

**DATA MEMO**

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**RE: Internet penetration and impact  
April 2006**

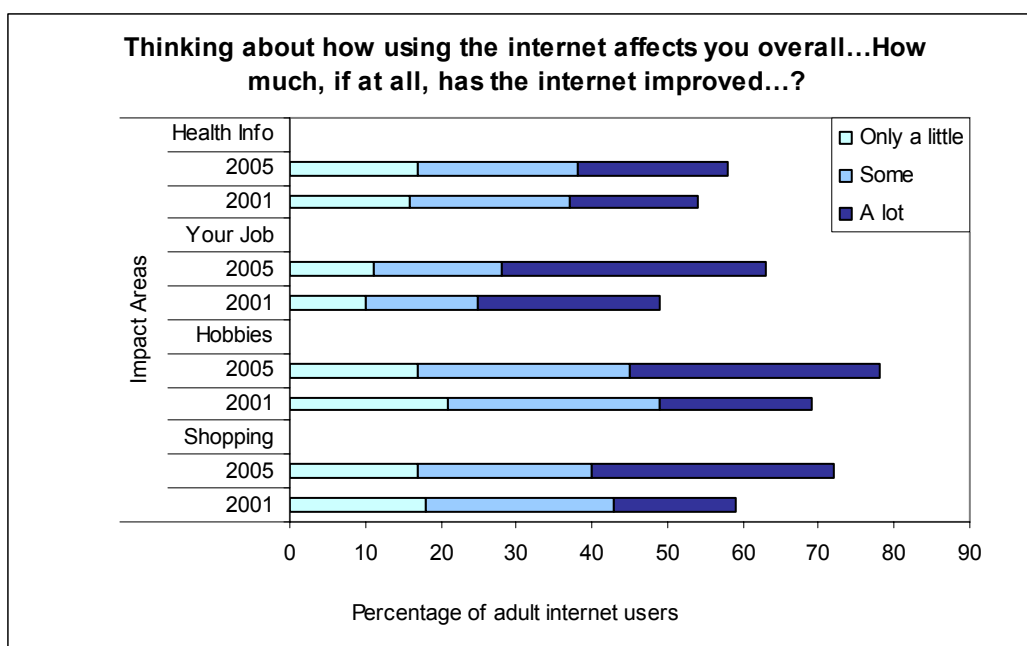
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*Internet penetration has now reached 73% for all American adults. Internet users note big improvements in their ability to shop and the way they pursue hobbies and personal interests online*

*The importance of the internet in key areas is growing*

As one measure of the impact of the internet, we have repeatedly asked online Americans whether or not the internet has improved various aspects of their life. Over time, internet users have become more likely to note big improvements in their ability to shop and the way they pursue their hobbies and interests. A majority of internet users also consistently report that the internet helps them to do their job and improves the way they get information about health care. Some key findings are listed below:

- The share of online Americans who say the internet has greatly improved their **ability to shop** has doubled—from 16% to 32%—since March 2001.
- The share of online Americans who say the internet has greatly improved the **way they pursue hobbies and interests** has grown to 33%, up from 20% in March 2001.
- The share of online Americans who say the internet has greatly improved their **ability to do their job** has grown to 35%, up from 24% in March 2001.
- The share of online Americans who say the internet has greatly improved the **way they get information about health care** has grown to 20%, up from 17% in March 2001.



Source: For 2005 data, Pew Internet & American Life Project November-December 2005 Tracking Survey, n=1,931 adult internet users, 18 and older. Margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points for results based on internet users. For 2001 data, Pew Internet & American Life Project March 2001 Longitudinal Callback Survey, n=862 adult internet users, 18 and older. Margin of error is plus or minus 4 percentage points for results based on internet users.

***Those who use the internet most cite the biggest improvements***

In all four categories (health information, job, hobbies and shopping), the internet earns the highest marks among the most frequent users. For instance, daily internet users are twice as likely to report that the internet improves their ability to do their job “a lot” when compared with those who only go online several times a week (45% vs. 17%). Likewise, 39% of daily internet users report that the internet has improved the way they pursue their hobbies and interests “a lot,” while about half as many (21%) users who go online several times per week say this.

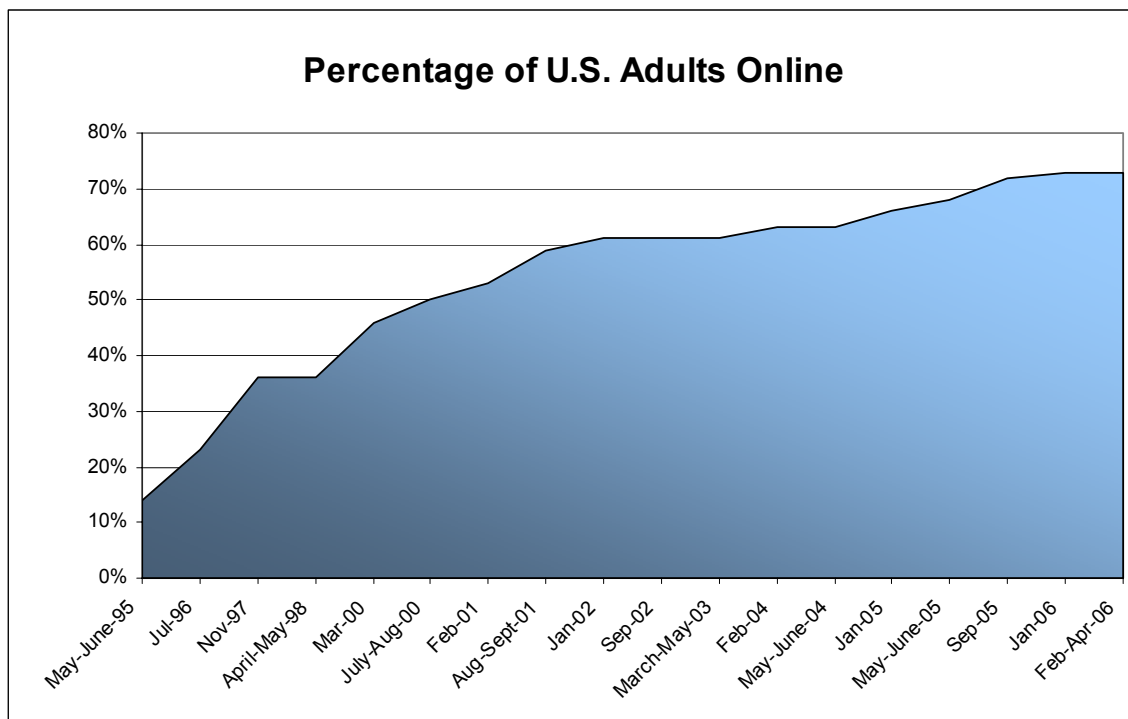
Equal shares of men and women note the positive effects of the internet in commerce and the workplace; about a third of both groups say the internet has improved their ability to shop or do their job “a lot.” Improved access to healthcare information is more likely to be noted by women (22% of female users say the internet has improved the way they get health care information “a lot” vs. 17% of male users), while greater numbers of men tout their improved ability to pursue hobbies and interests (38% of male users say the internet has improved the way they pursue their hobbies and interests “a lot” vs. 27% of female users).

For shopping, younger users are more likely to report big improvements overall, but older users report more growth over time. However, with hobbies, users under the age of 50 report *both* the most positive effects and the biggest increases since 2001. Those who note the way the internet helps them to do their job report relatively little variation according to age. Only those who are age 65 and older (and likely to be retired) are dramatically less likely to praise the internet’s role in their job. Health care also generally

yields comparable positive marks across the generations, with the most change since 2001 registering among the youngest (18-29) and oldest (65+) users.

### ***Internet penetration reaches a new high-water mark***

While the share of internet users who report positive impacts has grown, the sheer size of the internet population also continues to increase. Surveys fielded in 2006 show that internet penetration among adults in the U.S. has hit an all-time high.<sup>1</sup> While the percentage of Americans who say they use the internet has continued to fluctuate slightly, our latest survey, fielded February 15 – April 6, 2006 shows that fully 73% of respondents (about 147 million adults) are internet users, up from 66% (about 133 million adults) in our January 2005 survey. And the share of Americans who have broadband connections at home has now reached 42% (about 84 million), up from 29% (about 59 million) in January 2005.



Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Surveys, March 2000-April 2006. All surveys prior to March 2000 were conducted by the Pew Research Center for People & the Press.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Two surveys in 2006 (one fielded January 9 – February 6, 2006, and the most recent survey fielded February 15 – April 6, 2006) show that 73% of adults use the internet.

<sup>2</sup> For 1995, internet users include those who ever use a home, work or school computer and modem to connect to computer bulletin boards, information services such as CompuServe or Prodigy, or computers at other locations. For 1996 to 1998, internet users include those who ever use a home, work or school computer and modem to connect with computers over the internet, the World Wide Web, or with information services such as America Online or Prodigy. For 2000 to 2004, internet users include persons who ever go online to access the Internet or World Wide Web or to send and receive email. For 2005, internet users include those who at least occasionally use the internet or send and receive email.

As noted recently in our *Generations Online* report, internet use still varies significantly across age groups. While 88% of 18-29 year-olds now go online, 84% of 30-49 year-olds, 71% of 50-64 year-olds, and 32% of those age 65 and older say they use the internet. In a separate survey conducted in Oct-Nov 2004, we found that 87% of 12-17 year-olds use the internet.

Those in the lowest-income households are considerably less likely to be online. Just 53% of adults living in households with less than \$30,000 in annual income go online, versus 80% of those whose income is between \$30,000-50,000. Adults who live in households earning \$50,000 or more exceed the national average for internet penetration; 86% of adults living in households with annual income between \$50,000 and \$75,000 use the internet, compared with 91% of adults living in households earning more than \$75,000.

Education also remains an important indicator for internet use. While 40% of adults who have less than a high school education use the internet, 64% of adults with a high school degree go online. Among those who have some college education, 84% use the internet, and 91% of adults with at least a college degree go online.

### ***About The Pew Internet & American Life Project***

The Pew Internet & American Life Project is a non-profit initiative, fully-funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts to explore the impact of the internet on children, families, communities, health care, schools, the work place, and civic/political life. The Project is non-partisan and does not advocate for any policy outcomes. For more information, please visit our website: <http://www.pewinternet.org/>.

### ***Methodology***

The newly reported results in this report are based on data from a series of telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International between November 2005 and April 2006. For results based on the full sample of 3,011 adults, 18 and older, conducted November 29 - December 31, 2005, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 2 percentage points. For results based on internet users (n=1,931), the margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points. For results based on the full sample of 4,001 adults, 18 and older, conducted February 15 - April 6, 2006, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 2 percentage points. For results based adult internet users (n=2,822), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys may introduce some error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The sample for the most recent survey (February 15 - April 6, 2006) is a random digit sample of telephone numbers selected from telephone exchanges in the continental United States. The random digit aspect of the sample is used to avoid "listing" bias and provides representation of both listed and unlisted numbers (including not-yet-listed

numbers). The design of the sample achieves this representation by random generation of the last two digits of telephone numbers selected on the basis of their area code, telephone exchange, and bank number.

Sample was released for interviewing in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger sample. Using replicates to control the release of sample ensures that complete call procedures are followed for the entire sample. At least 10 attempts were made to complete an interview at sampled households. Calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chance of making contact with potential respondents. Each household received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone at home. In each contacted household, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest male currently at home. If no male was available, interviewers asked to speak with the oldest female at home. This systematic respondent selection technique has been shown to produce samples that closely mirror the population in terms of age and gender.

Non-response in telephone interviews produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population, and these subgroups are likely to vary also on questions of substantive interest. In order to compensate for these known biases, the sample data are weighted in analysis. The demographic weighting parameters for the most recent sample (February 15 - April 6, 2006) are derived from a special analysis of the Census Bureau's March 2005 Annual Social and Economic Supplement Survey. This analysis produces population parameters for the demographic characteristics of adults age 18 or older, living in households that contain a telephone. These parameters are then compared with the sample characteristics to construct sample weights. The weights are derived using an iterative technique that simultaneously balances the distribution of all weighting parameters.

For more information about the March 2001 Longitudinal Callback Survey, please see: [http://207.21.232.103/PPF/r/55/report\\_display.asp](http://207.21.232.103/PPF/r/55/report_display.asp)

For more information about the latest trends in internet use, please see: <http://www.pewinternet.org>