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## Newsletter October 2021

### From the Chair

It has been an eventful few months since the last Newsletter in June. We hosted a visitors' session on 11 June with 13 people attending and 8 joining SeniorNet. The next Visitors' session is on Friday 8 October, during Seniors' Week.

We had a very successful Volunteers' Forum on 15 July with Heather Newell, executive officer of the Federation of SeniorNets Inc. as our guest speaker. We extended an invitation to North Wellington SeniorNet to join us and were delighted to welcome four representatives. Three members of SeniorNet Wellington executive committee reciprocated by attending an Open Session at North Wellington on 16 July. Unfortunately the Volunteers' Forum scheduled for 30 September had to be cancelled due to the Alert Level 2 restrictions.

As part of a Federation initiative, Annie Lewin, Senior Director of Advocacy and Head of Asia Pacific, Google, visited us on 26 July to see first-hand how a SeniorNet operates. Thanks to all those who turned up for a 9.30 start and shared their ideas with Annie. She was very impressed.

Then things came to a grinding halt as we plunged into Level 4 lockdown. Several courses and workshops had to be postponed. Some Special Interest Groups (SIGs) went ahead as zoom sessions, others were cancelled. The executive committee has been 'pivoting' almost to the point of pirouetting as we have responded to the uncertainty that is life under a Covid outbreak.

While in Level 2, the Help Centre is open to a maximum of 4 members and tutors across 2 rooms. Given the difficulty in maintaining the required social distancing, courses have been cancelled, but some SIGs and workshops are being offered either face-to-face with limited numbers or via zoom. Please check our website or the weekly news emails for updates.

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The hesitant descent down the alert levels is trying for us all on a number of levels. The Executive Committee thanks you for your patience and continued support for SeniorNet Wellington.

Stay safe,

*Pam Fletcher*

## SeniorNet Articles

### Supersense – AI: an app for the visually impaired and blind

*by Bruce Ralph*



These days, visually impaired people have a variety of smartphone maps apps to use when walking. They vocally offer “turn left, “straight-ahead”, “turn right” directions, and also provide street address and intersection information. It’s a sunny day so they may leave home and arrive at their destination. But what about the things they are walking past? They can’t identify them, can’t get any feedback about their surroundings while they walk.

That’s the question IT professionals Cagri Hakan Zaman and Emre Sarbak asked one another. They agreed that Zaman’s previous computer vision research should be modified to assist the blind so they founded a nonprofit company Mediate to research this. The company’s goal was to use computer vision and machine learning to help blind individuals in unfamiliar environments learn what’s around them. “Is there a chair in this room? Where is the radio? Where is the front door?”

Mediate’s team used Artificial Intelligence (AI) to trace and identify over 600 different objects such as trees, chairs, doorways, and kitchen utensils, and to facilitate the identification in real-time.

Enter *Supersense – AI for Blind*, an app that is designed to assist the visually impaired and blind; it was released for Android and iOS in March 2020.

This article is based on my testing the first released version.

#### How does it work?

*SuperSense* operates in two main modes: **Object Explorer** and **Text Explorer**. Both of these modes use a common set of feature buttons e.g. Smart Scanner or Text Reader/Quick Read, but in a different way

#### Object Explorer mode

The app’s Object Explorer mode uses streaming video from your smartphone camera. If you’re sitting in a room and you want to know what’s around you, launch

*Supersense* and enable Object Explorer. Slowly pan the phone and the app will identify and speak the names of furnishings: tables, chairs, lamps, heaters etc. The identification happens in real-time. That's very handy for a quick look-around an unfamiliar room such as a hospital setting. Also, you can decide to look for chairs, and have the app announce the presence of various seating options as you pan the phone around.

Walking along a footpath, for example, the app might announce "car", "street light pole" or, even more usefully, "wheelie bin". It's not a map app so the only directional information you will receive is whatever you can glean from the direction your phone is pointed toward.

Most features work without an internet connection so it can be used in any location. If the user gets stuck they can phone the Mediate help desk who will assist, or give personal training.

### **Text Explorer mode**

In the default Smart Scan mode *Supersense* searches for brief snatches of text, currency, or bar codes, and when it finds them performs automatic recognition. If *Supersense* detects a longer document it automatically switches to Document Scan mode. There it offers spoken-English guidance such as "Rotate to 11 o'clock position", "Move one inch to the right", and "Move further away from the document". Image capture is automatic; no fumbling for a button. Recognition is both swift and accurate.

### **Camera quality**

By now you are likely thinking of any number of potential uses for *Supersense*: finding those missing headphones, locating an empty seat in the doctor's waiting room, navigating your way to the chemist at your local shopping mall. All of this is possible, but with one important note. For this app to be most effective, the smartphone camera quality matters. The better your camera, the further *Supersense* can detect, recognise, and identify objects. The writer's own iPhone SE 2nd generation needed to be 1-2M from a door, or chair. However, users of latest model smartphones can expect better distance scanning results.

### **Calculating distance**

When the app did report an object, it did not indicate the distance to it. This limitation may soon be at least partially overcome by the use of LiDAR paired with Mediate's newest offering *Super LiDAR* app. The word 'LiDAR' stands for light detection and ranging. It is similar to 'radar' but it uses pulses of infrared light instead of radio waves. Pulsed light is bounced off objects, then the distance and object's shape are calculated measuring the time for the reflected light to return to the receiver. This is also the technology used by Google Mapping vehicles and self-driving cars.

Using *Super LiDAR*'s more precise infrared pulse reflection you may also receive extra information about for example a person standing ahead, such as "a person wearing a mask" and the distance between your smartphone and that person. Rising and falling

sounds provide feedback as you approach or move away from the detected person or object; very helpful if, say, you're standing in a socially distanced slowly moving line at a cafe, or locating the counter.

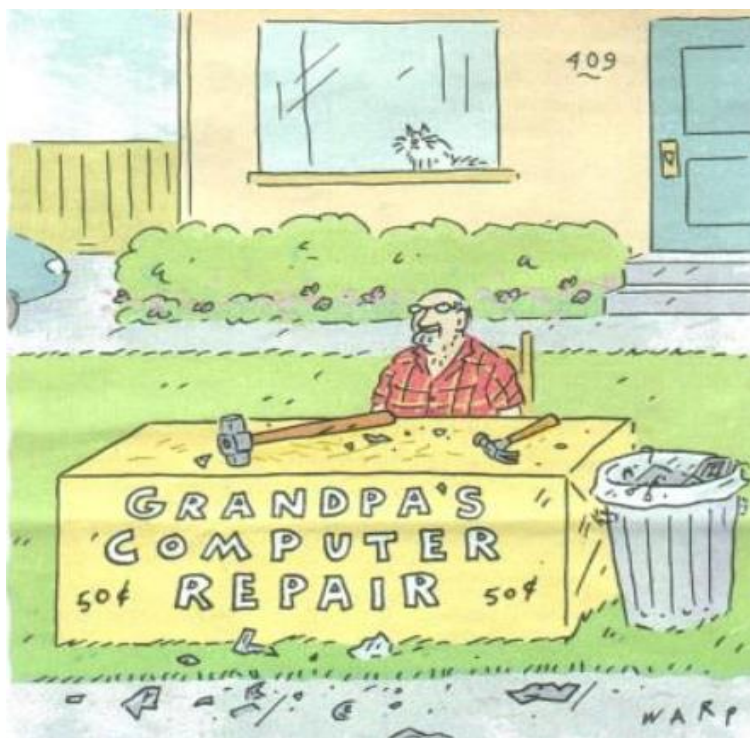
LiDAR sensor is currently available on the iPad Pro and iPhone 12 Pro and Pro Max only, but other manufacturers are expected to follow soon.

### Supersense app features

|                     | Object Explorer Mode   | Text Explorer Mode  |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Find                | Scans your physical environment for you to hear about nearby objects.  |   |
| Smart Guidance      | Automatically detects whether you are trying to read a piece of text, a multi-page document, a currency or a barcode.                                  |   |
| Magnify             |  | Enables you to zoom in and read the text either via eText or from a magnified image from the camera. Any text is also recognised.                   |
| Smart Scanner       | Guides you to point the camera to find the best angle for the most accurate results.   |   |
| Quick Read          | Instantly reads the text presented in front of the rear camera.  | Reads brief snatches of text. Recognition and voicing are automatic.  |
| Document Read       | Reads longer documents with the assistance of smart guidance. Once the text has been recognised, uses VoiceOver commands to navigate through the text. | Scans a full page and reviews or saves the text.  |
| Multi-page Scanner  | Scans documents with multiple pages simultaneously and navigates through the text.   | Scans multiple pages and reads them as a single document.   |
| Currency            | Recognises currencies and the value of banknotes but not NZ yet.   | Recognises various denominations of American, Australian, Euro, British and Canadian currencies, but not NZ yet                                     |
| Bar codes           | Scans barcodes to give the name and brand of the products with additional information.   | Auto-scans for bar codes. Variable speed beeps help locate the code. Works best with the phone positioned approximately 30cm away from the product. |
| Import image or PDF | Reads and explores text from images and PDF files.   | Recognises text within images and inaccessible PDF files.   |
| Read History        | Displays your recognition history in a single screen.  | Lists all previous recognitions with the date and time and scan mode used. From here you can review, delete, or share the text.                     |

## Downloading the app

*Supersense* can be downloaded from app stores. The free version is limited; it includes unlimited access to Quick Read, Import Image or PDF Mode, and Read History. A subscription is better to take advantage of most features. The monthly subscription is NZ \$7.99. Yearly and lifetime subscriptions are available. Payments are charged monthly to your Apple app Store or Google Play Store account.



# Digital wills

by Alan Royal and Mary Newman



What happens to our 'online life' when we shuffle off this mortal coil?

Be warned; you may find some of this article morbid, but please read on!!

It is estimated by the Commission for Financial Capability that 47% of us have a will (47% for women, 51% for men), but how many of us, as part of our succession planning, have included *digital executor access* to what we do online? In other words, have you created a digital will?

## What is a digital will?

It's not a legal document, like your official will, nor is it an online version of your will. It's a list of all your online accounts and digital assets, where they are stored, and how to access them. This information helps your estate recognise and retrieve any assets (such as documents, photos or videos), and also allows them to deactivate various accounts.

There are two very good reasons for a digital will. Firstly it prevents email or social media accounts of deceased persons from being hacked and used for scamming. Secondly it's important to deactivate accounts with credit card details, even though your legal executor and bank will cancel your credit card and also take care of direct debits, bank accounts, IRD, RealMe and other government accounts.

## How to create a digital will

A good starting point is the [Consumer New Zealand](#) article. This article gives an example of a digital will and a downloadable Word digital will template. You can alternatively do a copy and paste of the template, direct from their site.

In brief, make a list of all your digital assets and accounts. You may be surprised just how many accounts you have: emails, social media (Facebook, Instagram), photo and video storage (Google, iCloud), Amazon, TradeMe, Netflix, Sky, and e-book providers, to name just a few. Include your username or email for each account but not your passwords. Passwords should be kept separately in another safe place known to your *digital executor*.

Note that providers of some services, such as internet banking, do not permit you to record some details. Check the wording of the agreements you have.

You will also need to appoint a digital executor; this person needs to be tech savvy. It can be a family member and doesn't need to be your lawyer or legal executor. Indicate to your digital executor what you would like to happen to the assets. Store your digital will with your will or with your lawyer, review it regularly and keep it up to date.



Internet NZ also has a page devoted to a [Digital Legacy](#) checklist and information on web service policies.

The checklist includes how to identify your digital assets, the online accounts and information you have stored online, what is important to you or your family and friends, what you want to happen to each of these assets after your death (kept or deleted), whether anyone should have access to your email after your death, and should your email contacts be notified of your death?

## **Legacy policies and social media**

Consider setting up legacy policies if you use Facebook, Google and Gmail, Twitter or any other services which offer them. These allow a person you nominate to manage your account and close it. Google has one of the best legacy policies. Apple is not so good! Note also the article in the last SeniorNet Newsletter (June 2021), which describes how to delete your Google information.

Guides for many social media sites can be viewed at the (aptly named!) [Dead Social](#) site. The site also describes how to download media from these sites. Their [Digital Death Report](#) contains interesting survey material on people's views on handling digital death material. The Dead Social site also has a useful wide-ranging collection of resource guides.

The guides include preparing for death on social media sites, downloading your media and data from social networks, funeral-tech tutorials, end of life planning tutorials and offline legacy tutorials.

## **Free alternative Office suite**

*By Lindsay Rollo*



Whilst Microsoft Office remains the commonest commercial suite for documents, spreadsheets, and presentations, a range of alternative competitors have become increasingly attractive, not least because of more price-competitive licensing fees, and some are even completely free to use.

Further, paying less, or nothing, doesn't necessarily mean that the software is of lower quality, or incompatibility with Microsoft's formats and file types.

As of now, there are about 10 alternative office suite programs available, but a recent one is *FreeOffice* from Softmaker. This company has been developing office software since 1987 and its office suite is their flagship product.

FreeOffice is a complete office suite that is free to use for both home and in the workplace. It is developed for both Windows and Linux, and offers a basic version for Android users.

The suite output is compatible with all Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint formats. This means that you can not only view, but save files in formats such as DOCX, XLSX and PPTX. It also supports older file types such as PPT and XLS. A few formatting features are missing [such as small caps] but not enough to frustrate the non-professional keyboarder.

The new interface launched this year gives the option of either working with modern or classic menus and toolbars. This makes switching from Microsoft Office easy as the interface is very similar.

For those users who have the luxury of a touchscreen PC you can use touch mode with larger icons. This mode is available for both the newer version look and the classic menu-based interface.

The entire suite uses only 132 Mb of hard disk space, and is reported to run well on legacy Win7-8 equipment.

Full information and download links are available from the [Softmaker](#) website.

## Help at meetings for hearing impaired

by Lindsay Rollo



Most SeniorNeters have a degree of hearing loss and miss some of the presentation or the discussion when attending group meetings, and particularly so when speakers are not directly in front.

Computers, smartphones and tablets are increasingly prevalent in just about everyone's life these days, and with the use of the right websites, apps and services they can be valuable tools in helping to participate well with hearing loss.

There are a number of free apps available to record speech at meetings using your smart device, and can place on screen sufficient of what the speaker is saying almost instantaneously, and at a size appropriate for your needs.

I have been using [Otter](#), and found it sufficiently good to justify continue attending meetings where participants speak up.

Here are some examples of Android and Mac apps: there are many more out there. <https://www.miracle-ear.com/blog-news/the-11-best-free-smartphone-apps-for-hearing-impaired-users>

<https://www.hearinglink.org/living/loops-equipment/useful-apps-for-hearing-loss/>

Search around and try out several by talking to yourself, or while watching TV, or playing radio news to find the one that suits you best.

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