

KEY FACTS

Fall 2002

Teens Online

The past several years have seen an explosion in teenagers' use of the Internet. In response to the growing online presence of teens, a digital media culture has emerged that entertains, informs, and connects teens to one another. This "virtual mall" is a place where teens go to socialize with friends, listen to music, do their homework, window shop, and follow the latest trends.

Prevalence of Teens Online

- Census Bureau data indicate that between 1998 and 2001, the proportion of teens (ages 14–17) using the Internet increased from 51% to 75%, and the proportion of "tweens" online (ages 10–13) increased from 39% to 65%.¹
- According to a survey conducted by the Pew Internet Project in Fall 2000, 73% of all teens ages 12–17 have used the Internet.² A survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation in Fall 2001 found that 95% of all teens ages 15–17 had ever gone online.³

How Teens Learn to Use the Internet

- Most kids say they teach themselves how to use the Internet (40%), while others learn from their parents (30%) or friends (23%), and fewer from siblings (10%) or in a class (5%).⁴

Where Teens Access the Net

- Census data from Fall 2001 indicate that half (51%) of kids ages 10–13 and 61% of those ages 14–17 have Internet access at home.⁵
- Another survey of older teens (15–17) found an even higher percentage with online access at home: 83%, including 29% with access from their bedrooms.⁶
- A survey of families with home Internet access indicates that 7 out of 10 (70%) locate the computer in an open space such as a family room, den, study, or living room, whereas almost 3 in 10 (27%) put the computer in a private area such as a bedroom.⁷

- According to U.S. Census data, 43% of teens 14–17 use the Internet both at home and school, 19% only at home, and 13% only at school.⁸

How Often Teens Go Online

- Studies indicate that close to half of teens go online every day, with the vast majority going online at least once a week.⁹

How Much Time Teens Spend Online

- Teens (12–17) with home Internet access typically spend almost as much time online each day (46 minutes) as reading books (49 minutes), playing video games (55 minutes) or talking on the telephone (60 minutes).¹⁰
- Among older teens (15–17), a third use the Internet for 6 hours a week or more, 24% for 3–5 hours, 23% for 1–2 hours a week, and 20% for one hour a week or less.¹¹

Factors Affecting Teen Online Access

Family Income

- Census data indicate that children 10–17 from the lowest income households (less than \$45,000 a year) are only about half as likely as kids from the highest income bracket (more than \$75,000 a year) to use the Internet (46% versus 88%) and are four times as likely to go online only at school (21% versus 5%).¹²
- Comparing across income categories, another study found a significant difference in online access between high- and low-income households with children ages 2–17: (24%) of low income families had home Internet access, compared to (58%) of middle-income families, and (79%) of high-income families.¹³

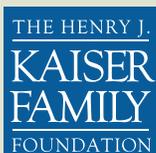
Race and Ethnicity

- According to U.S. Census data, about half of all Black and Hispanic teens do not use the Internet, compared to just one in five White or Asian American/Pacific Islander youths.¹⁴

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Online Teen Media

- According to Nielsen Net/Ratings, commercial Web sites specifically designed for teens are the most popular places for youths ages 12–17 to visit when they go online from home.¹⁵
- A survey of the top teen commercial Web sites conducted by the Center for Media Education (CME) identified several popular themes: music (68%), film (54%), relationships (52%), advice (49%), and fashion (43%).¹⁶
- The CME survey also identified an alternative teen culture existing online. Although small in comparison to the commercial online culture, these “youth civic media” Web sites are devoted to cultivating self-expression and encouraging volunteerism and civic participation.¹⁷

Popular Online Activities

Schoolwork

- The Internet is a primary research tool for teens. Census data indicates that 85% of older teens 14–17 and 77% of tweens 10–13 go online to do schoolwork.¹⁸ Among those teens who are online, 94% use the Internet for school research and 34% have downloaded a study aid.¹⁹
- The Internet is increasingly replacing the library as a primary research tool for doing major school projects. Online teens are three times more likely to rely mostly on Internet sources than library sources for their research (71% versus 24%).²⁰

E-Mail and Instant Messaging

- E-mail is the most popular online activity for teens and its popularity increases as kids get older. Reports indicate that upwards of 90% of teens and 64% of tweens use e-mail.²¹
- Approximately 74% of online teens use instant messaging (IM).²²
- Some online teens still prefer the telephone to communicate with friends, while others are replacing the telephone with the Internet. One study found that a majority (71%) of online teens 12–17 continue to use the telephone more often than the Web to contact friends.²³
- More than half (56%) of online teens 12–17 have more than one e-mail address and/or screen name.²⁴

Health Information

- One survey of online 12 to 17-year-olds found that one in four (26%) say they have gone online to look for “diet, health, or fitness” information.²⁵
- Another study of online teens 15–17 asked whether respondents had ever gone online to look for information on a series of youth-related health issues and found that three-quarters (76%) had researched one or more of those topics, including

HIV/AIDS (31%), drug or alcohol abuse (25%), sexually transmitted diseases (24%), smoking (23%), pregnancy or birth control (21%), and depression or mental illness (18%).²⁶

- Among those ages 15–17 who have looked for health information on the Web, more than half (53%) say they have had conversations with a parent or other adult about what they found online.²⁷
- Four in ten teen online health seekers (41%) say they have changed their behavior because of health information they found online.²⁸

POPULAR ONLINE ACTIVITIES

Online Youth, ages 15–17, Fall 2001

94% send e-mail
94% research schoolwork
85% get info on movies, music, or TV
81% play games
80% download music
78% get news
71% participate in chat room
50% check sports scores
36% buy something

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Generation Rx.com*

E-Commerce

- While visiting a Web site, teens are often asked about their habits and interests, as well as those of their parents. More than a third (39%) of teens 13–17 say they have given out information about themselves and their parents, including their allowance, names of their parents' favorite stores, and how their parents spend their weekends.²⁹
- Teens are much more likely to research a product online (66%) than purchase one (31%).³⁰

Pornography and Internet Filters

- Given that adult sex sites often appear as spam in e-mails, teens and children are at increased risk of exposure to sexually explicit material when they go online. One study found that 7 in 10 (70%) teens ages 15–17 say they have accidentally come across pornography on the Internet, including 23% who say this happens “very” or “somewhat” often.³¹
- Approximately 1 in 7 (15%) teens admit to lying about their age to access a Web site. Teen boys are more likely to do this than girls (19% versus 11%), especially boys ages 15–17 (25%).³²

- More than three out of four (76%) teens 15–17 with Internet access at school say there are filters designed to prevent access to adult content on the computers they use at school.³³
- A third (33%) of those 15–17 with Internet access at home say there is some kind of filtering or blocking product on their home computer.³⁴
- Among teens 15–17 who have sought health information online, 46% say they have been blocked from a non-pornographic site.³⁵

Differences Between Girls and Boys

- Studies indicate that boys and girls are equally likely to have gone online: a recent national survey of teens ages 15–17 found that 94% of boys and 95% of girls had gone online.³⁶
- Teen boys spend slightly more time online than teen girls: among online teens 15–17, boys spend an average of 42 minutes a week more than girls do online (7.6 hours versus 6.9 hours a week).³⁷
- Teen girls and boys use the Internet for many of the same reasons: similar proportions browse the Web for fun, visit entertainment sites, look for news, visit a chat room, listen to music, check their club or sports team Web sites, visit sites where they can express their opinions, or find information that is hard to talk about with other people.³⁸
- Playing games online is one of the major gender differences in Internet use. One study found that among teens 12–17, 75% of boys download and play games compared to 57% of girls.³⁹

Impact on Family and Friends

- Among middle-schoolers and high-schoolers, going online tends to be a solitary activity. Three out of five report going online alone rather than with siblings or peers to explore Web sites (61% versus 21%) or visit chat rooms (61% versus 16%). Few share online activities with a parent for any reason, whether to visit Web sites (6%) or chat rooms (10%).⁴⁰
- Almost 2 out of 3 (64%) teens express a concern that their Internet use reduces their family time.⁴¹
- Although most online teens are not concerned about the impact of their own use, almost two-thirds (62%) think that the Internet keeps others their age from doing more important things.⁴²
- Most teens (62%) do not think online time detracts from time they spend with friends; in fact, almost half (48%) of those with home access say the Internet strengthens their friendships.⁴³ However, most (67%) say the Internet is not that helpful when trying to make new friends.⁴⁴

KEY SOURCES

U.S. Department of Commerce, *A Nation Online: How Americans Are Expanding Their Use of the Internet*.

Released: February 2002. **Conducted:** September 2001. **Sample:** U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey of 57,000 households across the United States. Relevant findings are among those ages 10–17, with further age breaks of 10-13 and 14-17.

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, *Generation Rx.com: How Young People Use the Internet for Health Information*. **Released:** December 2001.

Conducted: Fall 2001. **Sample:** National random dial telephone survey among 1,209 respondents ages 15–24. Statistics in this report are based on respondents ages 15–17 (N=398).

Pew Internet & American Life Project, *Teenage Life Online: The Rise of the Instant-Message Generation*.

Released: June 2001. **Conducted:** Fall 2000.

Sample: Telephone survey of 754 online children ages 12–17 and 754 of their parents or guardians. Sample was selected based on tracking interviews.

The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, *Media in the Home 2000: The Fifth Annual Survey of Parents and Children*. **Released:**

June 2000. **Conducted:** Spring 2000. **Sample:** Random dial telephone survey of 1,235 parents of children ages 2–17. Reported for subsamples of children ages 12–17.

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kids & Media @ the New Millennium*. **Released:** November

1999. **Conducted:** Fall 1998/Spring 1999. **Sample:** Nationally representative sample of 3,155 children ages 2–18, including more than 2,000 written questionnaires completed by children ages 8 and older and more than 1,000 in-home interviews with parents of children ages 2–7. The data are reported for teens 14–18, in addition to the whole sample of children 2–18 years old.

¹ U.S. Department of Commerce, *A Nation Online: How Americans are Expanding Their Use of the Internet* (Washington, D.C.: NTIA and ESA, February 2002), 43, <<http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/dn/>> (23 September 2002).

² Amanda Lenhart, Lee Rainie, and Oliver Lewis, *Teenage Life Online: The Rise of the Instant-Message Generation and the Internet's Impact on Friendships and Family Relationships* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2001), 3, 12, <http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/pdfs/PIP_Teens_Report.pdf> (23 September 2002). For the purpose of this fact sheet, this study is referred to as Pew Internet & American Life Project.

³ Kaiser Family Foundation, *Generation Rx.com: How Young People Use the Internet for Health Information* (Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation, December 2001), 4, <<http://www.kff.org/content/2001/20011211a/GenerationRx.pdf>> (23 September 2002).

⁴ Pew Internet & American Life Project, 26. Numbers do not add up to 100% because multiple responses were accepted.

⁵ U.S. Department of Commerce, 46.

⁶ Kaiser Family Foundation, 4.

⁷ Pew Internet & American Life Project, 32.

⁸ U.S. Department of Commerce, 46. Less than 2% of teens go online at locations other than home or school. Studies from the Pew Internet & American Life Project and the Kaiser Family Foundation show similar results. Pew found that one in ten (11%) online teens get their primary or only access to the Internet at school (12%), while Kaiser's study found that 73% of online 15- to 17-year-olds go online most often from home, 14% most often from school, 7% from a friend's house, and 2% from a library (survey dataset).

⁹ Pew's study of online 12- to 17-year-olds, conducted in Fall 2000, found that 42% went online every day, while 33% said they went online a few times a week (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 13). Kaiser's study of teens 15–17, conducted in Fall 2001, found that 47% went online at least once a day, 31% went online a few times a week, and 11% went online at least once a week (Kaiser Family Foundation, 15).

¹⁰ Emory Woodard, *Media in the Home 2000: The Fifth Annual Survey of Parents and Children* (Philadelphia, PA: The Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2000), 22, <<http://www.appcpenn.org/mediainhome/survey/survey7.pdf>> (23 September 2002). For the purpose of this fact sheet, this study is referred to as Annenberg Public Policy Center.

¹¹ Kaiser Family Foundation, survey dataset.

¹² U.S. Department of Commerce., 50.

¹³ Annenberg Public Policy Center, 12–13. Low-income families are defined as those with annual incomes of less than \$30,000 per year, middle-income are between \$30,000 and \$74,000, and high-income are more than \$75,000.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Commerce finds that 48% of Black 10- to 17-year-olds do not go online, compared to 52% of Hispanic and 20% of White and Asian American/Pacific Islander youth in this age group (50).

¹⁵ David Lake, "Teens Turn On, Tune In, Log Off," *The Industry Standard*, 23 July 2001, <<http://www.thestandard.com/article/0,1902,28158,00.html>> (23 September 2002). Some of the frequently visited sites include: Teen.com, Teenpeople.com, Katrillon.com, Sparknotes.com, Badassbuddy.com, Blink182.com, Coolquiz.com, Teenmag.com, Teenchat.com.

¹⁶ Center for Media Education, *TeenSites.com: A Field Guide to the New Digital Landscape* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Media Education, 2001), 19, <<http://www.cme.org>> (23 September 2002). It is noted in the report that the results are intended to be an approximation of the distribution of various content, features, and practices

and not based on a representative sample of teen Web sites because it is difficult to characterize content that is user-centered and ephemeral in nature.

¹⁷ Center for Media Education, 58–75.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Commerce, 52–53.

¹⁹ Pew Internet & American Life Project, 35. The findings cited are for online 12- to 17-year-olds.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 35–36.

²¹ Percentages vary for different age categories across studies. Pew reports 92% of those ages 12–17 use e-mail (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 38); Annenberg reports 90% of teens 13–17 use e-mail [Joseph Turow and Lilach Nir, *The Internet and the Family 2000* (Philadelphia, PA: The Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2000), 9, <http://www.appcpenn.org/internet/family/finalrepor_fam.pdf> (23 September 2002)]; U.S. Department of Commerce reports 82% of teens 14–17 years old and 64% of those ages 10–13 use the Internet for e-mail, 53.

²² Pew Internet & American Life Project, 20.

²³ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁶ Kaiser Family Foundation, survey dataset, 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Turow and Nir, 29; The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) requires Web sites to obtain verifiable parental consent before collecting, using, or disclosing any personal information from children under age 13. For more information about the act and compliance, see <<http://www.ftc.gov>>.

³⁰ Pew Internet & American Life Project, 6.

³¹ Kaiser Family Foundation, 12.

³² Pew Internet & American Life Project, 33.

³³ Kaiser Family Foundation, 13.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Kaiser Family Foundation, survey dataset; Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kids & Media @ the New Millennium* (Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation, 1999), 50.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Pew Internet & American Life Project, 38.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁰ Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kids & Media @ the New Millennium*, 64.

⁴¹ Pew Internet & American Life Project, 28.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

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