



THE COMMONWEALTH POLL

The VCU Center for Public Policy

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VCU POLL FINDS MOST VIRGINIANS HAVE COMPUTER & INTERNET ACCESS

Employment Opportunities Help Bridge Digital Divide

Richmond, VA — More than three-quarters of Virginians (77%) use a computer, according to a new VCU Commonwealth Poll. Of these, 92% also have access to the Internet. The Commonwealth Poll was conducted Feb. 18-28 with 767 adults in Virginia. The margin of error is +/- 4%.

Computer use in Virginia is on par with or slightly higher than nationwide trends. For example, a national survey conducted Feb. 14-19 by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that 72% of the nation uses a computer and 60% of the nation “go on-line to access the Internet”. 71% of Virginians report having access to the Internet.

Some groups are more likely to have access to computers, and consequently the Internet, than others. The digital divide is particularly noticeable between rich and poor, black and white, and men and women. 96% of those with incomes over 50K use a computer whereas only 57% of those making under 35K do so. Workforce participation brings more opportunities to use computers—especially in white-collar jobs. The Commonwealth Poll finds that access to computers is more common among those who are employed full-time. Differences in computer use between men and women are largely due to differences in rates of employment. Women who are employed full-time are equally likely to use computers as men, but only 56% of women who are not employed full-time use a computer.

“One of the most surprising things from this poll is to see the gender gap in computer use between men and women and then to see how employment opportunities can help bridge that digital divide,” said Cary Funk, Ph.D., director of the Commonwealth Poll.

58% of those with Internet access report having gone on-line to shop or make purchases. Younger adults aged 25-44 are particularly likely to have shopped on-line. 64% of those 25-44 years old use the Internet for purchases; only 28% of Virginians aged 65 and over do so. That bodes well for some retailers who expect continued use of on-line shopping options as the computer-savvy generations dominate the population.

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	Use a Computer		Number of cases
	Yes	No	
Total	77%	23%	767
Men	81%	19%	370
Women Working Full-Time	91%	9%	207
Other Women	56%	44%	190
White	80%	20%	569
Black	68%	32%	133
Less than 35K	57%	43%	204
35-50K	73%	27%	134
50-70K	96%	4%	122
70K and above	95%	5%	200

The Commonwealth Poll
 February 18-28, 2001
 Number of Respondents: 767

Q1. Do you use a computer at home or elsewhere on at least an occasional basis?

		May 2000*
Yes	77%	63%
No	23	37

*In May 1-9, 2000, the Commonwealth Poll asked: Do you use a computer at home on at least an occasional basis?

Q2. Do you currently have access, either at home or elsewhere, to the Internet or a commercial online service such as America Online or Microsoft Network?

	All	Of Computer Users	May 2000*
Yes	71%	92%	54%
No	6	8	8
Don't use a computer	23		37

*In May 1-9, 2000, the Commonwealth Poll asked about access on "your home computer"

Q3. Do you ever use the Internet or online service to shop and make purchases online?

	All	Of Those With Internet Access	May 2000 Of Those Using Home Internet Access
Yes	41%	58%	57%
No	30	42	43
No Internet access	29		

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METHODOLOGY OF THE COMMONWEALTH POLL

The Commonwealth Poll is an omnibus public opinion survey of Virginia residents. Each survey covers a variety of topics. The survey is conducted by telephone with a randomly-selected sample of adult Virginians.

Interviewing for The Commonwealth Poll was conducted by telephone from the facilities of the Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. The interviewing is conducted by a staff of professionally trained, paid interviewers using computer-assisted telephone interviewing software.

The sample of telephone numbers was prepared by Genesys Sampling Systems of Ft. Washington, Pennsylvania, and was designed so that all residential telephones, including new and unlisted numbers, had a known chance of inclusion. The cooperation rate for the survey was 56%. Using the CASRO response rate calculations, interviews were obtained with respondents in 48% of the known or assumed residential households in the sample.

The data were weighted to adjust for unequal probabilities of selection due to multiple telephone lines and multiple adults living in the household. In addition, the data were weighted on sex, race, age, and region of residence to reflect the demographic composition of the Virginia adult population. Percentages reported in the text and tables are weighted, while the number of cases shown in the tables for various subgroups is the actual number of respondents.

Questions answered by the full sample of adults are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus approximately 4 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. This means that in 95 out of 100 samples like the one used here, the results obtained should be no more than 4 percentage points above or below the figure that would be obtained by interviewing all adult Virginians with telephones. Where the answers of subgroups are reported, the sampling error would be higher. Because of nonresponse (refusals to participate, etc.), standard calculations of sampling error are apt to understate the actual extent to which survey results are at variance with the true population values. Surveys are also subject to errors from sources other than sampling. While every effort is made to identify such errors, they are often difficult or impossible to measure. Readers making use of the results are urged to be mindful of the limitations inherent in survey research.

Further information is available on request from the Director of the Commonwealth Poll, Dr. Cary Funk, at 804 827 1430 or clfunk@vcu.edu. More information on the Commonwealth Poll can be found at <http://www.vcu.edu/commonwealthpoll/>.

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