ChatGPT

Designing for Seniors: Understanding Older Adults' Preferences

Trustworthy Color Schemes for Older Users

Color plays a key role in conveying trust. **Blue** is commonly associated with trustworthiness and calm across all ages [1], and studies show that many older adults gravitate towards blue for its calming effect [2]. However, the aging eye has reduced sensitivity to certain colors – especially cooler tones. Vision tends to **yellow with age**, making it harder for seniors to distinguish blues and greens [3]. For this reason, older users often respond well to **warmer colors** like soft yellows, golds, or light reds, which appear more vivid and are easier for them to see [4]. The ideal color scheme to inspire trust in seniors should **balance a calming blue palette with high contrast and warmth**. For example, using a clear dark blue or navy for important elements (text or logos) on a white background can signal stability, while adding warm accent colors (like a gold highlight or gentle orange buttons) can improve visibility and friendliness [5]. It's best to **avoid extremely bright or neon colors** that feel flashy or chaotic, as older adults tend to prefer subdued, *sophisticated* color palettes that appear professional [4]. In short, a clean design with **conservative colors (blue, white, neutral tones) and warm accents** will feel both trustworthy and comfortable for a senior audience. This aligns with general trust cues (blue = trust) while accommodating seniors' visual needs by providing contrast and easily distinguishable colors [1] [3].

High Contrast and Readability

Yes – **high-contrast design is crucial for seniors.** As we age, contrast sensitivity diminishes, so older adults prefer interfaces with clear differentiation between text and background [6]. A **white or light background with dark text (preferably black)** is considered optimal for readability [6]. This strong contrast makes content easier to read and is recommended over low-contrast combinations (for example, gray text on a slightly lighter gray background would be very hard for them to see). In practice, this means using dark, large text on a light background for body copy and ensuring that interactive elements (like buttons or links) also have bold, contrasting colors. The use of color should also support contrast: for instance, avoid placing blue text on a green background or vice-versa, since seniors already struggle to distinguish blue-green hues [3]. Instead, pair colors that sharply stand apart (dark navy on white, or white text on a dark navy button). Additionally, **avoid very thin fonts or low-contrast graphics**, as these can disappear to aging eyes. Overall, a high-contrast design not only improves legibility but also signals a thoughtful, accessible experience for older users. In fact, guidelines for senior-friendly sites emphasize *strong contrast and brightness* as key to making elements stand out [7]. By sticking to simple color schemes with excellent contrast, you ensure that seniors can comfortably read and navigate the content without eye strain [6].

Navigation Simplicity: Dropdown Menus vs. Visible Menus

Older adults typically **struggle with complex, hidden navigation**. It's best to **avoid multi-level dropdown menus or any navigation that requires precision hovering or clicking** [8]. Seniors often have less

precise mouse control and can become frustrated by menus that disappear or change unexpectedly. They prefer navigation that is **immediately visible and flat**, meaning the main options are clearly listed and reachable with a single click [9]. For example, instead of a complicated drop-down with numerous sub-menu items, a senior-friendly site might display a short list of key pages or use large, obvious buttons for each section. If submenus are necessary, consider using a simple list of links on a section page rather than an on-hover dropdown. The overarching principle is to **keep navigation obvious and minimal**: present the important sections in plain view and use clear labels. Usability experts note that *dynamic drop-downs and overly deep menus* can confuse older users [8]. Therefore, opt for **static menu elements** (that don't require tricky mouse movements) and ensure each navigation choice is worded in a straightforward way. Providing a site map or breadcrumb trail can also help seniors feel oriented. By simplifying navigation in these ways, you make it much easier for older visitors to find what they need without cognitive overload or accidental clicks.

Scrolling vs. Clicking Through Pages

When it comes to consuming content, older adults are generally **more comfortable with segmented content and minimal scrolling**. Unlike younger users who often scroll quickly and scan, seniors tend to **scroll slowly and read almost every word on a page** [10]. This means they *will* scroll if content is long, but extensive scrolling can be physically and mentally tiring. It's wise to **limit the amount of scrolling required** – for instance, by breaking up a long article into clearly separated sections or pages [10]. Many design guidelines suggest using **"Next" and "Previous" buttons to paginate content** rather than infinite scrolling for older audiences [8]. Pagination gives seniors a sense of progress and control, and it prevents the feeling that they might be missing content far below the fold. It's also important to indicate when there is more to see (so they know to scroll at all); clear visual cues like a partial cut-off of the next section or a "Continue reading" button can help. In summary, **shorter pages or sectioned content** tend to work better for seniors: they reduce the need for long scroll sessions and help focus attention. If a page must be long, use plenty of headings, whitespace, and perhaps an in-page table of contents to break up the content [11]. Also, avoid horizontal scrolling entirely, as it is particularly difficult for this age group [12]. By structuring content into bite-sized pieces with the option to click through for more, you cater to older users' comfort and ensure they won't get lost or overwhelmed on a single endless page.

Importance of Contact Options: Phone Number vs. Contact Form

Figure: A survey chart showing that a majority of older adults (ages 45–75) prefer phone calls (around 64%) over digital channels like email or forms (about 35%) for customer service inquiries [13]. This highlights the importance of offering a clear phone contact option for seniors on a website.

When designing for seniors, it's **very important to display a phone number prominently** rather than relying on just a contact form. Older users tend to trust and prefer direct human contact. In fact, a recent study found that among consumers 45–75 years old, the majority overwhelmingly **favored phone support over digital methods** for getting help [13]. For a Medicare-related site or any service for seniors, having a **visible phone number on every page (for example, in the header or footer)** can greatly increase trust. It assures older visitors that they can easily call and speak to a real person if they have questions or issues – a comfort that a blank form or email address may not provide. By contrast, a site that only offers a web form might feel impersonal or even discouraging to an older person who isn't sure if their message will be seen. Additionally, from a credibility standpoint, **upfront disclosure of contact information** is a known trust factor for websites [14]. Users of all ages, and especially seniors, feel more confident in a site that openly

provides a phone number, physical address, or other direct contact details. Therefore, the best practice is to **include a phone number (and possibly an email) alongside a contact form**, giving users a choice. The phone number should be easy to find (often top-right corner or prominently on a "Contact Us" page) and click-to-call on mobile. This doesn't mean you shouldn't have a form – many will still use it – but **do not hide the phone number in favor of a form**. Providing both options caters to different comfort levels and shows that your organization is accessible. For seniors, seeing a phone number instantly signals "help is just a call away," which can dramatically improve their comfort and trust in using the website.

Clear Call-to-Action Wording: "Ask the Navigator" vs. "Get Medicare Help"

When choosing wording for buttons or links aimed at seniors, **clarity and familiarity of language are key**. In this case, a button labeled "**Get Medicare Help**" is likely far more effective and understandable to the target demographic than "**Ask the Navigator**." The term *"Navigator"* might be confusing jargon to an older adult – unless they are already explicitly aware of what a "Medicare Navigator" is (which many won't be). Seniors may not immediately associate *Navigator* with getting personal assistance; some might even think it has to do with web navigation or something nautical! In contrast, "Get Medicare Help" is **plain language** – it directly states what the action is, using terms that the user will recognize (Medicare and Help). Using everyday words and **avoiding technical or insider terms** is strongly advised for this age group [15]. Research on content for seniors emphasizes sticking to straightforward labels and **avoiding slang or unclear references** that could cause hesitation [15]. So, a phrase like "Ask the Navigator" introduces an extra layer of interpretation (the user might wonder "Who or what is the Navigator? Is that a person's title or a tool?") whereas "Get Medicare Help" immediately conveys "click here to receive assistance with Medicare." Additionally, seniors tend to **read things literally and carefully**; any ambiguity can reduce their confidence in clicking a button. Thus, for a call-to-action targeting older adults, **choose the most direct phrasing possible**. In this scenario, *"Get Medicare Help"* clearly wins out as the senior-friendly option. It tells the user exactly what they'll get, in words they're comfortable with – likely resulting in more clicks and a better user experience.

Device Usage: Desktops, Tablets, or Smartphones?

Seniors today use a **mix of devices**, so it's important to ensure your design works well on various screen sizes. Many older adults are familiar with **desktop or laptop computers**, as these were the primary devices for internet use for years. In fact, about 90% of people over 50 own a computer [16], so a lot of seniors will access websites via a PC with a large monitor. Desktop interfaces are often comfortable for them, thanks to bigger screens and the use of a mouse (which some find easier than touchscreens for precise actions). That said, **smartphone adoption among seniors has surged** in recent years – as of 2024, roughly 76% of adults aged 65+ own a smartphone [17]. Many use smartphones daily for communication (texts, emails) and basic internet browsing. However, some older users may still find small screens challenging for reading or typing, so while they do use phones, they might prefer performing complex tasks on a bigger device. **Tablet usage is also common**: about 40% of people over 50 have a tablet like an iPad [16]. Tablets can be popular with seniors because they offer a touch interface with a larger display, great for reading or video calls. In designing your site, assume that **older users could be on any of these devices**. This means using responsive design with larger touch targets and readable text on mobile, while also ensuring a robust desktop layout. It's noteworthy that even though smartphone ownership is high, not all seniors are fully comfortable navigating complex forms or downloads on phones – many might switch to their computer for

those tasks. **Bottom line:** seniors use desktops and laptops heavily (for convenience and habit), they are increasingly using smartphones (for on-the-go access and communication), and many enjoy tablets for leisure and browsing. Your design should cater to **all three** by being mobile-friendly but not mobile-only. Providing features like adjustable text size, simple layouts, and consistent experiences across devices will help serve the broad range of technology that older adults use to engage online [6] [16].

Font Choices and Readability for Seniors

Yes, **font choice matters a great deal for senior users.** Older adults often have some level of vision impairment or just less visual acuity, so the **legibility of the typeface** can make or break their experience. First and foremost, **font size** should be generous: a minimum of ~12pt (which is about 16px on web, depending on the font) is recommended, and larger is often better [18]. Small text is a common complaint among older users. Beyond size, the **font family** itself should be one that is **clean and easy to read**. This means **avoiding fancy or decorative fonts** that have a lot of flourishes or unusual shapes [18]. A classic, simple serif or sans-serif font works best. In fact, some sources suggest that fonts like **Times New Roman** (serif) or **Verdana** (sans-serif) are good choices for seniors, as they are highly legible and familiar [18]. Times New Roman has the virtue of being a classic print-style font many seniors have seen in books and documents, while Verdana was designed for screen readability with wide, clear letterforms. The key is that each character should be easily distinguishable: look out for fonts where, say, a capital "I" looks too much like a lowercase "l" or where letters are very tight together – those can cause confusion. **Contrast with background** is also part of typography (as mentioned earlier): ensure the font color stands out (e.g., dark text on white). Additionally, using mixed case (not ALL CAPS for long sentences) and sufficient line spacing will improve readability for older eyes [19] [6]. In summary, **choose a straightforward font and make it large**. Consistent use of a clear typeface across the site will help seniors read content without undue effort. If you stick to well-known, **uncomplicated fonts and proper sizing**, you'll significantly enhance the user experience for the senior demographic. Always remember: for this audience, *readability trumps stylistic flair*. Keep it simple, and you'll keep it accessible [18] [20].

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