



Internet use is up, but so are concerns

Census report finds 55 % of Americans have access at home

The Associated Press

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WASHINGTON - Computer and Internet use is up, but so are concerns about identity theft and other online dangers. Fifty-five percent of American households had access to the Internet at home in 2003, more than triple the percentage in 1997, according to a report released Thursday by the Census Bureau.

Internet usage increased with education, income and the presence of school-age children at home, the report found. It was lowest among adults who have not graduated from high school.

School-age children are most likely to use home computers to play games or do school work. Adults are most likely to use home computers for e-mail, to search for information about products and services, and to read news, weather and sports information.

The report is based on data from the bureau's October 2003 Current Population Survey, the country's primary source of labor statistics. It is the bureau's latest information on computer and Internet use, though it is two years old and experts say Americans' computer habits are quickly evolving.

"We actually think the (Internet) penetration in households is higher," said Greg Stuart, president and CEO of the Internet Advertising Bureau, which helps online companies increase revenue.

A report this year by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 68 percent of adults use the Internet, up from 63 percent last year. It found that 22 percent of American adults have never used the Internet.

Susannah Fox, who worked on the Pew report, said age and education were the strongest predictors of whether someone uses the Internet. Young adults were the most likely to use the Internet, with a big drop-off among people 70 and older.

Advertisers are taking advantage of increased Internet use, said Stuart, who expects Internet advertising revenue to reach nearly \$12 billion this year, more than double the amount from five years ago.

Identity theft worries

But even as Internet access increases, computer users are being more careful about sharing personal information online.

A survey released this week by Consumer Reports Webwatch found that 86 percent of computer users have changed their online behavior in some way because of concerns about identity theft. A little more than half stopped giving out personal information on the Web, while 25 percent said they stopped making online purchases.

The Consumer Reports survey of 1,501 adult Internet users was done in May and June and has a margin of sampling error of 3 percentage points.

"The consumers are becoming more educated," said Clint Kreitner, president and CEO of the Center for Internet Security. "At the same time, the nature of the criminal activity on the Internet is increasing."

The [Census report](#) found that 32 percent of adult Internet users purchased products or services online, up from 2 percent in 1997.

Kreitner said it is safe for online shoppers to provide companies with their credit card numbers, as long as the site is protected by encryption software.

"Putting your credit card number on an encrypted site is much safer than giving it to a waiter and letting it out of your sight," Kreitner said.

Among the Census Bureau's findings on computer and Internet use:

- Since 2000, rates of computer use have become more uniform across the country. Computers are most prevalent in the West, where 59 percent of households have them. They are least prevalent in the South, where 52 percent of households have them.
- Alaska, New Hampshire and Colorado have the highest rates of Internet use; Mississippi, Arkansas and Louisiana have the lowest.
- Women are slightly more likely than men to use a computer at home, reversing a historical trend.
- Fifty-six percent of working adults used a computer at work, and 42 percent used the Internet on the job.
- Among those without access to the Internet, 39 percent said they don't need it or are not interested, while 23 percent said the costs are too high.

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