-wide surveys of older people and of decision makers in care services, best practice case studies, technology watch work shops and country reports. Synthesising the various types of empirical information gathered with help of these methods will finally enable the project to arrive at an holistic overview, to establish a technology and market observatory, and to derive policy recommendations to accelerate market development. Research results will be exploited by means of different measures.

Figure 1-1: The Project Phases of SeniorWatch



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As part of the project's overall methodological approach the SeniorWatch case studies aim at providing a useful source of information on how the IST-related needs of the target groups in question can adequately be served. They are also intended to help to understand - in a qualitative manner - more deeply specific aspects of the market situation related to IST

products and services relevant for older citizens. To allow a comparative analysis of real-life examples, a common approach for selecting and describing suitable cases was developed. The main selection criteria applied in this context include:

- suitability of the case to provide input to the overall understanding and analysis of the market for IST among older people;
- suitability of the case to serve as an example of a success story (or failure) that can guide and motivate others to take actions that will support the diffusion and take-up of IST by or for older people.

In the following the SeniorWatch case study no.21 is described.

2 Tele-Service for Seniors. Video telephony-based support for older people.

2.1 Description

TESS - Tele-Service for Seniors

The Evangesiches Johanniswerk was stimulated to develop the TESS-service through an increasingly perceived demand for supporting older people in their own home environment. Moreover, a strong need to overcome older people's isolation was perceived, particular in cases where they suffered from restricted mobility. This perception came along with a general development towards an increasingly competitive market environment in the care sector. So, the Evangelische Johanneswerk - as one of the main home care providers in the region - was very much interested in developing a strategy for strengthening customer loyalty among its client base while improving the quality of services offered. It was therefore decided to augment traditional services with remote support offerings.

It was planned to ultimately serve up to 100 clients via the TESS teleservice centre to be established. For the purposes of piloting the service, funds were raised from German Telekom which supported the project via its subsidiary DeTeBerkom. In a later phase, the service was entirely to be financed through client fees. It was planned to reach cost-recovery immediately after having passed the pilot stage. In technological regard, it was decided to start the service with ISDN-based of-the-shelf terminals, but then to develop a set-top-box solution in order to enable the clients to access the service through an ordinary TV set. Furthermore, an alarm device was planned to be included in the terminal platform ultimately to be used.

The TESS service centre was implemented in 1997. It was equipped with a special terminal to be used by the professional service staff. This terminal called "Media-Tel" was a prototype provided by German Telekom which enabled parallax-free eye-to-eye contacts with the clients. This feature was seen as a fundamental requirement. However, later in the project this terminal was replaced by a Polyspan conferencing system due to technical problems occurred with the prototype solution. Moreover, a data-base was developed in which information on the clients served as well as on relevant service components are stored. This data base can be used by the professional staff while communicating with a client. An additional document camera and a multi-point video conferencing unit (MCU) is also available at the service centre. The latter enables the service centre to host video conference with several clients at the same time.

In a first step, the client's flats were equipped with the T-View 100 Systems of the German Telekom. During the starting phase of the pilot project, the small screen size and limited video quality provided by the "T-View 100" seemed to be acceptable. It was, however, planned to substitute these picture-telephones as soon as new video-boxes, became available. The service centre was located at the newly established phone-based alarm service centre of the JOW. The marketing approach was to offer a service bundle including a 24-hour security service (traditional alarm service) together with a telephone-based service hot line and video telephony-based service offerings.

In the starting phase of the project the participants did not have to pay any fees for the video telephony-based service. Moreover, a special price was offered for the traditional telephone-based alarm-service. It was planned to raise a service fee for the video telephony-based components in a later project phase in order to test the client's willingness to pay for the new service. In the starting phase of the project, 25 clients accessed the service centre via the VT 100 terminals. During the life cycle of the pilot project the service concept as well as technology components used were continuously evaluated and improved. As already

mentioned, different kinds of service components were piloted such as provision of information and consultancy, home security, support regarding administrative issues and mediation of social services provided by other organisations. In addition to this, leisure time-offerings such as chat groups and games utilising the video-conferencing facilities were tested.

Policy context

The Evangelisches Johanneswerk as one of the main care service providers in the area of Bielefeld was forced to defend its market position within an increasingly competitive market environment. At the same time, German Telekom was exploring opportunities to expand its product/service range. In this situation, a pilot project was set up which allowed both parties to explore new solutions in an real world environment. The lack of specific expertise was compensated through co-operating with another technology provider (ELIAS) and with students from the field of care and social work.

Results

Today, the TESS service is being offered on a regular basis. It is seen by the service provider as an offering rather augmenting than replacing traditional services offered to older people. In contrary to the initial planning, the participants use the service much more for the purposes of every-day communication rather than for accessing pre-defined support features. Especially in the starting phase participants were not that much interested to receive social support. Rather, all kinds of informal communication features such as entertainment, chatting, group-discussions, etc. were most popular. This experience lead to a change in the service's focus at an early stage of the project. Today, informal communication is the main features being used, although more formal support features are still available.

Since more entertainment-related content is being offered within TESS, the service receives attention not only from older people living in their private flats. Also, persons living in stationary settings are more and more interested. Currently, three residential homes for older people use the TESS service. At each of this residential homes groups of app. 6 to 8 persons participate in moderated game sessions or chat groups once a week. Institutional carers seem to be unable to provide similar in-house-offerings to a sufficient extent due to financial restrictions i

In co-operation with a group of students a service programme is worked out for each fortnight. It is pre-announced to the clients with help of printed flyer. The flyer also contains an up-dated list of clients using a video phone. This is one activity amongst others aiming at stimulating contacts among the participants. For the same reason participants are invited to visit the service centre from time to time. Also, personal meetings are arranged in order to facilitate virtual contacts between the clients. Stimulating communication within the client's peer-group is seen as an important means of social intervention.

Service features offered in a one-to-one communication mode include ,e.g. , sessions with social workers. However, daily group-sessions are seen as the "highlight" of the service by most clients. Moderated discussion groups with up to eight participants are carried out nearly every day during the week. A wide range of topics is being discussed, e.g., actual policy themes. Sometimes external experts , e.g., a "flower doctor" or a pastor are invited to chair a particular session.

Most of the participants still use the T-View 100 picture phones today because TV-based video telephones are only available at a limited number. The latter are mainly used by groups of clients living in institutional facilities, as in this setting a larger screen is required. All participants pay a monthly fee depending on the service components they use.

2.2 Analysis

Impact

Against initial expectations, the ISDN-based T-View 100 picture phones were well accepted by the participants. The users had no problems to handle the system after having received appropriate advice. Not even the oldest client who is 90 years old has any problems in using this video telephone. Overall, the perceived benefits of the TESS service seem to compensate for any technical restrictions.

The development of the set-top-box has been completed in the meanwhile. However, the integration of an alarm feature into the system - as originally planned - was not achieved during the project's life cycle. The main obstacle was that liability of the system could not be guaranteed to a sufficient extent, and the service provider is not willing to take any risks in this regard.

In general, the relatively low video quality provided by the ISDN-based video phones used at the client's site was not critical with regard to user acceptance of the service. Rather, this issue was important with regard to the equipment used at the service centre. Here, technology-related limitations made service delivery difficult and straining for the staff. The availability of the multi-point video conferencing unit had a strong impact on the acceptance of the overall service as it enabled the service provider to offer group discussion which are highly appreciated by the clients. Overall, it can be stressed out that a more sophisticated technology at an affordable price could give the service a further push.

Already during the pilot phase, the high demand for interpersonal communication became obvious. Traditional service offerings tend to be insufficient in this regard, especially as regards home bound older people. Social service providers increasingly have to cope with financial restrictions, and informal communication as well entertainment offerings increasingly tend to fall victim to this situation. This is the context in which the success of the TESS service has to be seen.

A significant part of the costs of implementing the TESS service was financed by German Telekom. Nevertheless, running costs impose a significant burden on the service provider organisation. Offering the TESS service on a regular basis requires high level of enthusiasm and a strong willingness to innovate. The service has therefore been integrated into the telephone-based alarm service traditionally offered by Evangelisches Johanneswerk. This enables a more efficient utilization of personnel and resources.

Despite the fact that the TESS service is very appreciated by the users, it proves rather difficult to gain new clients. Due to the lack of experience with this kind of interactive service offerings, older people react rather defensive as they can hardly imagine what the TESS service really is about.

Also, the service content itself seems to be problematic as regards marketing. Only few people are prepared to admit that they have any unsatisfied communication needs. Therefore, this aspect has to be stressed with caution when potential clients are being approached. Moreover, older people are not used to "buy" informal communication in terms of a service and therefore have difficulties to imagine wherefore they are ultimately requested to spend their money. Some potential customers mentioned, that they were much more interested in subscribing to the TESS service if a larger number of people would use video telephony, i.e. when they were able to communicate with relatives or friends.

The service provider conducted several marketing activities to awaken a broader interest in the service. Despite the fact that the service attracted a lot of public attention and positive reactions, the current customer base could not be considerably expanded through these measures. Apart from advertising campaign, it seems to be important to offer potential clients the opportunity to try out the TESS service for a while. Moreover it was found out, that

relatives of older people are an interesting target-group for marketing measures as they seem to be important mediating party when it comes to offering services to older people.

Lessons to learn

While ISDN-based video telephones such as the T-View 100 video telephone provide a relatively low-priced solution for a social service provider, service centre technology - especially a video conferencing system - is still quite expensive. The technology utilised within the TESS service could only be afforded with third party funding, i.e. in the context of pilot project. Investing in expensive technology required to run a service centre such as in the case of TESS can be expected to overstrain most social service organisations in economic regard. Overall, it can be concluded that the TESS service undoubtedly contributes to a better quality of life of the client's served. However, it does not generate additional revenues for the service provider.

Perspectives

For nearly twelve years pilot projects have been carried out to explore the potentials video telephony may have for older people and their carers. Overall, results were positive and user acceptance was quite high. Nevertheless, a noteworthy market success of such services cannot be observed up to now. Ongoing technological progress may, however, increasingly facilitate availability of affordable systems. This situation together with a higher penetration of video telephony among the general population may turn out as a driver for video based tele services in the care sector. Setting service centres such as TESS could facilitate networked communication on a broader basis. A network of video service centres could support professional carers in better managing their individual cases and, thus, increase the economic viability of remote services such as TESS.

2.3 Acknowledgements and links

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WWW links

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