



THE COMMONWEALTH INTERNET POLL

Center for Public Policy

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fifty-four percent of adult Virginians access the Internet at home with their computer according to the Commonwealth Internet Poll that was released today by the Center for Public Policy at Virginia Commonwealth University. The survey indicates that among Virginians who access the Internet at home, the majority use it to send e-mail, obtain health and medical information and shop. The survey also shows that, at present, there are sizable "digital divides" in home Internet access, related to education, race, region, age and income.

The Commonwealth Internet Poll was conducted at the Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory of VCU's Center for Public Policy with 791 adult Virginians from May 1 - May 9. The margin of the error for the poll is plus or minus 4 percent.

Home Access to the Internet

Fifty-four percent of adult Virginians now report that they access the Internet at home with their computer. Thirty-seven percent of adult respondents report that they have no computer at home and 8 percent of those polled have computers at home, but do not access the Internet. Michael Pratt, Ph.D., co-director of the poll, noted that "a clear majority of Virginians are now taking advantage of the Internet at home."

In recent years, many commentators have spoken about the emerging digital divide. The survey results indicate that in terms of home access to the Internet there are, at present, a number of digital divides in Virginia.

- 77% of respondents who were college graduates access the Internet at home. 19% of the respondents who do not have a high school diploma and 35% of the respondents who completed high school access the Internet at home.
- 59% of white respondents access the Internet at home compared to 33% of African-American respondents.
- 65% of respondents between the ages of 18-44 access the Internet at home compared to 21% of respondents aged 65 and older.
- 81% of respondents with family income of \$70,000 and above access the Internet at home compared 21% of respondents whose family income was below \$20,000 a year.

- 71% of respondents in Northern Virginia access the Internet at home compared to 40% of respondents in the Western part of the state.

“There is substantial opportunity for creative entrepreneurs and elected officials to design ways of bringing the benefits of Internet technology to more and more Virginians. Efforts to bridge the digital divide will become an increasingly important component of the policy environment in Virginia during the next decade,” said Robert D. Holsworth, Ph.D., co-director of the poll.

Uses of the Internet

Among the respondents who access the Internet at home, 91 percent use it to send e-mail to family and friends. Seventy-two percent of the respondents report using the Internet at home to look up medical and health information. And 57 percent of the respondents say that they have used the Internet at home to shop and make purchases.

Internet Use	% of Home Users Who Perform Activity
Email to family/friends	91%
Look up medical/health information	72%
Shop and make purchases	57%
Look up information about candidates	31%
Bank	29%
Buy and sell stock	22%

Much smaller percentages of respondents who access the Internet at home report using it to look up information about politics and political candidates, to bank or to buy and sell stock. Thirty-one percent of the respondents who use the Internet at home say they look up information about political candidates. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents who access the Internet at home report using it to bank. And 22 percent of the respondents who use the Internet at home say that they buy or sell stock online.

“People have readily adopted the use of the Internet to communicate with their friends and family and to provide themselves with a broad-based source for information. However, its use in e-commerce is not quite as wide-spread among all users,” said Pratt.

The survey results indicate that there are, at present, different patterns of online use among men and women who access the net at home. While at least 90 percent of both men and women who access the Internet at home use it to send e-mail to family and friends, there are some notable divergences as well. Thirty-six percent of men who have access to the Internet at home use it to bank, compared to 22 percent of women who are home Internet users.

Internet Use	% of Male Home Users	% of Female Home Users
E-mail to family/friends	90%	92%
Look up medical/health information	69%	76%
Shop and make purchases	60%	54%
Look up information about candidates	38%	24%
Bank	36%	22%
Buy and sell stock	31%	13%

Thirty-one percent of men who are home Internet users buy and sell stock compared to 13 percent of women who are home Internet users. Men are also more likely to look up information about

political candidates on the net. Thirty-eight percent of the male respondents who are home Internet users report doing so compared to 24 percent of female home Internet users. In contrast women are more likely to use the Internet to look up medical and health information. Of the women who access the Internet at home, 76 percent report using it to obtain health and medical information compared to 69 percent of male home Internet users.

METHODOLOGY OF THE COMMONWEALTH INTERNET POLL

Interviewing for the Commonwealth Internet Poll was conducted from the facilities of the Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond May 1-9, 2000 with a randomly-selected sample of 791 adult Virginians.

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. Interviews were obtained with respondents in 43% 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 sample of 791 adult Virginians 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 Virginia likely voters 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 Directors of the Commonwealth Internet Poll, Dr. Michael Pratt at 804 828-1835 or at mdpratt@vcu.edu and Dr. Robert Holsworth at 804 828-8033 or at rholswor@vcu.edu.