

Jack York talks

technology, aging and dementia



With more than 18 years at the helm of his gerontechnology company, this active-aging pioneer shares insights on aging and technology, particularly for people experiencing cognitive decline

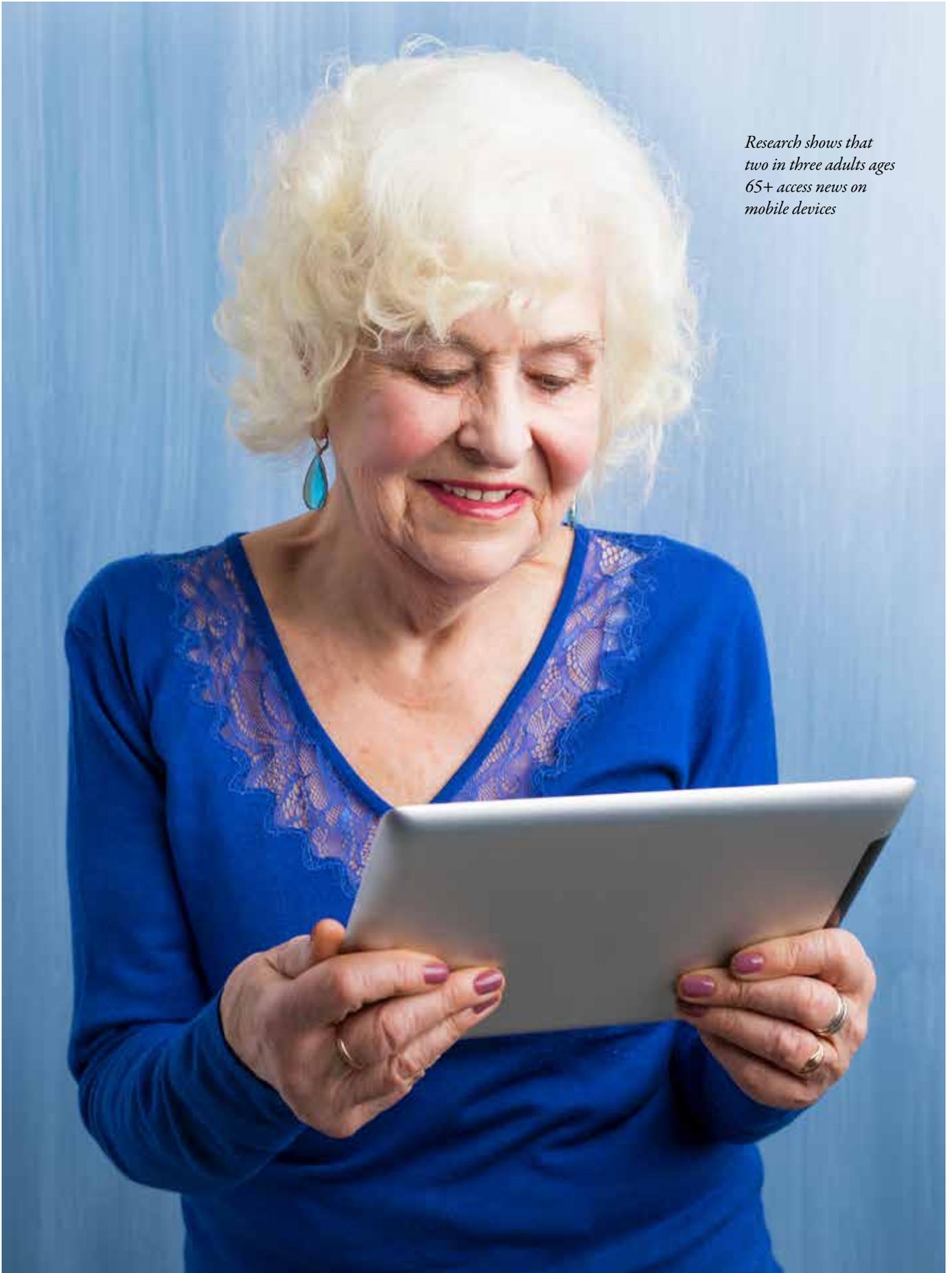
“There is a lot to be cynical about and perhaps even to fear with technology,” states Jack York, BS, president and co-founder of It’s Never 2 Late (iN2L), a Colorado-based company that helps older adults realize the full benefits of engagement technology. “If we slow down and take a deep breath, it is stunning how different our world has become in a few short years. But I’ve been involved in technology and aging for almost 20 years,” York says, “and I believe the tech tools at our fingertips today are transforming this area in ways more positive than negative. Except when I wish my kids would pick up the phone!”

York’s company, iN2L, was not originally envisioned as a business. Instead, it grew out of a philanthropic idea from his friend Leslie Sweeney to donate computers to assisted living communities and nursing centers in Southern California. With his 15-year background in the Silicon Valley, York saw a vast potential in fostering these connections, but he also believed that conventional technology was difficult for residents to use in meaningful ways. So, in 1999, he retired as vice president of strategic sales for Vishay Intertechnology and started his gerontechnology company. Today, iN2L has a customer base of more than 2,500 communities spread across the United States and Canada.

Enriched with client feedback, iN2L works to ensure that technology to en-

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*Research shows that
two in three adults ages
65+ access news on
mobile devices*





Jack York worked in California's Silicon Valley for 15 years before starting It's Never 2 Late in 1999. Image courtesy of It's Never 2 Late

gauge residents includes people living with dementia. "It's fascinating to see the outcomes, and the possibilities," York shares. "And it's often not that complicated. A lot of our work has been around looking at ways to take the tools that we take for granted today (Google Earth, Skype and flight simulators, for example) and look at ways to make them easily accessible through our interface and ease-of-use accessibility tools." He adds, "Every person is unique. Our success has been driven by providing technology that can reach everyone. Each resident can have an individual profile and unique set of content."

In October 2018, York will give an educational seminar at the ICAA Conference and Trade Show 2018, which will take place in Long Beach, California. He will present this session on the intersection of technology and aging with Davis

Park, executive director of Front Porch's Center for Innovation and Wellbeing (see the box on page 70).

For this special technology issue, the *Journal on Active Aging*[®] asked York to discuss his views on technology, aging and dementia. Here are his comments.

On the technology and aging arena

"A lot of us attend numerous conferences every year that focus on technology (e.g., CAST [LeadingAge Center for Aging Services Technologies], Aging 2.0, Mary Furlong's Boomer Summits). There are always dozens and dozens of companies there, many just starting out, and all chasing the aging population. Some startups have heartfelt stories of founders whose personal experiences with parents and grandparents have driven them to try and find a better way to solve a problem. Other startups, funded by angel investors or private equity, are chasing the huge dollars tied to aging. Then there are companies like Google, Amazon, Apple and so on, which are all looking at how to have a piece in the puzzle and share in the expected financial gains.

"The statistics for aging and technology back up the enthusiasm (67% of adults over 65 access news on a mobile device,¹ 40% of adults over 65 own a smartphone, etc.²). And anecdotal support is everywhere. Many people talk about their parents or grandparents initially resisting technology, but then becoming hooked after learning about ways to stay connected to grandkids and the world at large. Commonalities in the tech transformations of recent decades include initial skepticism that is then overcome by a majority of people who want to keep up, all reluctant to be the first or last adopters."

On technology for people with dementia

"Huge gaps and opportunities exist in the technology and aging space. Most of the technology development and stories are about aging in place, and keeping

older adults as independent and healthy for as long as possible. Geared towards wellness and longevity, the products aim at keeping people connected and cognitively fit. Forward-thinking communities are stepping up the realization that many of their more independent residents are moving into their communities with a working knowledge of apps and connectivity, smartphones in hand. Unfortunately, people dealing with cognitive decline, in particular dementia, can be left out of the equation. Yet, I believe they have the most to gain of any age cohort.

"At iN2L, we have seen that a dramatic impact with technology and dementia usually does not come from new and life-altering technologies, but from repurposing tools already at our fingertips. Our society has become blasé about new technologies. Even though these tools change our lives, the transformations happen incrementally, so the novelty and astonishment can fade. Not so for individuals living with dementia.

"Imagine what it is like for a 93-year-old with mid-stage dementia to see the house where he grew up via Google Earth. Or a grandmother in Iowa to watch her granddaughter get married in France via Skype. Or a Korean War pilot to relive the experience of flying by navigating a joystick with an off-the-shelf flight simulator. It is absolutely astounding.

"These kinds of tools, which are at our disposal every day, simply need to be integrated into the dementia landscape. Yes, we have to account for an individual's cognitive and physical realities, but they do not change the human desire we all have to stay connected and to stay relevant. The communities that 'get it' are the ones that proactively look for technology solutions to match the needs of the individual."

On technology and programming

"Integrating technology into programming does not happen overnight. It

also involves repurposing staff. But it is an opportunity as well as a challenge. Young workers out of school are attune to technology, so investing in person-centered technologies attracts that person. You can also attract a different kind of volunteer.

“At iN2L, we were involved in a project in Michigan driven by EHM Senior Services’ Denise Rabidoux. Her intuition, which proved to be accurate, was that if high school students were led to a project through an interesting technology opportunity, interest in aging and in dementia would follow. The concept was to teach students some filming techniques with the goal both to tell the story of individual residents living with dementia and to film local community landmarks of relevance to them. The student would then deliver the experience to a resident on one of our company’s tablets.

“The initiative worked remarkably well, with the residents in memory care positively impacted by the results. But the

profound effect was in how the process led to one student’s life-altering perspectives of aging, and dementia. Sabrina entered into the project simply with an interest in learning more about technology, and maybe meeting some cool older adults along the way. But the experience, as she articulates brilliantly, wound up being much deeper. Through her positive interactions with Arlene (one of the residents), Sabrina’s perception of aging has changed, her perception of dementia has changed, and her career ideas are potentially being changed. Technology was the hook, but the relationship made the difference—and now Sabrina is working at EHM. What a remarkable outcome!”

On the technology journey

“The journey into technology for older adults with dementia is just beginning. Virtual reality [VR], augmented reality, voice activation, robotics and more—the future is bright, and full of endless possibilities. Companies are popping up in this space. For example:

- MyndVR and Embodied Labs offer products (and MyndVR participates in research studies) in the VR arena.
- Amazon is expanding its voice capabilities through digital assistant Alexa into senior living.
- Jintronix is integrating virtual gaming into therapy.

“So organizations can already find technology to help older adults stay healthy and independent as long as possible. But I guarantee the outcomes from technology investments will also be successful dealing with individuals who seem the hardest to reach—those living with cognitive decline, particularly dementia. And the marketing benefits make the investments worthwhile.”

On the future

“We all have a tendency to think whatever technology we are using today will probably be with us for a while. Micro-

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Resources

Internet

Aging 2.0

<https://www.aging2.com>

Amazon Alexa

<https://developer.amazon.com/alexa>

Embodied Labs

<https://embodiedlabs.com>

Front Porch Center for Innovation and Wellbeing: Amazon Alexa Case Study

<http://fpciw.org/story/amazon-alexa-voice-activated-model-engagement-world-possibilities>

Google Earth

<https://www.google.com/earth>

It’s Never 2 Late (iN2L)

<https://in2l.com>

Jintronix

<http://www.jintronix.com>

LeadingAge Center for Aging Services Technologies (CAST)

<https://www.leadingage.org/center-aging-services-technologies>

Mary Furlong & Associates: What’s Next Boomer Business Summit and Silicon Valley Boomer Venture Summit

<http://www.maryfurlong.com/conferences.html>

MyndVR

<https://www.myndvr.com>

Skype

<https://www.skype.com>

Print

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Mizak, A., Park, M., Park, D., & Olson, K. (2017, December). Amazon “Alexa” Pilot Analysis Report. Front Porch Center for Innovation and Wellbeing. Available at <http://fpciw.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2017/12/FINAL-DRAFT-Amazon-Alexa-Analysis-Report.pdf>



A woman enjoys a creative activity using the iN2L touchscreen interface and content library, components of its person-centered digital engagement systems. Image courtesy of It's Never 2 Late

soft founder Bill Gates has a comment that speaks to this tendency. Gates says, 'We always overestimate the change that will occur in the next two years and underestimate the change that will occur in the next 10. Don't let yourself be lured into inaction.' This quote has real relevance for senior living.

"Because change in senior living can take time for a variety of reasons (e.g., regulation, litigation, risk aversion), it is easy to become complacent. Yet, I see a lot of new operators with backgrounds in high-end hospitality. These people are jumping into the senior living arena headfirst, with a firsthand knowledge of smart televisions, electronic concierges, and all kinds of ubiquitous technologies built into their core services. This kind of thinking would appeal to me as a consumer. If I were to search for a community, I would put staying connected to my passions at the top of my list of desired amenities—and there are a lot of

people like me out there. Smart operators are waking up to this desire, and catering to it.

"Technological disruptions are rampant everywhere. These changes provide challenges, but also a myriad of opportunities. Senior living, like every other industry in today's economy, has to figure out unique ways to attract new customers, and implementing creative uses of technology is ideal to build census and improve quality of life. We've seen transformation in so many other facets of senior living. It's time to turn resident engagement upside down.

"The older generation invented the backbone of technology we now take for granted. It has been our company's honor for almost 20 years to help them enjoy the fruits of their labor." 

For more information about It's Never 2 Late, visit <https://in2L.com>.

References

1. Bialik, K., & Matsu, K. E. (2017, October 4). Fact Tank. Key trends in social and digital news media. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/10/04/key-trends-in-social-and-digital-news-media/>
2. Anderson, M., & Perrin, A. (2017, May 17). Tech Adoption Climbs Among Older Adults. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2017/05/17/technology-use-among-seniors>

Mark your calendar

Learn more from Jack York at the ICAA Conference and Trade Show 2018, to be held October 18–20 at the Hyatt Regency Long Beach and Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center. On Friday, October 19 at 8:00 a.m.–9:30 a.m., York will copresent "The future's so bright: The intersection of technology and aging" with Davis Park, BA, MURP, executive director of Front Porch Center for Innovation and Wellbeing. The session will focus on how older adults in senior living, particularly those living with dementia, are left out of the technology revolution, and explore how to change that reality. The presentation will offer real-world examples of multimedia technologies delivered through adaptive computer systems, and provide best practices to implement person-based technology. For more information, visit <https://www.icaa.cc/conferenceandevents/overview.htm>.