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Teens Using Internet in Record Numbers

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By MARTHA IRVINE

CHICAGO (AP) - A new survey says that the Internet has all but saturated the youth market.

The report compiled for the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that nearly nine out of 10 young people, ages 12 through 17, have online access - up from about three-quarters of young people in 2000.

By comparison, about 66 percent of American adults now use the Internet.

David Pulliam, a 17-year-old high school senior from Indianapolis, is a typical example of a wired teen.

He first got access to the Internet when he was 13, as did most of those who were surveyed. He has a blog and loves to use instant messaging to stay in touch with friends he's met at camps and sporting events. He also gets his news online, as do about three-quarters of teen Internet users who were surveyed. That's an increase of about 38 percent, compared with 2000 results.

"It's hard to imagine my life without it," Pulliam says of the Net. "In some ways, life would become a little easier because it would slow down. But it would become a lot more boring and hard because you would always be waiting for letters and responses."

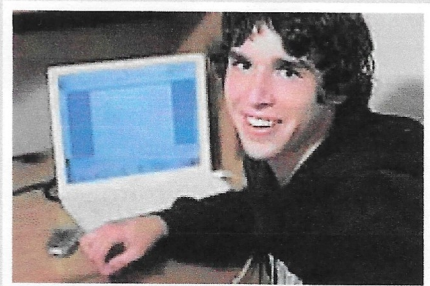
At the same time, he says he and his friends also have honed their Internet use - seeing it more as a tool for communication or research than "a novelty."

Amanda Lenhart, a Pew researcher, says that rings true with the findings of the survey. "Teens are very selective - they're smart about their technology use," she says. "They use it for the kinds of things they need to do."

As one teen in a focus group told her: "If you're asking for your parents to extend your curfew, you don't send an e-mail."

The survey, completed in late 2004, included responses from 1,100 young people who were contacted randomly by phone. It has a margin of error of four percentage points. Its findings included the following:

- Of those surveyed, 87 percent said they use the Internet. About half of the young people who have online access say they go on the Internet every day, up from 42 percent in 2000.
- Three-quarters of wired teens use instant message, compared with 42 percent of online adults who do so. Teens most often reserve IMing for friends and e-mail for adults, including parents and teachers.



(AP) David Pulliam, a 17-year-old high school senior, sits at his desk at a Cornerstone University...

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- About half of families with teens who have an Internet connection have speedier broadband access, while the other half still use phone lines to connect.
- Nearly a third of teens who use IM have used it to send a music or video file.
- While 45 percent of those surveyed have cell phones, those phones aren't necessarily the preferred mode of communication. Given a choice, about half of online teens still use land lines to call friends, while about a quarter prefer IMing and 12 percent say they'd rather call a friend on a cell phone.
- Older teen girls who were surveyed, ages 15 to 17, are among the most intense users of the Internet and cell phones, including text messaging.

"It debunks the myth of the tech-savvy boy," Lenhart says. As young people get Internet access at younger ages, that trend may only continue.

Back in Indianapolis, for instance, Pulliam's 13-year-old sister, Anna, says she first set up an e-mail account at age 8 - and started using it regularly at age 10. She's been IMing since she was 11 - and already has a blog. She also uploads photos from her digital camera to a Web site to share with friends.

She does not have a cell phone yet - though she notes that many people her age do.

That leads technology trackers to predict that text messaging, done by about a third of those surveyed who have cell phones, will grow in popularity.

"The more other kids are doing it, the more kids want to do it," says Susannah Stern, an assistant professor of communications studies at the University of San Diego.

Still, as wired as many young people are, she says the fact that about 3 million of them remain without Internet access is cause for concern. Many of them are low-income and a disproportionate number are black, the survey found.

"When so many teenagers have such access, the few that don't are at a significant disadvantage," Stern says.

Daniel Bassill, who heads an organization that helps build the computer skills of low-income youth in Chicago, says it's an even greater challenge to find people to teach teens how to use the Internet.

"Even the kids that have access don't necessarily have people mentoring them to use the information to their greatest advantage," says Bassill, president of Cabrini Connections and the Tutor/Mentor Connection.

On the Net:

Pew: <http://www.pewinternet.org>

Cabrini Connections: <http://www.cabriniconnections.net/>

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