



Review of Silver Surfers' Day 2009 (SSD09)

July 8, 2009

Management Summary by Emma Solomon, MD, Digital Unite



At the risk of repeating myself for the eighth year in a row, Silver Surfers' Day (SSD) 2009 was the biggest, most creative yet. This year, we counted **1055 IT Taster Events for Older People** on or around Friday May 15th and reached **8 million people** through local and national on and offline media. This is tremendous, and due in no small measure to the excellent partnership working between Digital Unite and **UK online centres**, who clocked up over 500 of these Events. I am grateful – and extremely heartened – by what has been achieved by this co-working.

Stars come out for SSD09

This year, we took SSD to new people and places. We used **Twitter, YouTube** – and thanks to **Ofcom's** help, we were able to make a film of celebrity Silver Surfer endorsements from Joan Bakewell, Martyn Lewis, Angela Rippon and Patricia Routledge. We published these on our new YouTube channel, called **Silver Surfers TV**. We also ran a **Joke Roll** and had older learners and SSD supporters spreading smiles – and groans – online. We opened our website for

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interaction and SSD Event Holders and their visitors **blogged** their SSD experiences.

Thanks to the 'faithful'

We wouldn't have exceeded 1000 Events without the energy and enthusiasm of local and community organisations, faith groups, schools, colleges, housing providers, and local businesses, to name but a few. One sector - schools - grew dramatically and the term **Schools for Silver Surfers** was coined and we hope it will run and run.



This liaison, of young computer-enthusiasts with older would-be enthusiasts, has resulted in some touching images, many depicted in our co-operative **Flickr album**, which netted 150 or so free-use pictures including plenty that illustrate the beauty of these age-groups together. These groups and people make up our core 'SSD Faithful' and they grow in number and in levels of participation every year. The sheer diversity of participating organisations is inspiring and so rewarding for us to see. Thanks to all of them for running Events, and for their contributions public and private to making the Events better, the resources better, the support better by joining conversations and supplying feedback - and even gentle criticism. We welcome it all.

SSD - Power to inspire individuals

We have many examples in our full report of what I'd call 'creative, local interpretations of SSD'. Margaret's example is one that made a great impression on us. Her story illustrates very simply how a large amount of very public momentum and activity around an agenda can act as a catalyst for an **individual**, intimate piece of digital engagement work.

Margaret, aged 84, encouraged by her family, used the learning resources on the Silver Surfers' Day website's Learning Zone to encourage a near neighbour to give digital technology a go. The result was an educationally and socially enriching experience for both learner and self-styled mentor, and importantly, gave Margaret the confidence and appetite to explore **digital mentoring** further.

Not that she'd call it digital mentoring, but that's not the point: Silver Surfers' Day is a mechanism that can support all sorts of people and organisations - individuals as well as collectives - to interpret digital inclusion as it makes sense to them and those around them.

If we are, collectively, really to reduce digital disenfranchisement, it is this personalisation and contextualisation of both need and intervention that will ultimately bring the walls of exclusion crashing down.

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SSD – power to inspire communities

SSD is also proving a brilliant **launch pad** and **learning “glue”** for all sorts of other local initiatives around digital literacy, older people and wider community participation. For example, we heard how the **Salcey Cluster of Schools**, in Northamptonshire used SSD09 as part of their intergenerational work between older people and school children. “It is fantastic to see the students engaging with the older community in such a positive way, hopefully this will inspire them to work towards one of Northamptonshire Voluntary Youth Action’s accreditation schemes.”

The example of the Salcey Cluster – and their enthusiasm and success - is not unique; it is one example that makes us very proud of SSD’s power to **galvanise** and **sustain** learning and inclusion work at a local level.

Sponsors with (good) attitude

Thanks are due to sponsors in 2009 who, notwithstanding difficult economic conditions, were as good as their word and stood by their commitments to promote digital skills and confidence to older people.

McCarthy and Stone, Britain’s largest retirement builders, are old friends, and for them, we ran 24 SSD Events at McCarthy and Stone housing developments in England, Wales and Scotland. “I’ve absorbed sufficient knowledge to give me confidence to ‘go for it’. I’ve found it immensely valuable,” commented one learner: job done.



Wiltshire Farm Foods are new friends and contributed some excellent learning resources to Learning Zone as part of their sponsorship. We’ve enjoyed their energy and enthusiasm.



Working together gets more done

We have so many people to thank for their support, but I’d like to mention two in particular: our good friends **NIACE**, the adult learning charity, whose integration of SSD into Adult Learners’ Week in 2002 was a stroke of genius and one we are still thankful for and benefiting from. Thanks also to **BBC Nations and Regions** whose persistence this year in sowing SSD across production grew great results.

On which note, SSD09 netted again greater publicity gains than ever before, again helped enormously by our UK online centres’ liaison. We had national and local TV, radio, online and print media coverage, including prime time shows and slots with BBC radio and TV. An estimated 8m people heard about SSD through local and national media this May.

I’d also like to give sincere thanks to **IT4 Communities**, who loaned SSD their volunteer-matching service and made several successful liaisons between third-sector organisations and volunteer IT professionals. Some of these may become lasting relationships.

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SSD – partnership in action, delivering social benefit

There's always a lot of talk about the need for public and private sectors to come together to solve some of our big social issues. The digital inclusion and digital literacy of older people is, I would suggest, a very important social issue, with clear and oft-cited ramifications for the emotional, social and economic health and well being of not just older people, but society as a whole. (Digital Britain, Morris Review of ICT User Skills, the Learning Revolution White Paper, Ofcom's Media Literacy Reviews will give you ample references, to name but a few sources.)

We are very proud that over the years, SSD has come to embody well managed, highly effective partnership working. Year on year it not only raises awareness to the whole of the UK of this issue, but by working in partnerships of all shapes and sizes, simultaneously creates and supports under its banner **locally-owned, practical and accessible activities** to promote older people's digital inclusion. And because they are locally owned – and well resourced and supported by the SSD campaign - they have far greater chance of being re-generating and self-sustaining.

May 21st 2010 – where will you be?

So, roll on 2010 (May 21st is the date – put it in your diary with a big red ring round it!). May 2010 may feel a way away, but we're already working towards it here at Digital Unite. We welcome your feedback and comments whoever you are, on SSD or any other aspect of our work: if you've got something to suggest, something you want added, improved on or even taken away, do tell us. Thanks once again to everyone who helped make this year's SSD such a resounding success.



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Blog with us at <http://dnc.digitalunite.com>

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