

# VIRTUALLY THERE

Kim Rutter goes into cyberspace



Heard of the new internet phenomenon that's sweeping the world? It is (all quiet for the drum roll, please) the rise of the silver surfer. Not an online release of another B-grade movie but a fascinating demographic shift in internet users. Forget the stereotypes of kids doing their homework, nerdy youths in gaming chat rooms and tragic thirty-somethings trawling for porn – the new internet user is old!

According to Nielsen/NetRatings, who make it their business to know such things, one in three internet users in New Zealand is over the age of forty-five and fifteen per cent are over fifty-five – the silver surfers. In the UK twenty-two per cent of website visits are by surfers fifty-five and older and they are about to overtake thirty-five to forty-five-year-olds as the age group with the largest presence online. So take that, you hip and happening young things – old is the new young.

And what exactly are the silver surfers doing online? In the UK they're doing exactly what their kids are doing – visiting adult sites and shopping. How depressing. Following close behind as favourite oldster categories are travel, news and media, money and leisure pursuits. Luckily there is no local research on the subject, so I shall assume that, unlike our



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British friends, we here in Godzone are above the pursuit of electronic titillation in our virtual dotage. In which case, here are some wholesome recommendations for the more mature among us.

First up to the tee is the New Zealand Golf Network ([golf.co.nz](http://golf.co.nz)). This is New Zealand's official golf handicapping website, which I'm sure you know all about if you play golf. I don't, but I was very impressed by the search function that allowed me to find out the handicap of everyone I could think of who plays club golf and what they scored in their last round. Not that I'm nosy, you understand. But clearly silver surfers are, because more than sixty percent of the visitors to this site are over forty-five.

Also hugely popular is GrownUps ([grownups.co.nz](http://grownups.co.nz)). GrownUps is an excellent mix of blogs and chats aimed at the fifty-plus community, with sections on health, pets, money and genealogy, as well as regularly updated columns from old heroes Alice Worsley and David Hartnell. The discussion threads, on topics such as living in a motor-home, knitting and how to text, are the most polite I have ever seen. I like this site – it's clearly a site for nice people and sometimes online nice people are in short supply.

More than half of the visitors to the local sharemarket information site FinData ([findata.co.nz](http://findata.co.nz)) could be classed as "mature" and the same is true of gardening site [garden-nz.co.nz](http://garden-nz.co.nz) and farm information site [fencepost.com](http://fencepost.com). Now that's a surprise – the gardening thing I was expecting, but farming? Better than porn is all I have to say.

Apparently silver surfers internationally love cruise ship sites. If you've been missing out on that trend, try [icruise.co.nz](http://icruise.co.nz), [finecruising.co.nz](http://finecruising.co.nz) and [cruisedirect.co.nz](http://cruisedirect.co.nz). Also popular are e-greetings sites. One of my favourites is



SmileBox ([smilebox.com](http://smilebox.com)) because it has a cute little function (free, which makes it even cuter) to make emailable slideshows of your own photographs. If you like e-cards, you will LOVE these.

And what about U3A? The University of the Third Age is an international movement that "encourages retired people to take part in lifelong learning activities for pleasure. There are no prior qualifications, no exams and no degrees awarded." Sound good? There is a list of New Zealand U3A groups at [www3.griffith.edu.au/03/u3a/](http://www3.griffith.edu.au/03/u3a/) and, if you can't get to a group, you can enroll for virtual U3A courses there.

Finally, whatever age you are, visit Poem Hunter to read an excellent plan for ageing disgracefully ([poemhunter.com/best-poems/jenny-joseph/warning/](http://poemhunter.com/best-poems/jenny-joseph/warning/)). And then go out and buy a red hat.

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