

# Globe Talk: Web not answer to all just yet

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Make no mistake. There's no turning back on the Internet. But while shopping, dating or watching videos online is fast becoming the norm, some people are realizing that there's a limit to how much the World Wide Web can actually deliver on its promises, at least for now.

So while Internet giants such as Yahoo! are trying to consolidate their travel planning capabilities by bringing together more hotels, airlines and other providers under one roof to lure in more users, there is evidence that fewer people are going online to arrange their next holiday.

According to a study released by the New York-based private research group the Conference Board, fewer people are using the Internet to meet their travel needs than two years ago. The board's Internet barometer study surveyed 10,000 households across the United States and found that only 28 percent of all men and 25 percent of women plan to research airline rates and availability over the next three months, compared to 41 percent of men and 25 percent of women in 2004.

Still, the group argued that the decline may be less to do with the capabilities of the Internet than the fact that more people are feeling squeezed financially this year than they did two years ago.

"Vacation plans may have fallen victim to higher gas prices, rising travel costs, and an increasingly uncertain economic outlook," argued Lynn Franco, director of the board's consumer research center. "The latest consumer confidence survey shows consumers' vacation intentions are at a two-year low and this slowing in the rate of travel-related activity

online only adds to overall concerns," she added.

Certainly, sites that offer practical information about local travel remain popular, most notably for driving instructions and weather reports. But when it comes to accessing information on services that could cost a few hundred dollars, the hits become fewer. Only 19 percent of men and 15 percent of women said they will be booking airline tickets online over the next three months.

Still, worries about personal finances aren't the only factor keeping the Internet from being the ultimate source of information. For one, the board found that people still turn to newspapers and their classified sections when it comes to looking for jobs that will allow them to go on holiday in the first place. In a survey released late last year, the Conference Board found that 75 percent of job-seekers go the old-fashioned route and look for positions in newspapers, while 60 percent actually went online.

"Newspapers are still the most common method of looking for a job in three of the four major regions across the U.S. and in all but the top income group. The Western (United States) is the only area of the country where the Internet topped newspapers among those seeking jobs. An impressive 63 percent of job searchers 55 years and older in the Western (United States) reported searching the Internet, while just 36 percent of this age group did so in the Southern (United States)," the board stated.

Of course, the reason why people don't go online as much as they turn to their local dailies may be because there are fewer job postings on the Internet precisely because of economic concerns. At the beginning of this year only 1.632 million jobs were posted on the World Wide Web, considerably below the 2.131 million postings that were placed in August 2005.

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