

# Net continues making inroads in usage

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Home Internet usage hit 55 percent by 2003 propelling a jump in online news and e-commerce, according to a Census Bureau report released Thursday.

"Computer and Internet Use in the United States: 2003," reported that the Internet has become a major venue for the dissemination of news with the proportion of adults who used the Internet to find information on "news, weather, or sports" increasing from 7 percent to 40 percent between 1997 and 2003.

The report also showed the usage of the Internet for e-commerce has grown to the point where the Net is "an integral part of the economy." According to the Census, in 2003 nearly half (47 percent) of adults used the Internet to find information on products or services. About one-third (32 percent) actually purchased a product or service online, compared with only 2 percent of adults who shopped online in 1997.

Also, in a measure of how interpersonal communications are changing, more than half of adults (55 percent) used e-mail or instant messaging in 2003, up from the only 12 percent who did so in 1997.

This burgeoning use of the Internet for news, e-commerce and communication is a function of the increasing number of Americans who have Internet access. The Census reported that in 2003, 70 million U.S. households (62 percent) had one or more computers and that 55 percent of households had Internet access, more than triple the number of households with Net access in 1997 (18 percent).

The Census report, however, noted that seniors, African-Americans and Hispanics have had a lower computer-adoption rate compared to whites. For instance, of households over 65 years old, only 35 percent have PCs, while 45 percent of households with an African-American or Hispanic householder have a computer.

The report said that the presence of a school-aged child has had a heavy influence on computer ownership and Internet access. According to the Census, more than three-quarters of households with a school-aged child (6-17 years old) had a computer and 67 percent had Internet access.

Affluent households showed the highest rate of Internet access with 95 percent of households with incomes of \$100,000 or more owning computers and 92 percent having Internet access. Among families with incomes below \$25,000, 41 percent had PCs and 31 percent had Internet access.

Of the over 45 percent of total households that did not have Net access at home in 2003, the three most commonly cited reasons were "don't need it," "not interested" and "cost are too high."

Age was a large factor in disinterest: The Census report showed that of the 20 million households who stated they were not interested in the Internet, over 60 percent (12.7 million) were aged 55 and older.

Census reported that the computer gender gap of the '80s and '90s was nearly reversed with almost equal numbers of men and women having computers at home, with men leading by a small margin.

According to the Census, most of the estimates in its reports were obtained in October 2003 from the Current Population Survey.

In related news, a mid-October report from Nielsen//NetRatings showed

that almost three-quarters of British Netsurfers (73 percent) now access the Internet from home using broadband compared to 46 percent this time last year -- a "phenomenal growth" of 59 percent. Broadband users spend twice as long on their computers and view 3.5 times as many Web pages each month as narrowband users.

Nielsen European Internet Analyst Alex Burmaster said, "Broadband is not only good news for surfers -- providing them with more efficient Internet access -- but great news for Web site owners. Broadband users generally spend twice as long on their PC's, visit twice as many sites, view three and a half times more pages and download more multimedia content than narrowband users."

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