

New Initiative Encourages the Elderly Citizens of Denmark to Get Online



With the support of Microsoft, Ældresagen has initiated a programme in Denmark designed to teach elderly people how to use computers and benefit from the Internet and e-mail.

Like many societies around the world, Denmark is experiencing a rise in the number of older citizens that make up its population. Over the next 10 years this phenomenon is expected to continue, as the country's middle-aged population reaches retirement age. This is not a bad thing in itself—after all, age often equates wisdom. But as technology becomes evermore ingrained in our day-to-day lives, older citizens can become overwhelmed by the barrage of e-tools at their disposal.

While many of us take things such as e-mail and the Internet for granted, the technology and language that constitute our technology-savvy world can be baffling. Familiar terms such as 'download,' 'install,' or even 'hardware' and 'software,' may have little meaning to a generation that did not spend its childhood staring at a computer screen. Even using a mouse is an alien concept.

But now, more than ever before, the value and importance of online communication and information accessibility is clear. An inability to use e-mail, for example, removes a quick and inexpensive means for grandparents to keep in touch with travelling grandchildren. Similarly, unfamiliarity with the Internet deprives older people of all manner of useful everyday functions. For example, ordering shopping online means that trip to the supermarket and the journey home—weighed down with heavy bags—can be avoided.

Reach Out to Grandchildren

It's a fact of life that, with age, we become less agile and less able to manage the physical tasks we once took for granted. The Internet is the ideal tool to circumvent these difficulties, making it a tragedy that so many older people remain ignorant of its use and value.

In Denmark, the task of caring for the older population is managed by the member-funded group, Ældresagen. Ældresagen provides care and support for the country's older residents. It has a membership of more than one million people. It has long realised the importance of ensuring old people do not lose sight of the benefits of technology, and part of its objective is to ensure these citizens have access to the Internet and knowledge of computers.

Microsoft is keen to support the ongoing drive to ensure as many people as possible are able to take advantage of the opportunities available through using the Internet, and computers in general. Consequently, Microsoft talked to Ældresagen to explore new opportunities and support its work in helping older citizens develop an understanding of new technologies.

Marianne Wier, Corporate Affairs Manager, Microsoft Denmark, says: "We saw huge potential to provide assistance and help to Ældresagen's supporters. We have been able to train them and provide them with

Fast Facts

Country: Denmark

Country Profile

The Kingdom of Denmark is located north of Germany (its only land neighbour), southwest of Sweden, and south of Norway. Denmark is a constitutional monarchy and is part of the European Union. Greenland and the Faroe Islands are crown territories of Denmark, each with political home rule.

Situation

Denmark's older citizens were in danger of losing touch with new technologies such as the Internet and e-mail. Without specialist training, elderly citizens were not embracing the technology and, as such, were unable to gain from its many benefits.

Solution

Ældresagen—a Danish organisation that aims to support and help the elderly—and Microsoft have created a programme that offers first-hand advice and support for elderly people who want to learn how to use new technologies. Microsoft offers software, and expert IT advice, helping Ældresagen provide the best possible tutorage for the country's elderly population.

Benefits

- The supporters of Ældresagen gain valuable insight into the workings of IT tools.
- Able to keep in touch with friends and family using e-mail.
- Supports plans for country-wide e-voting initiative.
- Can use the Internet to locate and order goods they would otherwise struggle to transport.
- Locate community groups that offer support for the elderly.

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Marianne Wier, Corporate Affairs Manager, Microsoft Denmark



the tools to ensure they can offer the best possible support to their members.

Direct Access to Expert Tuition

Microsoft has been on hand to provide Ældresagen workers with software and technical support, effectively ‘training the trainers’ to help older people familiarise themselves with their IT problems.

As a result of the partnership, Ældresagen now has direct access to Microsoft call centres and online support where it can get the very latest information on any product or technical query. Microsoft is also providing the group with software to ensure its hands-on knowledge and expertise is of the highest level. For example, it has donated 85 samples of Microsoft® Office Basic Edition 2003 and 85 samples of Microsoft Windows Operating System™.

With the support of Microsoft, Ældresagen has opened up a new world to hundreds of thousands of older citizens who are now able to enjoy the myriad benefits offered by the Internet. Whether it is keeping in touch with friends and family using e-mail, accessing news and information over the Internet, or locating nearby senior citizens groups, the older generation of Denmark is learning how to benefit from technology traditionally seen as a reserve of the young.

The move will also benefit new plans to introduce e-voting across the country. For many elderly citizens, travelling to polling stations can be difficult, and those who live in more remote areas can effectively be disenfranchised. With a better understanding of IT, these individuals will be able to actively participate and exercise their rights to vote from the comfort of their own home. This is not only important for

the citizens themselves, but for democracy as a whole.

Wier says: “In Denmark, we were conscious that it would be very easy for a two-tier society to emerge over a number years, with our older population effectively becoming second-class citizens as far as technology was concerned. We really didn’t want that situation to develop and now, with the help of Microsoft, we are confident that our older citizens will be just as savvy with computers, e-mail, and the Internet as the country’s young people.”