

## Remarks by Mary Furlong

Every 7.7 seconds, one of America's 78 million Baby Boomers turns 50. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, there are nearly 70 million people 50 years of age and older in the U.S. today, and that number will grow to 115 million during the next 20 years.

At the same time that the largest, best educated, most vital group of people the world has ever seen is aging, Internet use is growing at geometric rates

A March, 1997 Nielsen/CommerceNet study reported the number of Internet users in North America had doubled to 50.6 million people over the last year. That growth spurt will continue. That number could more than double in the next 5 years. According to the research firm Jupiter Communications, by 2002, they project that almost 55 percent of the US population will be online.

The evidence is clear that the Web is becoming increasingly mainstream. During the week of June 8, 1998, The Internet Industry Standard noted that the words "internet" and "Web" appeared in 300 press release headlines.

Also, people are going online with greater frequency, and they are spending more and more time there with each visit. A Ziff-Davis/Roper Starch survey of web users reported that in the third quarter of 1997, 80% of users logged on weekly, and 25% log on daily.

Furthermore, at appropos to our discussion for today, the Net is not a domain only for the technologically sophisticated, nor is it exclusively for the young.

The stereotype of the Internet as an exclusive clubhouse for consumer-electronic experts and technophiles is being replaced by the image of the web as a digital living room. A comfortable place to connect, be entertained, find information and even shop.

Mature adults are not only the fastest growing portion of the population, but also the fastest growing demographic group buying computers and logging on to the Internet. 7.6 million people online are aged 50 and older, which is 15% of the Web population.

Contrary to the stereotypical portrayal of older adults as technophic, what we are seeing is that older adults approach using the Net with enthusiasm, and a desire to master the new technology. Once the older user gets on the Net, they are committed to it.

Right now, 50+ Internet users spend more time online per session compared to their younger counterparts:

Americans aged 55 and older who own computers log the most home computer usage, at 38 hours per month. Their computer time use is nearly 60 percent higher than the average of 24 hours per month. Forty-five-to-54-year-olds are second in time spent at the PC, at 34 hours, while 35-to-44-year-olds use their computers 28 hours per month. Young adults aged 18 to 24 log on for 23 hours monthly, and 12-to-17-year-olds trail far behind at 11 hours, 55 percent below average.

The 50+ user goes online to:

1. keep in touch with distant family and friends-96% use email.

2. To explore new areas-67% go online to "try something new".
3. Engage in commerce--they control \$1 million in spending each year; 42% purchase products online, 83% go online to collect product information.
4. Continue their careers-older baby boomers in technology-driven competitive professions are honing their skills on the latest software on their own time or searching job listings on the Internet.
5. Find information on health/longevity-74% go online for medical information.

Focusing in on the 78 million people turning 50 and entering their Third Age in the next 5 years, we are looking at the aging of people who have experienced more exposure to technology in their professional and home lives. The Internet will play a major role in their lives as they age. Households headed by people aged 55 and older will show the greatest growth potential in online use. Between now and 2002, households headed by 55-59 year olds will grow 170%; households headed by 60-64 year olds will grow 258%; households headed by those 65 and over will grow 280.

With so many people going online, with technology becoming more accessible (83% of libraries have online access), we need to explore how they spend their time and what benefits are to be derived from the growth of the Internet.

The Internet will serve as a key source of the following:

1. Companionship and connection--Community
2. Intellectual growth--Education
3. Commerce
4. Work and Career
5. Medical Advice

### **Closing Remarks by Mary Furlong**

As we've seen and heard today the aging of America and the drastic growth of the Internet are already having a great impact on the quality of life for older adults in this country and abroad. More than anything else, we've seen and will continue to see that the Internet empowers older individuals by breaking down barriers -- barriers to people, barriers to information, barriers to occupational opportunities and barriers to products and services.

Online communities, through chat rooms and forums, put people with common interests and concerns in touch with one another instantly regardless of geographic boundaries;

Expansive resources online make finding -important information on everything from health care to your public library easier than ever;

The ability to telecommute will expand the opportunities gainful employment by older adults knocking

down geographical barriers and opening opportunities for learning new skills; and

The increased ability to purchase goods and services through "e-commerce" will help to drive prices down and provide more choice to older consumers - something especially important to rural and isolated individuals.

The future looks bright. More and more older Americans embracing the Internet and making it an integral part of their daily lives. At the same time the technology is evolving at incredible speeds. In the next two to three years alone we can expect to see the number of cable modems in the home - high speed Internet connections that make possible applications like streaming audio and video - to grow from 200,000 to 10 million.

It's impossible to predict specifically how all our lives will be affected by the creation of all the new technologies surrounding the Internet but it is safe to say that as long as these older adults are considered and included in the process we will be moving toward the day when we can all say:

"Gone are the days where the aging process rewards the acquired wisdom of a life time with an inability to share and contribute in society."

It is a goal that I know each of us up here is committed to and one that all of us can make a reality.

Thank you very much.