

PEW INTERNET PROJECT DATA MEMO

BY: Senior Research Fellow Deborah Fallows (202-419-4500)
RE: Browsing the Web for fun
DATE: February, 2006

***On any given day, about 40 million internet users go online just for fun
or to pass the time***

The internet is increasingly a place where Americans just hang out.

Surfing the Web has become one of the most popular activities that internet users will do online on a typical day. Some 30% of internet users go online on any given day for no particular reason, just for fun or to pass the time.

This makes the act of hanging out online one of the most popular activities tracked by the Pew Internet & American Life Project and indicates that the online environment is increasingly popular as a place for people to spend their free time. Compared to other online pursuits, the act of surfing for fun now stands only behind sending or receiving email (52% of internet users do this on a typical day) and using a search engine (38% of internet users do this on a typical day), and is in a virtual tie for third with the act of getting news online (31% of internet users do this on a typical day).

In aggregate figures, this development is striking because it represents a significant increase from the number of people who went online just to browse for fun on a typical day at the end of 2004. In a survey in late November 2004, about 25 million people went online on any given day just to browse for fun. In the Pew Internet Project survey in December, 2005, that number had risen to about 40 million people.

The Project's December survey asked about Web surfing in two ways. We asked all internet users: "Do you ever go online for no particular reason, just for fun or to pass the time?" Two-thirds of internet users, 66%, answered "yes" to this question, a percentage that has held about steady since we began asking the question in 2000.

We also asked internet users if they went online "yesterday," referring to the day before the respondent was interviewed. Respondents who said "yes" were then asked, "Did you go online for no particular reason, just for fun or to pass the time yesterday?" In this case, 30% answered "yes." We interpret the positive responses to indicate that 30% of internet users were surfing the web for fun on an average day in December 2005. This figure shows striking growth compared to previous surveys when we asked the same questions.

Who surfs the Web for fun

In the earliest days of the Web, young, white men were the most likely people to go online just to surf around with no particular purpose or destination in mind. It is still the case that being young

and male are predictors of Web surfing on a typical day. But this kind of idle browsing has a broader appeal now, cutting through all races, income groups, levels of educational accomplishment. Here are some of the factors:

Gender: Although men and women are equally likely to have tried Web surfing for fun, online men are significantly more likely than women to do this on an average day. Men have always led women to a small degree in their likelihood of going online on an average day with no particular purpose. While percentages of both men and women increased to record highs in December 2005, the increase from a year before was ever higher for men, from 24% to 34%, than for women, from 19% to 26%.

Age: Web surfing is more attractive to younger users. The younger the user, the more likely he or she is to surf for fun, either at all or on a typical day.

Internet experience: Surfing the Web for fun is something that two-thirds of internet users try, and the majority of users try it from even their earliest days online. But the more years of internet experience, the more likely users are to browse for fun on a typical day. Some 36% of internet users with six or more years of experience will surf for no particular reason on an average day, compared to fewer than a quarter of those with less experience online.

Home broadband access: Those who have broadband access at home are significantly more likely than those with dial-up to have surfed the Web for fun, and dramatically more so on a given day. Some 72% of those with home broadband have surfed the Web this way, compared with 63% of those with dial-up; and almost twice the number, 39%, do so on a typical day, compared with 23% of dial-up users.

Percentage of internet users who go online just to pass the time		
<i>Users were asked if they have ever gone online for no particular reason, and if they did this yesterday.</i>		
	Ever done this	Did this yesterday
Gender	%	%
Total	66	30
Men	68	34
Women	64	26
Age	%	%
18 - 29 yrs	82	37
30 - 49 yrs	67	31
50 - 64 yrs	55	25
65 yrs and over	49	20
Years online	%	%
6 yrs or more	70	36
4 - 5 yrs	65	25
3 yrs or less	58	15
Connection at home	%	%
Broadband	72	39
Dial-up	63	23

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, Nov. - Dec., 2005 Survey. N=1,931. Margin of error is ±2%.

Why the increase now; the beginning of a trend?

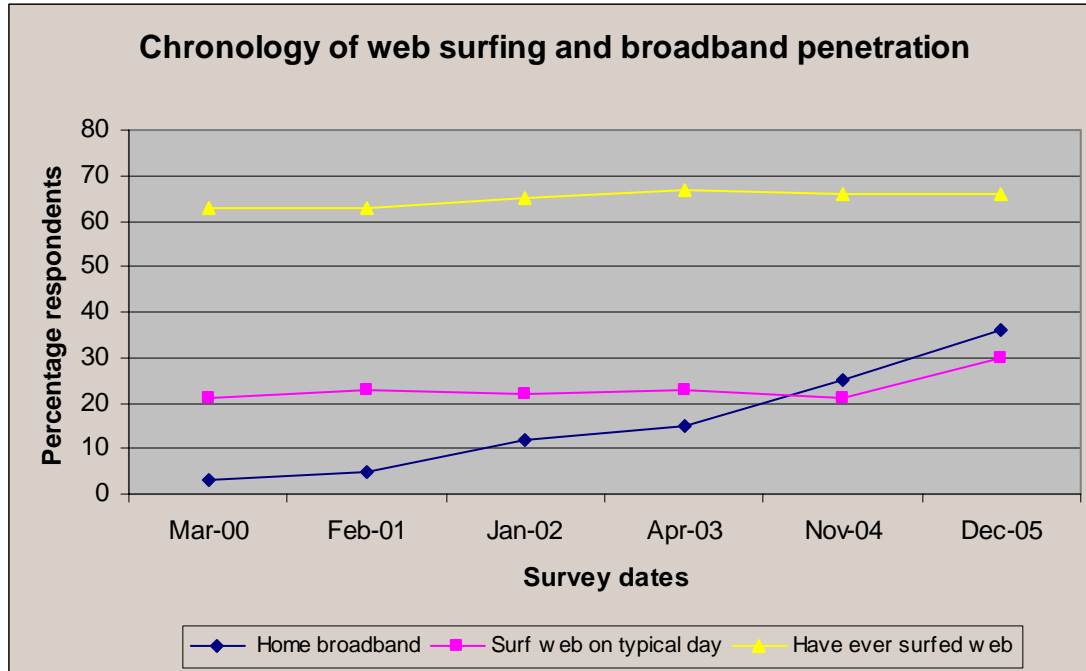
This new appeal of idle web surfing on a typical day takes places in the context of at least two relevant ongoing changes in the internet world: increasing numbers of people who have broadband access in their homes and a growing body of content and applications on the web. Broadband connections certainly make Web surfing easier, faster, and more pleasant an experience. More web content and more applications means a greater variety of experiences for people with different interests to enjoy.

Both home broadband penetration rates and amount of web content are likely to continue to grow. Perhaps the rise in either broadband or web content has crossed a kind of threshold that stimulated a rise in everyday web surfing. Perhaps, as these two factors likely continue to rise, this moment marks the beginning of a trend of increasing everyday web surfing. Or perhaps the rise in web surfing on a given day marks an uptick that has hit an upper limit.

Rise of home broadband

Penetration rates for home broadband access have risen from about 3% in 2000 to 36% at the end of 2005. The rise of Web surfing for no particular purpose on a typical day has remained steady at about 20% until the last year, when it took a sudden upswing, and only then did it match the rise of home broadband access from one-quarter to more one-third of American households.

- 72% of those who have broadband access at home have surfed the Web for fun; 39% of those with broadband at home do it on a typical day.
- 63% of dial-up users have surfed the Web for fun; 23% of dial-up users do it on a typical day.



Web content growth

There's no doubt that the amount of content and the variety of things to do on the Web have grown and continue to grow dramatically. Here are some examples:

- The Google index of Web pages has grown over 1,000 times in size since its launch in 1998.¹
- The number of websites grew from 17 million in the middle of 2000 to 65 million in the middle of 2005²
- The number of internet domain survey hosts grew from 93 million in August, 2000, to 350 million in July, 2005.³

What web surfing on a typical day means

Users have already folded purposeful web activities into their everyday lives -- communicating, gathering information or looking for answers. Now, they have added web surfing -- going online

¹ <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2005/09/we-wanted-something-special-for-our.html>

² <http://www.zakon.org/robert/internet/timeline/>

³ <http://www.isc.org/index.pl?ops/ds/>

without any particular purpose to that list. Many people have described the internet in terms of different purposeful places: a library, or a shopping mall, or a post office. Now we can add “destination resort” – a place to go just to have fun or pass the time -- to that list.

The Pew Internet & American Life Project is a non-profit, non-partisan research organization that is funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts to examine the social impact of the internet.

Survey questions and methodology

November/December 2005 Daily Tracking Survey Final RDD Topline 1/13/06

Data for November 29 – December 31, 2005

Princeton Survey Research Associates International
for the Pew Internet & American Life Project

Sample: *n* = 3,011 adults 18 and older
 Interviewing dates: 11.29.05 – 12.31.05
 Margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points for results based on the full sample [n=3,011]
 Margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points for results based on internet users [n=1,931]
 Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on home broadband users [n=1,014]

WEB1 Please tell me if you ever use the internet to do any of the following things. Do you ever use the internet to.../Did you happen to do this **yesterday**, or not?⁴

	TOTAL HAVE EVER DONE THIS	----- DID YESTERDAY	HAVE NOT DONE THIS	DON'T KNOW/ REFUSED
Go online for no particular reason, just for fun or to pass the time				
Current	66	30	33	*
November 23-30, 2004	66	21	34	0
March 20-25, 2003	67	22	33	*
Jan 2002	65	22	35	*
Dec 17-23, 2001	64	20	36	*
Nov 19-Dec 16, 2001	64	21	35	*
Oct 19-Nov 18, 2001	67	23	33	*
Oct 8-18, 2001	65	19	35	*
Sept 20-Oct 1, 2001	62	20	38	*
Sept 12-19, 2001	60	13	39	1
Aug 2001	61	20	39	*
Feb 2001	63	23	37	1
Fall 2000	65	21	35	*
July-August 2000	66	19	34	*
May-June 2000	61	17	39	*
April 2000	60	18	40	*

⁴ Prior to January 2005, question wording was “Please tell me if you ever do any of the following when you go online. Do you ever...?/Did you happen to do this yesterday, or not?”

Methodology

This report is based on the findings of a daily tracking survey on Americans' use of the Internet. The results in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International between November 29 to December 31, 2005, among a sample of 3,011 adults, 18 and older. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 1.9 percentage points. For results based Internet users (n=1,931), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.4 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 this survey 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.

New sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. The sample was released in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger population. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. At least 10 attempts were made to complete an interview at sampled households. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. 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. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day.

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 are derived from a special analysis of the most recently available Census Bureau's Annual Social and Economic Supplement (March 2005). 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.

Following is the full disposition of all sampled telephone numbers:

Table 1: Sample Disposition

	<u>Final</u>
Total Numbers dialed	20,297
Business	1,784
Computer/Fax	1,398
Cell phone	50
Other Not-Working	3,763
Additional projected NW	1,014
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Working numbers	12,288
	Working Rate 60.5%
No Answer	239
Busy	65
Answering Machine	2,007
Callbacks	318
Other Non-Contacts	200
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Contacted numbers	9,459
	Contact Rate 77.0%
Initial Refusals	4,616
Second Refusals	1,040
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Cooperating numbers	3,803
	Cooperation Rate 40.2%
No Adult in HH	26
Language Barrier	517
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Eligible numbers	3,260
	Eligibility Rate 85.7%
Interrupted	249
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Completes	3,011
	Completion Rate 92.4%
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	Response Rate 28.6%

PSRAI calculates a response rate as the product of three individual rates: the contact rate, the cooperation rate, and the completion rate. Of the residential numbers in the sample, 77 percent were contacted by an interviewer and 40 percent agreed to participate in the survey. Eighty-six percent were found eligible for the interview. Furthermore, 92 percent of eligible respondents completed the interview. Therefore, the final response rate is 29 percent.