FACT SHEET 12-05

University of Nevada
Cooperative Extension

Internet 101 for Older Adults

Senior Wellness Series

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Internet 101

Have you “tweeted” lately? How about emailed your grandchildren, reserved a library book or paid your phone bill online? If so, you are not alone. According to AARP about 27.5 million older adults are using the Internet today. In fact seniors represent the fasting growing online community. They report using the Internet to stay in touch with family and friends. What began as an experiment in the 1960s, the Internet we use today creates excellent opportunities for older adults to conduct financial business, access personal or health records and for entertainment and educational purposes.

Consider these Internet use options:

- Keep in touch with family and friends by using email. Widely-used free email services include Gmail, Yahoo! and Hotmail. Many internet service providers offer home subscribers a free email account. Be sure and create a “junk” folder for spam.

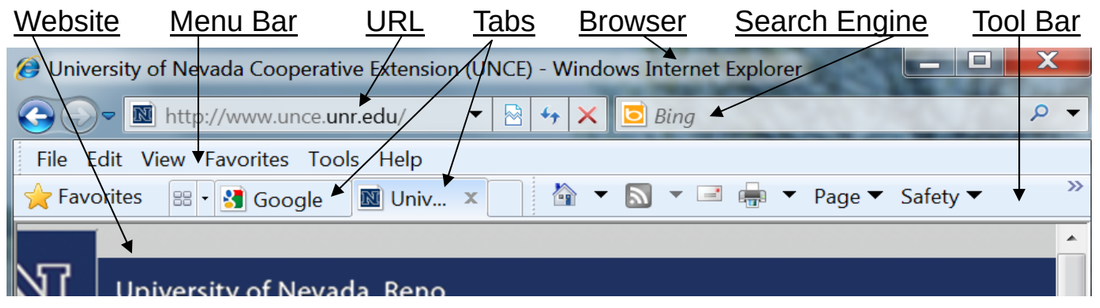
- Don’t stop at email, how about an online video chat? Skype is a popular website offering free video and voice calls over the Internet. Both people will need a web cam and the downloaded software to conduct a video call. Visit skype.com for a tutorial.

- Printing, storing and sharing digital photos is another way to stay connected. Photos can be shared either publicly or privately on sites like Flickr, SnapFish and Shutterfly. These sites allow you to create books, calendars and other photo gifts. Even drug stores offer online photo centers which make local pick-up easy.

- The sky’s the limit when it comes to online shopping! Look for free shipping offers and be sure to read return or refund policies.

- The Internet offers many educational opportunities such as learning about a new hobby, downloading books or music, researching genealogy or health topics, taking an online course or keeping up with world news and just simply “surfing the net.”

- Many older adults may also find they use the Internet for booking travel, reading their hometown newspaper, playing online games, paying bills and social networking.



Attack of the Zombie Army!

Right now your computer could be under attack, secretly invaded by hackers, spammers or infected by viruses. Your computer could be one of the thousands of other computers that send out spam emails by the millions as part of a robot network or zombie army. Once your computer has been attacked, hidden downloaded software can spy on your Internet surfing, steal your personal information, use your computer to send spam and even damage your files or disrupt your system. This all may happen without your knowledge so protect yourself and follow the tips below.

Be Safe and Secure Online

- **Protect your personal information.** Once thieves have your personal information they have instant access to your financial information. The Federal Trade Commission estimates as many as 9 million Americans are victims of identity theft each year. So be cautious to whom and why you provide your personal information and take time to read website privacy policies. If you do make it available, like when shopping online, check to make sure the site is secure by looking for a 🔒 "lock" icon on the browser's status bar or a website URL that begins with "http**s**:."

- **Know who you are dealing with.** "Phishers" send out spam email and pop-up messages pretending to be from legitimate businesses in an effort to get your personal information. For example, an email claiming to be from your bank asks you to click on a link and update your account for security purposes. This is a scam! Legitimate businesses don't ask for this information via email so don't take the bait just delete it.

- **Use anti-virus and anti-spyware software, as well as a firewall.** These protect your computer from unwanted hackers, spammers and viruses. Security protection software can be installed on your computer when you purchase it, downloaded for free from the Internet or available from software companies and retail stores. Always make sure you perform regular security scans and updates. Don't forget operating system and web browser updates too. If your computer gets hacked or infected, disconnect from the Internet, run an entire security scan and troubleshoot based on the results.

- **Protect your passwords.** Keep your passwords in a secure place and don't share them. Always create strong passwords that include capital letters, numbers or symbols and no personal information. The longer the password, the harder it is to crack.

- **Visit trusted websites**. You will be much safer online if you only go to well-known sites such as a company you know or sites your browser or security program indicates as trustworthy. Also, make sure you follow this same rule when downloading files from the Internet.

Resources

- If you are new to the Internet, ask your grandchildren for a "lesson," take computer classes offered by libraries and senior centers or read self-help books like *Using the Internet Safely for Seniors for Dummies* or *Internet for Seniors in Easy Steps*.

- For help with anti-virus software, computer or Internet issues, consider asking a knowledgeable friend, calling technical support for your product or seeking one-on-one assistance from a computer technician at a local, reputable business.

- More information about Internet safety, fraud or filing a complaint can be found at www.ftc.gov or by calling the Federal Trade Commission at 877-382-4357.

Social Networking Sites—Facebook

Social networking sites are a great way to connect with family, friends and perhaps even people from your past. Facebook is the most used worldwide service with 750 million active users a month. Once users have created a personal profile, they can add other users as friends, send messages, share photos, receive updates and even join special interest groups through a school or organization. With Facebook, or any other social networking site, protect your personal information because once information is online, it is out there forever! Here are some tips for using Facebook more safely:

- Under **Account** you should customize your **Privacy Preferences**. If your account isn't public, **Sharing on Facebook** settings should be set to **"Friends Only"** or **"Custom"** as these settings control who can see what you share. Also, under **Privacy Preferences** view settings under **Connecting on Facebook** so you can set what information people can see when they search for you on the site.

- Most of the browsing in Facebook is done without a secure connection to the website increasing your risk of being hacked. Under **Account** choose **Account Security** and check the box to **Enable** secure browsing whenever possible.

- **Facebook Applications** (Apps) are used to enhance your experience on the site. These apps can include anything from social games like Farmville, calendars to share events, to "sending gifts" to friends like hugs or Halloween treats! However, apps you or your Friends use have access to your personal information. Under **Privacy Settings** find **Apps and Websites,** click **Apps you use** and uncheck any you don't want. Also, under **Edit Settings** uncheck all the boxes that allow what information can be shared with apps your Friends add**.**

- If you want to cut down on "spam" posted on your wall go to **Customize Settings** and under **Privacy** uncheck the box **Enable** where it allows Friends to post on your wall. Friends can still comment on your status and photos but they cannot leave you a public message.