

New website for golden 'grown-ups':

Entrepreneur meets internet needs of the over fifties

By Barbara Weil

In response to a scarcity of online services for New Zealanders aged 50-plus, former marketer Richard Poole has struck gold with a new website.

His www.grownup.co.nz has become New Zealand's leading free independent community site for over-50s, with more than 12,000 registered users and 30,000 visitors per month.

Director Poole says after hearing the complaints of older family members, the decision to launch the site was an easy one.

"I was quite stunned when my father, who's 66, said there was nothing in cyberspace for people in his age group," he said. "We tend to think that the internet is so vast there's something for everyone, but when we investigated we found that there was nothing in New Zealand specifically for people over 50 — which is a lot of people!"

Barely a year after being launched, the site is proving its appeal; a www.nielsen-netratings.co.nz report named it one of the top three sites for total traffic by proportion of users aged 45+.

Over-50s represent 28 per cent of



■ Director Richard Poole: "I developed www.grownup.co.nz after my father commented that there was little in cyberspace to interest his age group."

the total population, or around 1.12 million people, and another 50,000 hit the 50 milestone this year. By 2020, the proportion of 50-plus people is expected to grow to 38 per cent.

A disproportionate amount of the nation's wealth is concentrated within this demographic; Retirement Commission figures show the net worth of people aged 45-plus is \$329 billion (comprising homes, assets and financial investments, minus liabilities).

Poole was surprised that despite the statistics, over-50s were being overlooked: "Advertisers and businesses prefer to aim at the 18-39 age group because they feel that's where all the disposable income is.

"We set up www.grownups.co.nz because we felt that was a huge misconception, and that 50-plus people do want sophisticated information about travel, home renovations, investments — you name it — but they want a site that is designed for them and not 30-year-olds."

With the first baby boomers turning 60 at the start of 2006, Mr Poole says evolving lifestyle options and consumer behaviour, coupled with ever-lengthening life spans, means age is becoming an irrelevance for older people.

"Fifty is definitely the new 40. It's easy to navigate and they can tell us what they want."

The hunch that web users were



■ Two avid users explore the website developed by marketer Richard Poole for over-50s.

Photos supplied

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looking for opportunities to communicate has proved correct, with participation in the www.grownups.co.nz discussion forums making up more than 10 per cent of all views on the site. There are also regular polls on almost every subject imaginable.

The site also encourages feedback, Poole said, because of his awareness of the tech-sophistication of the older audience.

Ruth Buss, a 55-year-old Napier bed-and-breakfast owner, is a typi-

cal example of the growing breed of internet-savvy baby boomers that comprise a big chunk of the site's audience and membership.

As a self-taught web designer, she created the site for her business, and spends around 10 hours a week online.

The site provides thorough coverage of lifestyle issues, from investment and retirement information to games and travel tips, and includes advice from a range of specialists.

Our visitors want to read articles, find information that is relevant to their lifestyle and they are keen to keep both mind and body active," Poole explains.

The site grew by 12 per cent in July and Poole expects even more growth.

"We even cater for people who like games, we encourage hobbies and try to make the site really user driven.

"After all, we developed it especially for them."