

We all want the latest tech toy, study says

September 9 2009, By Steve Johnson

Like it or not, we're now officially a nation of technology-obsessed, gadget-loving geeks.

At least, so says Forrester Research, based on a new survey by mail of nearly 48,000 people in the United States. The Cambridge, Mass., marketing firm found that lust for the latest electronic toys is rapidly expanding and cutting across all sectors of society, from the very young to the aged.

Not only are older technologies such as personal computers and mobile phones in the majority of U.S. households, but newer technologies such as [high-definition television](#) sets are becoming ubiquitous, too.

"Nearly 10 million households added an HDTV set to their home last year," the study said, and the trend shows no signs of slowing.

About 58 million households have an HDTV today, and that is expected to grow to more than 85 million by 2013. Over that same period, the study predicted, the nearly 80 million households with broadband Internet access will surge to nearly 93 million, and the 92 million homes with a PC will reach nearly 100 million.

Aside from providing new forms of entertainment and boosting productivity, many of the latest gadgets to hit the market are connecting us to other people, "so this is truly a social revolution," said Paul Saffo, a well-known [Silicon Valley](#) technology forecaster and consulting associate professor at Stanford.

However, he added, "we really are rapidly reaching a saturation point" where consumers' obsession with gizmos threatens to cut into their sleep time. And with all the electronic gear everyone is wearing these days, he joked, "we should all be very nervous in lightning storms."

As expected, Forrester found the young -- whom it defined as those under 40 -- to be particularly gadget-oriented.

Young singles and couples spend more time online than any other group, often accessing the Web via their phones. And if they have children, "they buy shared technology that has some payoff for the kids, which is why Blu-ray disc players, digital video camcorders, DVRs and game consoles are most prevalent in these [households](#)," the study said.

But older people are snapping up tech toys, too, said Jackie Anderson, who co-authored the study, adding, "to see that proliferation was definitely a surprise."

Of those 40 and older who have children, 84 percent are online and two-thirds have broadband. They are heavy purchasers of PCs, laptops, MP3 players, HDTVs and portable GPS devices, as well. "They are no Luddites," the report concluded, adding that their Internet usage -- uniquely -- is almost evenly split between home and work.

In addition, while 93 percent of young families have a mobile phone -- the most of any group -- older families tend to have the most phones per household, with 57 percent owning at least three. And those over 40 who have no children are especially avid online shoppers, spending more via the Web over a three-month period than any other group.

The over-40 crowd also is swelling the ranks of video game enthusiasts.

"Half of older families are casual gamers," the study found. And

although Nintendo's Wii console is popular among all age groups, it added, "older families are much more likely to own Microsoft's Xbox 360 than any other group."

How many gizmos are too many depends on whom you talk to.

Take 40-year-old Surd Prathnadi of Fremont, who says his technology acquisitions include two HDTVs, laptops and an iPhone.

"I don't consider myself hard-core," he said. "Most of the gadgets are pretty helpful."

However, Gina Gomez has a different view.

"I hate [gadgets](#)," the 38-year-old San Jose resident said. "I don't even have a cell phone anymore. It's such a hassle."

Nonetheless, that didn't stop Gomez from plunging into a Fry's Electronics store on Wednesday on a buying mission for her boyfriend.

"I'm going to get him an earpiece for his phone," she explained, "because he's a gadget guy."

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