

Online bill paying on the increase

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More than half of U.S. online households pay at least one bill online, according to a survey by CheckFree.

CheckFree Corp. announced Friday the most recent results of a survey conducted twice annually by CheckFree Analytic Research Services with The Marketing Workshop Inc. and Harris Interactive, revealing that 56 percent of U.S. online households are paying at least one bill online, up from 52 percent in June 2004.

The survey also found that 87 percent of users who pay their bills from a single "consolidated" Web site, such as a bank, brokerage, credit union or Internet portal, say they receive the service for free.

Also, for the first time online banking and bill pay features surpassed the more traditional bank-selection criteria of bank branch and ATM proximity to home. The availability of online banking and bill-pay features ranked third among the top three factors in selecting a bank for personal accounts, following "availability of free checking" and "reasonable fees and service charges."

"Today's Internet user has several options when choosing to pay bills online. Consumers can pay individual bills at a 'biller direct' Web site, such as a utility, telecommunications or credit card company, or pay any bill from a single 'consolidated' Web site like their bank," says Matt Lewis, executive vice president and general manager of CheckFree's Electronic Commerce Division.

"Paying bills online is in the mainstream, and for the first time online banking and bill pay has moved into the top three factors considered by consumers when choosing a bank," he added.

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