

The Columbus Dispatch

Products, services help seniors with know-how

By Sam Grobart *New York Times News Service* • Monday May 25, 2015 6:54 AM

Advancing age can rob people of their abilities, and products that help mitigate that are good things indeed. But what if the need for that kind of assistance is still decades away?

Today's baby boomers are just now crossing the retirement line, but that does not render them incapacitated. Far from it. It might, however, render them out of touch.

"What's developing is a digital divide," said Ken Dychtwald, the chief executive of Age Wave, a research and consulting organization that focuses on population aging.

"New technologies are largely oriented to people under the age of 50," Dychtwald said. "If you're older than that, you have to muster the courage to ask your family how things work."

Becoming familiar with some of these products will help ensure that technology, much like youth, is not wasted on the young.

Some easy picks:

- Want to stay active?

Buy a video-game console. Forget about first-person shooters and psychedelic mazes. Gaming systems such as Nintendo Wii, Microsoft Xbox 360 and Sony PlayStation 3 all have accessories that get gamers out of their chairs and moving on the floor, whether it is in a virtual dance competition, an exercise program or a sports simulator.

In addition to the benefits of moving around, recent studies have shown an improvement in balance among some older people who used the Wii and its fitness programs such as Wii Sports. The Xbox Kinect from Microsoft is the most-advanced gaming system available, with built-in cameras and motion sensors that can see a player's body and its position.

- Want to stay in touch?

Get a webcam. Although nothing replaces in-person visits, video conferencing gets pretty close. If your computer does not have a built-in webcam, get an external one.

In addition to the hardware, you will need an account with Skype, Gmail, iChat, AIM or another service. As long as loved ones have accounts on the same network, you can talk face to face for as long as you like.

- Want to stay informed?

Pick up a tablet or e-reader. The intuitive interface of a touch-screen tablet can suit anyone who dreads a traditional keyboard and mouse. Among the growing number of tablets, Apple's iPad remains the best choice.

If a tablet seems like a step too far, for either financial or technological reasons, consider an e-book reader. Amazon's Kindle is the leader here. Its "always on, never pay for it" wireless Internet connection means you can download books most anywhere within seconds.

You also can subscribe to Kindle versions of newspapers and magazines (and adjust type size as well).

- Want to be entertained?

Stream movies right to your television (via a high-speed Internet connection).

Movie-rental stores are losing appeal, and the costs of pay-per-view/on-demand cable programming can add up.

But \$60 will buy a Roku box, and that opens a world of inexpensive video programming.

When combined with a monthly \$8 subscription to Netflix, you get access to the company's library of thousands of movies and TV shows with a click of the remote.

Other subscription services, such as Amazon Instant Video and Hulu Plus, are also available.

These products and services are not radical departures from everyday life, but they can make measurable improvements.

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