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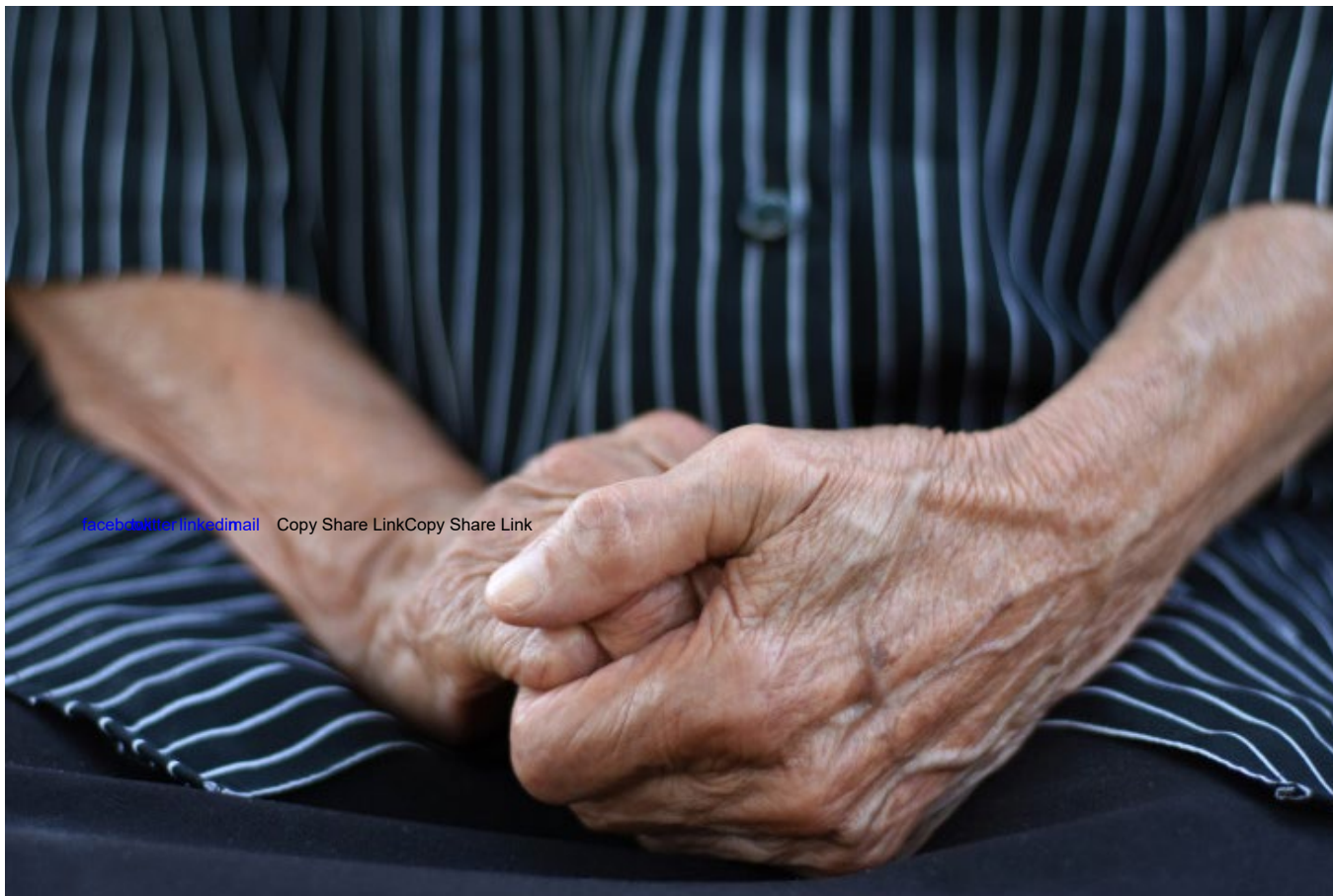
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We are leaving older adults out of the digital world

Jessica Fields 8:30 am CDT • May 5, 2019

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May is national [Older Americans Month](#), and this year's theme is *Connect, Create, Contribute*. One area in particular threatens to prevent older adults from making those connections: the digital divide.

Nationally, [one-third](#) of adults ages 65 and older say they've never used the internet, and half don't have internet access at home. Of those who do use the internet, nearly half say they need someone else's help to set up or use a new digital device. Even in San Francisco – the home of technology giants like Twitter, Facebook, and Google – [40%](#) of older adults

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Jessica Fields Contributor

Jessica Fields is a research analyst and program manager at the [UCSF Center for Vulnerable Populations at Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital](#) and a collaborator in The OpEd Project.

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do not have basic digital literacy skills, and of those, more than half do not use the internet at all.

Mastering digital technology has become a key component of what it means to fully participate in society. If we do not provide technology access and training to older adults, we shut them out from society, worsening an already worrisome trend of isolation and loneliness among the elderly.

As a researcher working directly with isolated older adults to provide low-cost internet, tablets, and digital training through the [Tech Allies program](#), led by the non-profit [Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly](#), I regularly hear this sentiment from seniors.

I visit Tech Allies participants – whose ages range from 62 to 98 – both before and after their eight weeks of one-on-one technology training. We talk about their experiences with and perspectives on technology today. In reflecting on why he and other older adults would want to learn to use the internet, one elder told me, “We feel like we’re standing outside a building that we have no access to.”

Another woman shared that because she doesn’t have internet access or know how to use technology, she feels, “I’m just not part of this world anymore. In certain facets of society, I just can’t join.... Some [things] just are not possible if you are not in the flow of the internet.”

In contrast to concerns about technology use increasing isolation among younger populations, the communication and connection possible online can be especially valuable for older adults who are homebound, live far away from family, or have lost the loved ones they relied on for social support in their younger years. Elders can use online tools to connect with friends and family via messaging platforms, video chat, and social media even if they can no longer physically visit them.

Older adults can find online support groups for people who share their medical conditions. And they can engage with the outside world through news, blogs, streaming platforms, and email, even if they are no longer able to move about as easily as they once could. As one elder told me, “I can’t really move that easily without a caretaker and I only have her a few hours a day so [the tablet] ... has been a great companion for me and it gets me connected with other people.”



Image courtesy of Getty Images

For older adults in particular, the risks associated with social isolation are profound. Loneliness among older adults has been associated with [depression, cardiovascular disease, functional decline, and death](#). Technology can serve as an important tool to help reduce these risks, but only if we provide older adults with the skills they need to access our digital world.

But we can close this gap. Our research shows that Tech Allies measurably improves older adults' use of technology and confidence in key digital skills. Programs like this, which embed technology training in existing community-based organizations, should be expanded, with increased funding prioritized at local, state, and federal levels and with greater involvement of technology companies and investors. If we spent even a fraction of the [\\$8 billion invested in digital health companies alone last year](#) on tailoring these tools for older adults, we could drastically expand usability, training, and access to broadband and devices.

Support from technology companies could take many forms. Beyond expanding device donation programs, technology companies should design devices specifically for older adults (when your hand is shaky, swiping can be tough...) and should have tech support call lines tailored to older adults less familiar with the internet (cache and cookies and clouds, oh my!).

Furthermore, broadband providers like **Comcast** and AT&T should streamline the enrollment process for their affordable internet programs and expand eligibility. Partnerships between service providers and community-based organizations focused on older adults will be key in ensuring that these efforts actually meet the needs of older adults.

To be sure, many older adults also express a lack of interest in technology. For some, this reflects a true lack of desire to use digital tools. But for others it reflects an underlying fear of technology and lack of skills. Appropriate training can help to quell those fears and generate interest. In particular, great care must be paid to online safety training. Older adults are more likely to fall victim to online scams, putting their personal information at risk, but with tailored digital literacy training, they can learn to navigate the internet safely and securely.

The importance of digital inclusion is not going to disappear with the generational changes of the coming decades. Technology is continuously evolving, and with each new digital innovation come challenges for even younger adults to adapt.

With greater investment in providing accessible devices, broadband, and digital training, technology has the potential to become a powerful tool for reducing loneliness among older adults, empowering them to connect, create, and contribute online. As one elder put it, "It's time to catch up, you know, and join the world."

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Amazon calls on Congress to create anti-price gouging law

Brian Heater

2:53 pm CDT • May 13, 2020

Amazon has received a fair amount of criticism for perceived inaction against seller price gouging during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the retail giant has made efforts to rein in the opportunist a...



Taika is building a better coffee through natural chemistry and adaptogens

Jonathan Shieber

2:46 pm CDT • May 13, 2020

So, an eight-year product veteran from Facebook and an internationally renowned barista walk into a coffee bar... It's not a joke. It's the origin story for Taika, a new startup tha...



Top members of Google's Pixel team have left the company

Brian Heater

2:43 pm CDT • May 13, 2020

Key Pixel team members Marc Levoy and Mario Queiroz are out at Google. The departures, first reported by The Information, have been confirmed on the pages of the former Distinguished Engineer and P...



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Startups are transforming global trade in the COVID-19 era

The global trade crisis is a setback, but also an opportunity for logistics startups to show the ...

Scott Bade

2:32 pm CDT • May 13, 2020

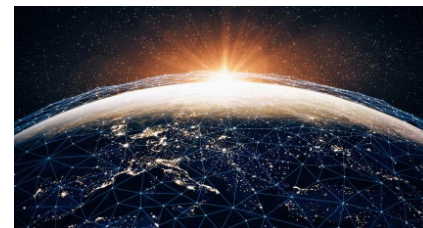


Crypto Startup School: A new type of computer drives waves of innovation

Zoran Basich

2:00 pm CDT • May 13, 2020

In week one of a16z's Crypto Startup School, the firm addresses "Crypto Networks and Why They Matter" and "Blockchain Primitives: Cryptography and Consensus."



SparkLabs Global Ventures promotes Jessica Jackley, co-founder of Kiva, to general partner

Catherine Shu

2:00 pm CDT • May 13, 2020

Jessica Jackley, co-founder of non-profit microlending platform Kiva, has become a general partner at SparkLabs Global Ventures. Jackley was previously a venture partner at the firm, which focuses ...



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Why is Eugene Kaspersky funding a travel accelerator during COVID-19?

Natasha Lomas

1:43 pm CDT • May 13, 2020

Eugene Kaspersky made a name for himself in cybersecurity as CEO of Kaspersky Labs, but the Russian security expert has a new passion project: he's funding an online accelerator that aims to ...



Here are the 15 companies presenting at Alchemist Accelerator's first fully digital demo day

Greg Kumparak

1:30 pm CDT • May 13, 2020

As with just about any big gathering, the traditional approach to Demo Day — in which a startup incubator debuts all of its latest companies to a huge room full of investors — has been put on hold ...



Google Chrome will finally help you organize your tabs

Sarah Perez

1:20 pm CDT • May 13, 2020

Google Chrome is rolling out a new feature to help you better manage all your open tabs. The company announced today the launch of "tab groups" for the beta version of its web browser, ...



Inria releases some source code of French contact-tracing app

Romain Dillet

12:50 pm CDT • May 13, 2020

French research institute Inria has released a small portion of the source code that is going to power France's contact-tracing app, StopCovid. It is available on several GitLab repositories under ...



Uber commits \$50 million to safety supplies for drivers

Megan Rose Dickey

11:49 am CDT • May 13, 2020

Uber says it has committed \$50 million to procure and provide safety supplies to drivers. Those supplies will include things like face masks, sanitizer, gloves and disinfectant, Uber CEO Dara Khosr...



Google's Android ad ID targeted in strategic GDPR tracking complaint

Natasha Lomas

11:45 am CDT • May 13, 2020

Now here's an interesting GDPR complaint: Is Google illegally tracking Android users in Europe via a unique, device-assigned advertising ID? First, what is the Android advertising ID? Per Goo...



Momentus set to deploy satellites for a free 4K space-based Earth live-streaming service

Darrell Etherington

11:41 am CDT • May 13, 2020

Space bus company Momentus has signed a new contract that will see it provide in-space transportation and deployment for Sen, the U.K. company that's building a 4K real-time video streaming s...



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As e-commerce booms during the pandemic, Shopify accelerates

Alex Wilhelm, Ron Miller

11:31 am CDT • May 13, 2020

Despite the economic disruptions associated with the coronavirus pandemic, cloud vendors are holding up well as many client companies and their employees work from home. With stores closed, it's na...

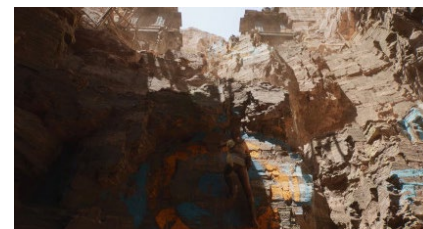


Epic Games announces Unreal Engine 5, shows off boundary-pushing PlayStation 5 demo

Lucas Matney

11:16 am CDT • May 13, 2020

After eight years of Unreal Engine 4, Epic Games is finally ready to talk about Unreal Engine 5, which they're announcing will launch in preview early next year with a wider launch by the yea...



MIT develops a way to use wireless signals from in-home appliances to better understand your health

Darrell Etherington

11:12 am CDT • May 13, 2020

Having a holistic picture of your health might not mean just wearing a device like an Apple Watch that can monitor your biometrics — researchers at MIT's Computer Science and Artificial...



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Extra Crunch Live: Join Alexia and Niko Bonatsos for a Q&A May 19th at 2 pm EDT/11 am PDT

Alex Wilhelm

11:11 am CDT • May 13, 2020

The Extra Crunch Live series rolls along next week with something special: My old boss is taking part. Let me explain. Alexia Bonatsos was once co-editor of TechCrunch and was part of my interview ...

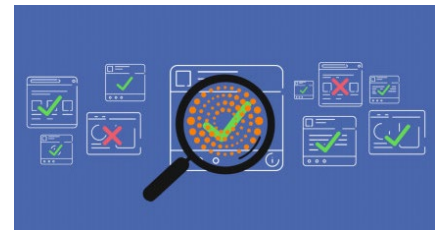


Daily Crunch: Facebook will pay \$52M to content moderators

Anthony Ha

11:10 am CDT • May 13, 2020

Facebook strikes a deal to compensate content moderators with PTSD, Tesla might reopen its factory next week and Twitter says some employees can work from home indefinitely. Here's your Daily...

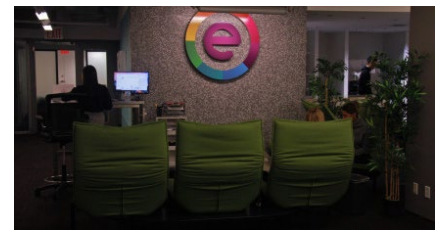


Meet the 13 startups graduating out of Entrepreneurs Roundtable Accelerator

Jordan Crook

11:00 am CDT • May 13, 2020

While the world feels paused, in some respects, new startups are still cropping up like usual. Today, 13 companies are graduating from the Entrepreneurs Roundtable Accelerator, based in NY, with \$1...



Amazon Fire TV adds a Free tab featuring apps, movies, TV and news

Sarah Perez

10:58 am CDT • May 13, 2020

Amazon's Fire TV platform now has its own rival to Roku's popular free movies and TV hub, The Roku Channel. Today, Amazon introduced a new "free" section on Fire TV that mak...

