

GoGoGrandparent helps seniors without smartphones

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Don't be fooled by her age or her not-so-smart flip phone. Eighty-five-year-old Betty Lou Luce is spurring a technology movement that's spreading from bridge clubs to retirement homes across Southern California.

Thanks to a phone service called GoGoGrandparent, Luce, who lives in this Los Angeles-area city, is defying the stereotypes associated with older adults, using the same on-demand mobile apps as smartphone-savvy millennials and boomers. She takes Uber rides to and from Coco's Bakery and doctor appointments. She gets meals and groceries delivered by trendy, give-it-to-me-now apps such as Munchery, Postmates and Instacart.

And, perhaps best of all, there's no app required. GoGoGrandparent, created by Luce's 24-year-old grandson Justin Boogaard, is just a hotline.

Luce, and now her social circle and their acquaintances, call a [phone number](#) and select from a simple menu of automated choices: Press 1 for an Uber ride, 2 for a return trip, 3 to order a meal, 4 to get groceries delivered and 5 for all other delivery options. GoGoGrandparent handles the rest.

"My grandma is the kingpin of Torrance and when she likes something, everybody hears about it," Boogaard said.

Luce's word-of-mouth referral system has thus far resulted in hundreds

of users. GoGoGrandparent first got rolling at the beginning of the year. Now, the number of calls to the hotline is increasing by 20 percent every week. The nascent, self-funded company doesn't charge callers additional service fees, but it is starting to eke out revenue from affiliate relationships with Uber and other partners.

The service uses a custom-built, automated system to manage all Uber ride requests. For now, everything else gets routed to a human operator who places orders on behalf of callers, who are, on average, around 85 years of age. Boogaard and his business partner, David Lung, are still toying with the right age-appropriate options to make sure their older clients can get what they want without too much hassle.

Because ease of use is paramount.

"When I need (a ride), I just dial the telephone number and press 1," said Rose Iacono, 90, who recently relocated from her home to a retirement community. "When I'm ready to come home, I dial the number, and press 2 and they already know where I am. It's really an ideal situation for me. ... Being without a car, it's a nice alternative."

GoGoGrandparent is a go-between, porting the convenience introduced by the burgeoning on-demand app realm (where anything you want is usually available in an hour or less) to seniors without smartphones who have no way to interface with handy new tools.

Fully 70 percent of Americans ages 65 and older do not own a smartphone, according to the Pew Research Center. Yet older adults, 78 percent of whom do have access to old-fashioned cell phones, can benefit from speedy delivery and ride services just as much, if not more so, than youngsters.

"Technology is really critical for older people, especially in terms of help

and assistance," said Dilip Jeste, M.D., senior associate dean for healthy aging and senior care at the University of California at San Diego. "The number of [older people](#) is increasing, but care is declining. That care can only be filled, in large part, by technology."

Yet seniors are often overlooked by technology companies.

"That's a mistake," Jeste said.

And not just because there is a need for tools to assist the increasing population of elderly folks who prefer "aging in place," or the practice of allowing people in their golden years to remain in their own homes, safely and independently. There's a real financial incentive as well.

Laurie Orlov, founder of the Aging in Place Technology Watch and a former analyst at Forrester Research, estimates that the senior tech market will become a \$20 billion industry by 2020. Semco Research, meanwhile, forecasts that companies creating technologies that support the stay-at-home movement will generate more than \$30 billion in revenue by 2017.

Inspired by Luce's real-life challenges, GoGoGrandparent can piggyback on the aging-in-place trend and help seniors remain self-sufficient while simultaneously saving them money on costlier care-taking services.

"Shortly after grandma lost her vision, she broke her leg," Boogaard said. "I started looking into how expensive a caretaker would be (to help with groceries, odd jobs and transportation). The prices seemed unreasonable. I'm totally a child of the 21st century. I would rather just (use an app) to pay for the groceries and pay the \$6 delivery charge. But of course grandma doesn't have access to those things. Now she does."

The University of California at Los Angeles class of 2011 graduate, is

the quintessential 20-something serial inventor. Boogaard has bounced around from idea to idea for the bulk of his brief professional career. At one point, he was spending his weekends on something far more superficial.

That product, called Upmygame, helped users of the popular dating app, Tinder, stand out from the crowd by suggesting the most eye-catching photos and bios to use in their profiles. There was also a college-themed project called Bubbleboard and a contract job board named Hustle.

His current business is seemingly a more worthwhile endeavor.

But for all that GoGoGrandparent can do to support independent older adults, the service has at least one glaring shortcoming.

GoGoGrandparent doesn't actually teach older adults how to use the Internet. It certainly doesn't train them to be self-sufficient with smartphones and tablets. These are far more pressing needs for seniors, Orlov said. After all, the Internet is replete with information and tools - take the tech training program AARP TEK - that can be used to better the lives of [older adults](#).

"It's a great thing he's done in a fairly niche view of the need," she said. "But he needs to carry it a step forward."

Callers should be directed to Internet educational resources, Orlov suggested.

Boogaard knows there's more to be done.

After living with his grandmother for two years and witnessing the pros and cons of aging, he has found his best muse yet: Betty Lou Luce.

"I've realized that I am the definition of a family boy who is making it work for him. I'm just going to keep going with that," he said. "There is so much opportunity in this space and there are not many people focusing on it."

The Basics

Phone number: (310) 400-5082

Website: Gogograndparent.com

Services: Transportation by Uber; meals from Postmates, Seamless, Grubhub and Munchery; delivery from Amazon Fresh, Google Express and Instacart

Cost: Free to call. Customers pay the same rates as offered by the transportation, meal and delivery providers.

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