

# COMPUTER SAYS NO



*A Management Summary*

Digital Inclusion issues are changing extremely quickly. In recent months awareness has been sharpened by the events of the Covid Pandemic. With its idea of Social Distancing, it has drawn attention to the usefulness of IT solutions such as video calls – which are useful for social and family and business purposes.

The technology is moving quickly, and so are our attitudes to it.

The Government is also focused on these issues and helping to improve and develop.

## **KEY POINTS FROM OUR REPORT**

- The importance of the Internet is now almost beyond doubt.
- Almost everyone (96% of households) is now able to obtain an internet connection if they want one – whether by Broadband or via their mobile device.
- People who don't have the ability to use the Internet for any reason are considered to be Digitally Excluded.
- There are many implications of an individual being Digitally Excluded: examples are:
  - Unable to apply for jobs
  - Unable to apply for benefits
  - Unable to seek Advice or other forms of help
  - Unable/difficult to obtain supermarket delivery service (to protect those who need Shielding and those who are clinically more vulnerable)
  - Unable to see family and friends
  - Unable to learn new skills
  - Lacking social contact
  - Limited news/uninformed
  - Lacking entertainment - many people now play games and watch television/movies online
  - Limited access to shopping and other services.

- The Government – as well as many other organisations – now prefers to do business online. The Government is now working hard to improve the availability of the Internet.
- But the few places in which the Internet is not available are Rural.
- Of those who have been offered Superfast Broadband, only about two thirds have taken up the offer. This is now the Key Issue for Digital Inclusion.
- There are seven predictors of non-adoption:
  - Income
  - Education
  - Social Housing
  - Disability
  - Age
  - Availability
  - Household Composition.
- Older people are less likely to take up the offer; people living alone are also less likely to take up the offer; people who are both older and living alone are the least likely to take up the offer – despite the advantages of video calls to contact friends and family.
- The main obstacle to adoption of the Internet is a sense that “it’s not for me” – in 60% of cases. This includes people who are put off by the fears of cybercrime.
- Cost of adoption is also a significant factor. People with low incomes are sometimes forced to choose between Broadband and food. 1 in 6 people struggle to afford their Broadband bills; and 2.3million people are behind on their Broadband bill. It is not very realistic to expect to use somebody else’s computer. Most people buy a ‘phone and a service. A typical entry-level phone will cost just over £25 a month so the total commitment is of £600 over 2 years – and this commitment is not always well understood by our clients. An alternative approach is to buy a computer and an internet service. A very basic laptop computer costs about £194; Broadband service costs at least £22/month for 24 months. So a total commitment of £718 over 2 years. And this excludes any need to print. There may also be initial setting up costs, depending on the choice of provider. Where a client is dependent upon income from Benefits, these may amount to as little as £58.90 a week - so an entry level ‘phone costs 10% of income. Where a client is dependent upon

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- Literacy is an important part of the skill set for using the Internet, but our clients' literacy levels are not good and the Average Reading Age is 9.
- We recognise progress in providing access to the Internet in rural areas.

### **WE RECOMMEND THAT**

- > ***We should raise awareness of the problems of Digital Inclusion among Public and Private Sector organisations and charities. This includes explaining that people in rural areas remain less likely to be Digitally Included. Less likely still to be Included if they are rural and older. And least likely to be Included if they are rural and older and living alone.***
- > ***Government funding for the Gigabit Programme should be restored.***
- > ***Government must continue to focus on the last "hard to reach" properties not yet offered a Broadband connection.***
- > ***We should all raise awareness that at least a quarter of people in the UK lack the literacy skills (and computer literacy, and funds) to effectively access the Internet.***
- > ***We should raise awareness of the fact that many people simply accept that they are rejecting its advantages and choose not to join the Information Age.***
- > ***We must not lose sight of the last few homes – probably all rural - that are unable to connect to the Internet. We must agitate until connection is available to everyone everywhere.***
- > ***Clearly, we must promote the benefits of Digital Inclusion to our clients, and hope that other organisations will follow.***