

# Image Collaging for *Parent's PC* *Let's get subconscious...*

## PURPOSE

A magazine publishing company is about to launch a new print and online magazine called *Parent's PC* to address the unique needs of seniors and older adults who are new to the world of computers. The target audience for this website and magazine is seniors and older adults, as well as their children, who aid in them in troubleshooting problems. Like most traditional magazines, advertising will supply *Parent's PC* its most important source of revenue, and defining the audience for the magazine will inform many decisions for how to market the magazine to advertisers, as well as to its target audience.

Our team interviewed two adult children who have supported at least one parent who is a computer novice. The participants created an image collage detailing how they would like the *Parent's PC* website to approach them as a potential user. We focused specifically on how the website should approach this particular audience. What follows is a record and analysis of the themes that appeared during the image collaging exercise and the insights they reveal.

## AS IT TURNS OUT, A LOT OF THIS IS ABOUT FEAR

Throughout the image collaging exercise, it was apparent that the main theme for both participants was fear. Fear manifested itself several different ways: first in anticipation of resistance, second in anxieties about the role of technology in a parent's life, and lastly in an abstract fear of issues brought up by a parent's helplessness.

### Fear of Resistance

Both participants consciously anticipated that they might encounter resistance from their parents, even if they had initially been asked for help by them. Language used by both participants revealed a coercive tone. One participant used the phrase "build technology into someone's life", the other described a need to "break down" a parent's "fears and trepidations".

*"...if your going to try and build technology into someone's life it has to have significance that's going to make it worth their time..." (Participant 1)*

*"Having worked with my mother through her technological issues, one of the things I recalled specifically, was all the work I had to go through to break down her fears and trepidations and the stereotypes that she had built up before she even touched a computer." (Participant 2)*

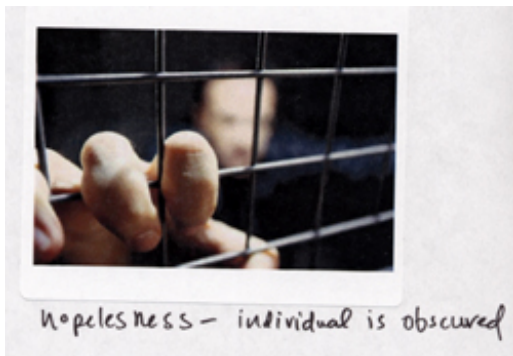
It seems that on some level, both participants see their parents as unwilling or uncooperative with the process of improving their computer knowledge.

## Fear of Dehumanization

Secondly, there was clear reference to a general fear of technology and its impersonal aspects. Both participants used a negative image that related to this issue, but did not relate it directly to their parent. They referred to these images in very non-specific terms:

*"This [image is] just so hopeless, I don't think you want to set up a situation that someone feels trapped behind bars, to this extent, that their face is completely obscured, its impersonal, its about being trapped, its not a healthy metaphor...this one's just too close to reality for some people, and its also so impersonal, you know, because the face is gone."*  
(Participant 1)

*"You're outlining a human being's face with these electronic glowing lines, and they're facing a wall of numbers...it's a dehumanizing image, and it's bad news."* (Participant 2)



Participant 1



Participant 2

*"[This image] Shows a human being coming into contact with something electric, and its also unknown...we have no idea what this person is coming into contact with...I mean there's an obvious reference to [the] da Vinci painting...man coming into contact with god, but I think on the whole it scares the hell out of people."* (Participant 2)



Participant 2

## Fears Around a Parent's Independence and A Child's Changing Role

Helping parents with technology was also innately fearful *for both participants*. In scrutinizing the language and tone of the interviews, it became clear that there was a great deal of anxiety around issues of role reversal implied simply by a child teaching a parent. The superficial role-reversal of helping with technology, brought to mind powerful anxieties around parents who are aging, and the inevitable, looming, sometimes hopeless or disparaging reversal of the parent-child relationship as parents age:

*"I think about trying to make an educational experience for an older adult, especially a family member, who maybe changed my diapers, who remembers the time I tried to set the kitchen on fire, and now I'm supposed to teach this person not only how to do something new, but how to do something that frightens them." (Participant 2)*

*"This one, its just so much about illness, and age, and death...even though there's someone helping, it's like hospice help...it's not rehabilitative health...even just the black and white of it, it's not a positive message...people are trying to learn new skills, it's like 'maybe I'm getting old but there's a lot left in me'...when you reference death and age like that it's like 'why bother learning it?', cause your going to only live a decade anyway...technology is scary enough." (Participant 1)*



Participant 1

Clearly, the challenges for Parent's PC's mission are made more difficult by an atmosphere of fearfulness which has both superficial and deep levels. Still, recognition and exploration of the nature of these challenges may yet yield benefits and opportunities.

## COPING WITH FEAR, THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

Both participants came up with productive strategies for coping with the difficult topics presented by the *Parent's PC* project. They focused on the role of humor, a strategy of emphasizing relationships, and utilizing education themes and nostalgia in *Parent's PC* content. Each of these points of focus also reveals latent concerns which the participants see a need to address.

### Humor

In both cases, the participants chose for their first image one they described as humorous as an explicit strategy to help their parent overcome *their* fear of technology.

*"It's a huge frustration [for] the people trying to learn...you want to acknowledge those feelings, but also make it kind of funny, so it's not like 'you're never going to learn how to do this.'" (Participant 1)*

*"The internet technology, computers...they can be really frivolous and fun and laid back...and i think a lot of people...either non-computer users or first time computer users have a really hard time grasping that...images that impact the potential of frivolity and fun [are] a great idea...the idea of taking something that you might recognize is slow and speeding it up is a funny idea." (Participant 2)*



Participant 1



Participant 2

Interestingly both participants discussed only the frustration of their parents, and the desire to use humor to deal with that frustration. There is probably even more significance to idea of frustration here, however. The participants may also be experiencing their own frustration when dealing with parents who perceive technology so differently from the way they do. For example, both images relate to an exaggerated view of the parent's predicament, to participant 1, the parent may seem frustratingly helpless and child-like, to participant 2, there may be a strong feeling that his parent should or could hurry up and learn.

## Relationships

Providing a motivation for persevering through the challenges related to computers was a theme that came up in many ways. Both participants felt that the web site needed to focus specifically on relationships, and ultimately could improve parent-child communications.

*“When you get it in your head that you can email someone who you can’t see regularly, that’s a lot more important than figuring out how to turn [the computer] on, you don’t get stuck in how hard it is to do something because there’s sort of an end goal of relating to people.” (Participant 1)*

*“If you’re going to try and build technology into someone’s life it has to have significance that’s going to make it worth their time...this is a way to possibly connect to people more...” (Participant 1)*



Participant 1



Participant 2

However, quizzically participant 2 when asked to explain this image choice ultimately went back to negative feelings about helplessness and anxiety. It was as if the image and idea of focusing on relationships was intended to reverse or minimize these issues.

*“Never has a person come to me in the workplace smiling and relaxed saying ‘hey there’s a problem with my computer.’” (Participant 2)*

The following images also fit into the relationship theme.

*“This one that I kept going back to, I liked it because it was one of the very few pictures that had any children in it. It’s playful, but it’s about people working together, so it’s about cooperation...this one person’s trying to hold up a canoe, it looks like, with a stick, so not everyone’s going to approach things from the same point, so having here be a way for multiple users to respond and have access, if the website is about multiple ages that everybody’s sort of working together regardless of, you know, who they are, there’s different places for them to do their job.” (Participant 1)*

*“I can tell my mother or my father like go to this website...and they see stereotypical gen-Xers wearing skateboards on their backpacks and walk-mans etc., they are going to feel alienated, but if they see photos of people like them having a good time with technology then I think that will*

*enhance a more relaxing experience...I chose [the happy old people image] because it showed photos of typically older people having fun.”  
(Participant 2)*



Participant 1



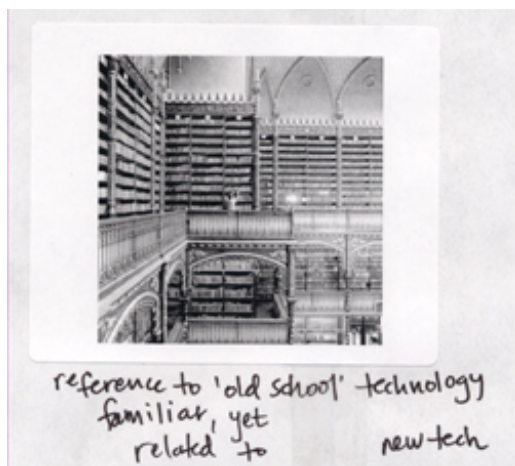
Participant 2

## Education

The theme of education and the need for a positive, helpful education experience was prominent in both interviews. Both participants felt that the educational experience needed to be positive and provided suggestions for how this could be done. An interesting detail is that the descriptions take an abstract tone, and are not related to how they themselves could make the experience more positive.

*“A lot of people are more comfortable with paper and books, and...a good thing to remember and think about is how to reference old technology and use that as a means to help people feel they’re still getting the same information just in a different way” (Participant 1)*

*“[I was hoping] that [such an] image would take them back to a time when they were in a position to take instructions” (Participant 2)*



Participant 1



Participant 2

Here the two participants, who are strikingly editorial in their advice, have made some great, actionable suggestions for strategies to gain the most positive reaction to the *Parent's PC* content: 1. Promote the use humor, 2. Focus on relationships and communication, and 3. Exploit imagery, metaphor, and nostalgia for educational experiences and traditions that are familiar to the audience.

However, they have also revealed a concern for *managing* the tone of the educational process. By emphasizing the need to keep the parent *comfortable*, and using the startling phrase “take them back to a time when they were in a position to take instructions” it is clear that behind the earnest desire to help is some difficulty with the challenges of learning for the parent and the perhaps an equally difficult predicament of mentoring or teaching *one's own* parent.

Here Participant 1 elaborates on the idea of using nostalgia:

*“I feel like nostalgia is a really big thing for my family and for seniors in general...remembering good times is what keeps you continuing to decorate the Christmas tree...if your going to try and build technology into someone's life it has to have significance that's going to make it worth their time...this is a way to possibly connect to people more...or plan a trip to visit your grandkids or connect with your college buddies.” (Participant 1)*

Nostalgia, defined as “a bittersweet longing for things, persons, or situations of the past” is a familiar feeling for many adult children tasked with assisting an aging parent. In fact, each of the themes in the *Coping with Fear* section, Humor, Relationships, and Education, convey both a strategy for addressing what is difficult for people around Parent's PC's content, as well as detailing the depth of the problems themselves, and perhaps revealing their ultimate, universal, and inevitable nature.

Beyond exploring the challenges for Parent's PC, this exercise has underscored the intensity of the parent/child relationship, and the powerful desire which parents and children must feel to make connections, through communication, community, and fun. It is our feeling that with the right approach, this near-universal relationship will richly reward a company that assists people in the fulfillment of these basic needs.