



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

**www.seniorwatch.de**

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## ***Ceerful net.***

*A World Wide Web service for seniors in Finland.*

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## Short Title

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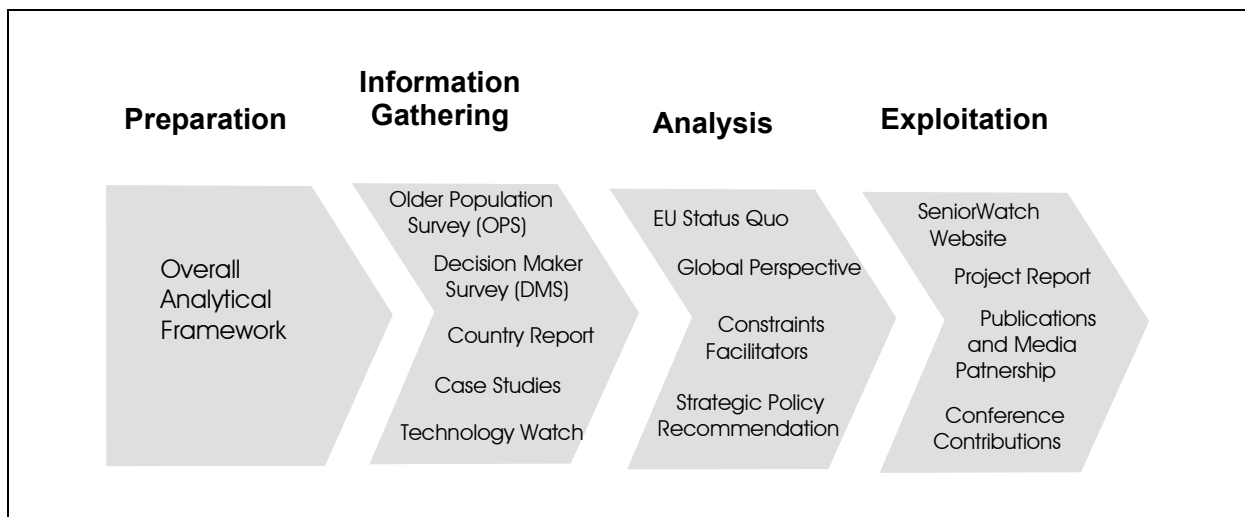
# 1 Introduction

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**



Source: © SeniorWatch, 2001

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.6 is described.

## 2 Cheerful Net. A World Wide Web service for seniors in Finland.



<http://www.ilonet.fi>

### 2.1 Description

Cheerful net (<http://www.ilonet.fi>) is a web service for seniors established in September 2000. The service is mainly maintained by Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres, which has produced the material. Co-operation has been done with a nation-wide Finnish media and broadcasting company called Alma-media, which has offered the technical facilities; Cheerful net has been running on their server. Anyhow, this co-operation is going to end in the near future. Alma media has decided to draw from the service and Cheerful net is searching for new partners.

The idea of Cheerful net is to function as a portal for seniors having only a little or not at all experience in using computers. There was a need for an entry channel like this for seniors and this kind of service has not existed in Finland before. The aim was to allure the seniors to use the Internet; to show them what they can profit from using the Internet. The content was supposed to consist of themes interested for seniors like education, hobbies and interests, travelling, health-related issues, health and care services with own web pages and further links. There are three main worlds in the web service: the world of learning, the world of travelling and the world of health. In the service the seniors have also the possibility to practice their IT-skills in a concrete way and in addition, there are case stories telling how other seniors have learnt and used IT.

The aim is to take the needs of seniors into consideration in producing the content as well as in the design of the web pages. The service should be practical and easy to use. This means the font has to be clear and big enough, the colours peaceful etc.

### Marketing and distribution

The service was established as a part of the Adult Education week –campaign and marketed through its channels. In the beginning a brochure called 'Computer for joy and help' and 'Cheerful net magazine' were produced to guide the seniors' way into Internet and arouse their interest. The brochure shows with very clear pictures and text how to use computer and Internet, and mentions Cheerful net as a starting point in web. The brochure and magazine have been distributed by education organisations, senior organisations and adult education

organisations and public libraries. They have been very successful; until now 60 000 copies on the brochure and 30 000 copies of the magazine have been distributed. The adult educational organisations have used Cheerful net as a starting point in their Internet courses for seniors.

### Target group

The target group is retired persons that are not working any more, but are still active in their lifestyle. Retired seniors very often have only a little or not at all experience with computers. They are in danger to be excluded from the information society, when more and more services are moved to Internet and are electronically available.

The problem is, that many seniors have no interest on Internet or computers, because they don't even know, what possibilities these could offer for them. So, the first task was to arouse the interest of the seniors. For this purpose the brochure was made.

### Context

The idea was born when planning the adult education week campaign in 2000. The theme of the campaign was IT skills needed in information society and the target group was non-employed persons – especially the retired. Sponsors and advertisers were searched for. In September the service was launched. Number of users: 8,000-10.000 per month.

In 2001, Alma media will draw back from the service. The service will be moved to the server of the Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres. New partners and funding are searched for.

Actors in this project are: The Finnish Association of Adult Centres, Communication agency, Alma media company, Adult education organisations, adult education and senior association.

### Results

In December 2000 Cheerful net had about 10 000 users per month, that was fairly satisfactory from the point of view of Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres. Anyhow, the Alma media was not satisfied with that. In their opinion there should be about 100 000 monthly service users to be commercially interesting for them. Until then they had no interest to participate in producing the content. In the spring 2001 the number of monthly users fell down to 8 000, because the content of the service was not maintained and updated any more.

## 2.2 Analysis

### Impact

There is clearly a need for this kind of service for persons not familiar with IT. There has been a good start for the service; reaching 10 000 monthly users in three months is a good achievement in a country with 5 million inhabitants. Anyhow, there is a danger, that the number of users will fall down, if the service is not constantly maintained. Finding adequate funding and resources are acute problems.

There has been positive feedback from the seniors. Especially the case stories telling, how other seniors have learned IT and use computers have been very successful. They embody the idea of peer-group support and education. The concept of the service is good, the structure is carefully planned – only the content has until now remained too thin. Marketing has been successful. Through educational organisations, libraries, adult educational associations and senior associations it has been possible to reach the potential users fairly well.

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The non-aligned association was very enthusiastic and optimistic in the beginning and it was not understood, how much work and financial resources developing this kind of service would require. It was supposed, that the service could finance itself with commercial money gained through advertisements, that was not a realistic idea. The interest of the commercial media company and the non-aligned association turned out to be very different from each other.

It is an important question, if the seniors want to have own (web)services or if they want to use services targeted to other groups as well. The question is, if the seniors want to distinguish themselves from other groups or prefer not.

A senior association has established an interactive chat group for seniors, but also here resources are missing to maintain this group.

### Lessons to learn

A good idea alone is not enough, there should also be sufficient economical resources. Developing a web service like this is an initiative for several years, that has to be co-ordinated. For the developing phase there should be funding available from public sources. Co-ordination cannot be based on voluntary work. It is not realistic to assume, that commercial actors will become financially involved in the development phase of the service. Later, when the service has been established, this could be possible. It is very important to make clear agreements on targets, work distribution and responsibilities among the partners. The problem with Cheerful net was, that the commercial and non-aligned partners had dissimilar and unrealistic expectations from each other's.

### Perspectives

There is an urgent need to find new partners and funding now, when Alma media is drawing back from the service. Negotiations will be carried on e.g. with a Finnish telecommunication company. Also a British web service for seniors, VAVO ([www.vavo.com](http://www.vavo.com)), might have an interest in penetrating into Finnish markets. They have launched their service also in Sweden. Possibilities for co-operation will be found out. Another alternative to be discussed, is to extend the target group of the service to non-employed persons generally, who has not much experience in IT. The Cheerful net would then develop to a more general learning and education portal. Anyhow, the basic elements of service could be remained and the seniors could profit from this kind of service as well.



## 2.3 Acknowledgements and links

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### Links

[www.vavo.com](http://www.vavo.com)

<http://www.ilonet.fi>