

## Out of Sight but Front of Mind

*How technology can help the 'guilty middle aged' care for elderly parents when they often live far away*

*By Peter Robertshaw, cloudBuy plc*

It's easy to go about our daily lives under the assumption that our parents will always be around to help and support us. However when they grow older or ill health strikes, the tables can turn rather quickly. All of a sudden it's the middle aged offspring who must step in and make important decisions about their health, mobility and how best to support them in the future.

It is difficult to juggle this added responsibility while holding down a job, raising a family and managing all of our other commitments. The emotional strain alone can take its toll, especially if you live many miles away, don't know what quality help and support is available locally and can't be physically there as much as you'd like.

Traditionally we've found information about carers, cleaners, care homes, lunch clubs and charity help etc. from local sources such as neighbours, cards in shop windows and newspaper adverts. When you live hundreds of miles away or in another country, these resources are impossible to access.

In my case I was living more than 3 hours' drive away from my parents, when my mother began to show early signs of dementia and my father started experiencing other health issues. My sisters and I quickly realised they couldn't go on as before but to be honest we didn't know the best places to turn for information on help and support options. It was almost impossible to find good quality details about local care and support, that showed the full range of trusted options from free to self-funded.

Eventually we took the decision to arrange for them to move into the nearest available care home. I like to think they were happy there but it was certainly a big shock for them to suddenly have to move out of the family home where they'd lived for over 50 years. Given more time or better information could we have found a different solution that enabled them to better retain their independence?

This seems to be a growing issue for my generation. Several of my work colleagues at cloudBuy, are experiencing similar situations. They are living remotely from parents with failing health who are losing their independence. Lyn Duncan, our CEO, lives in Berkshire, and had to quickly look for a qualified physiotherapist for her mother who lives near Aberdeen. It proved so difficult to find trustworthy information remotely, that she eventually resorted to 'kidnapping' her mother, flying her from Aberdeen to Berkshire so that she could get her the treatment she'd need.

Another colleague Lucy Auchincloss, cloudBuy's Head of Customer Services, was based in Australia when the health of her mother in Scotland rapidly declined. Putting a support plan in place meant frantic online searching and a stream of phone calls to potential care providers on the other side of the world, with little information on their skills and trustworthiness.

At cloudBuy, we realised that there must be millions of us 'guilty middle-aged' out there doing our best but wondering if we'd made the right decisions based on full information in exceptionally difficult circumstances. One in five of individuals will need care support, so thousands more people are put in this situation every single year.

As a company, cloudBuy provides e-commerce solutions for buyers and sellers. We wondered if we could apply the online marketplace technology we provide to clients around the world to the social

care sector. It was then that we came up with the idea for [myCareSupermarket](#), a national online resource that could assist people find and purchase trusted care products and services, wherever they are and whenever they need them.

Taking our inspiration from the consumer shopping websites with which we are all familiar, we have built a “one-stop shop”, containing everything needed to put a support plan in place, and access the help and support to deliver it. Users can enter the postcode of their relatives and find anything from approved home care to nursing support, even tele-health devices and mobility aids.

To help deliver [myCareSupermarket](#) cloudBuy has partnered with the social enterprise Salvere CIC which is devoted to helping members of the public to plan, set-up and manage care for themselves or their relatives. Individuals can pick up the phone and speak to a friendly independent advisor who will help to build a care plan and advise on what’s needed. The [myCareSupermarket](#) website can then be used to access local and national suppliers, requesting more information or purchasing goods and services there and then.

Local and national care suppliers of all sizes including NRS, Carver Care, Sure Safe and Homecare Mellor have already joined [myCareSupermarket](#). It is increasing their market visibility and enabling them to build more personal relationships with the public, in a sector where spend is around £24bn per year and growing. We expect many more care suppliers to join the marketplace in the coming months.

Unfortunately we can’t take away all of the emotional stress of looking after an elderly and increasingly dependent parent. However, we hope we can make it that little bit easier to play an active role in finding them the most appropriate care solutions for their needs, wherever you are and whenever care is needed.

The older generation are increasingly comfortable with using the internet themselves, based on their experience of communicating with their children and grandchildren, booking holidays and shopping online. [myCareSupermarket](#) also provides them with the opportunity to self-service to meet their own growing care needs and a tool to help them remain independent for longer.

For more information visit: [www.myCareSupermarket.com](http://www.myCareSupermarket.com)