



## **Chapter X**

# **Web Site Design for People with Dementia**

Nada Savitch, Innovations in Dementia, City University, London, UK

Panayiotis Zaphiris, Centre for HCI Design, City University, UK

## **Abstract**

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*This chapter describes the current thinking around designing Web sites for people with dementia. It is important that people with dementia are involved in the development of Web sites that are designed for them to use. The chapter offers advice for both researchers and practitioners who may not have thought about this user group. Symptoms of dementia are described, and the design needs of people with the condition are discussed. A list of design considerations for Web site designers covering simplified displays, avoiding distractions, consistent and familiar page design, contextual support, the use of colour, graphics, icons and sound, language and content, and navigation and menus is presented. Appropriate methodologies for working with people with dementia are also described.*

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## Introduction

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People with dementia have not traditionally been seen as a user group for Web site development. However, due to the availability of drug treatments that slow the progression of the disease, and patterns of increasing early diagnosis, the numbers of people in the early stages of dementia are increasing. Involvement of people with dementia in their own treatment and care, and in voluntary organisations such as the UK Alzheimer's Society is also increasing (Litherland, 2004), as is the amount of information about the condition and the social, legal, and health issues associated with it available specifically for people with dementia. Web sites of organisations for people with dementia now have sections specifically targeted at this user group. However, there is little evidence that the design of these Web sites takes into account any special needs people with dementia may have when using the Web (Savitch & Zaphiris, 2005).

One of the most significant developments in the field of dementia care has been the focus on personhood (Kitwood, 1997). The Alzheimer's Society also promotes the idea of hearing the voice of people with dementia, and developing communities of people with dementia, including online communities (Litherland, 2004; Savitch, Zaphiris, Smith, Litherland, Aggarwal, & Potier, 2006).

Computer interfaces can and should be designed in a way that maximises their accessibility, and enables people with early-stage dementia to benefit from this enabling technology, should they wish to do so.

Dementia is a complex progressive condition that affects not only memory, but also language and perception. This chapter describes the symptoms and experience of dementia, and how designers might help people with dementia to overcome some of these difficulties.

In the past, people with dementia have been excluded from research. Appropriate methods for involving this user group in designing accessible Web sites are also discussed.

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## Dementia

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Dementia has been defined as a syndrome characterised by the development of multiple cognitive deficits including progressive deterioration of specific functions such as language (aphasia) or perception (agnosia), and/or a disturbance of executive functioning (Cummings & Khachaturian, 1999). The cognitive domain that is impaired first and foremost in Alzheimer's disease is memory (Kertesz & Mohs, 1999).

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