How internet usage has changed in five years essay sample

Technology, Internet

The release of the World Wide Web to the public in 1994 brought sweeping changes to the way the world communicates, conducts business, works and plays. Widespread use of the Internet has opened the doors to innumerable possibilities for instantaneous exchange of communication globally, offering Internet users nearly unlimited access to information on a 24-hour basis. While basic usage of the Internet has not changed much in terms of using the medium for homework, research and news, some new and innovative programs have launched themselves and brought with them their own changes.

In a study published by IT & Society Magazine, 43% of American households are connected to the Internet. Add that percentage to Internet access at work, 55% of Americans over 18 were " connected" in 2002 (p. 136). In this study, it was found that people who have a higher frequency of Internet time per week are less likely to watch television. The impact of Internet usage is already being seen in the mass media industry as Internet users are turning to their computers for information and entertainment.

It has been thought that use of the Internet in business would accelerate the speed and efficiency of workers who use it for business, possibly increasing levels of productivity within the work day, leaving more time for leisure. However, one rather startling discovery by the survey in IT & Society was that of Internet users who worked full time, 16% reported using the Internet for work while at home, without cutting back time at the office. While this could be interpreted as good because of workers not having to stay after

hours at the office, it does imply that people are working more hours but without a pay raise due to Internet access (p. 138).

A study conducted by USC Annenberg's Center For the Digital Future in 2004 showed an increase of online usage to about 75%. Hours of usage per week had risen to an average of 12. 5 hours. Lower television viewing among Internet users was also seen in this study, raising the question of what society will be like when it transitions from spending inactive time in front of the television to more interactive time on the Internet?

Another issue, that of demographics, was addressed in the above study; the " digital" divide is closing amongst ethnic and age groups; the fastest growing Internet using population is now amongst Latinos, African Americans, and older Americans. This really comes as no surprise, due to the rise in free instant messaging services such as AOL Instant Messenger, Yahoo! Messenger and MSN Messenger. A visit to a library or an Internet café can connect an individual to friends and family who also have Internet access anywhere in the world, without worrying about a long-distance telephone bill.

Instant messaging has become one of the most popular modes of communication for young people; conversations can take place with multiple users at a time, enabling chat with several people at once, even " conferencing" in one private chat room together. Due to the staggering use of chat rooms, an entire new language has been invented using abbreviated English (examples include " brb" = " be right back," " cu" = " see you," "

bbl" = " be back later," " ttyl" = " talk to you later"). While this language is not an official language, it is finding its way into daily use moving from chat room lingo and into verbal conversation. With video and telephony becoming available to instant messaging users, there will no doubt be a radical shift seen in land- line usage in the years to come.

The evolution of instant messaging has been dramatic, with the invention of Rich Client technology such as Macromedia Flash Player and Macromedia Flash Communication Server. Flash Communication Server enables Internet users to engage in multimedia communications in real time (Jeremy Allaire, 2006, para. 8).

It is predicted that as instant messaging becomes more integrated into households and business, the platforms will become more sophisticated; already consumers and businesses use conferencing and Internet telephony for multi-sensory Internet communication. With video and telephony becoming available to instant messaging users, there will no doubt be a radical shift seen in land-line usage in the years to come, dramatically affecting the use of conventional telephones.

The changes in usage of email are not as dramatic, yet it still remains the main reason people go online (USC Annenberg, 2004, para. 2). There are a plethora of services available, from PC users' Microsoft Outlook program to Mac users' Eudora and Mac Mail. Many users prefer the free services of Microsoft Network (" Hotmail"), Yahoo! Mail, Google's " gmail" and other online programs over the software provided with their computers.

Where five years ago email was still primarily used for communication in the personal and business areas, the style with which many users send email has changed; personal touches can be added to email through the use of downloadable programs to decorate one's email like stationery. Users can also send photographs and video clips through email using digital cameras and video cameras or even their cell phones.

Of course we cannot have new technologies without new laws to cover intrusive Internet practices such as cyber-stalking and email harassment. On January 5, 2006 President Bush signed into law a prohibition on posting " annoying" email messages without disclosure of identity.

In part, the law states: " Whoever…utilizes any device or software that can be used to originate telecommunications or other types of communications that are transmitted, in whole or in part, by the Internet… without disclosing his identity and with intent to annoy, abuse, threaten, or harass any person…who receives the communications…shall be fined under title 18 or imprisoned not more than two years, or both" (Decan McCullagh, 2006). This act is under intense scrutiny, since it could possibly infringe on First Amendment rights.

Yet another email malady is the plethora of " spamming" that has radically increased in the past five years; this continues to plague email users who receive up to 50 " spam" messages in any given day. Measures to block spam has resulted in email users resorting to unblocking new correspondents from their spam list; email software now filters out what it

considers to be spam, but could be a legitimate communication from a company or friend who has an email address unfamiliar to the system. Further refinement of spam-blocking technology will likely be an ongoing endeavor for software companies.

On-the-scene cell phone users equipped with a cell phone capable of digital photography have reported major events online through email, such as the London transit bombing in the summer of 2005 and Hurricane Katrina. Television news has now begun to use these images as major stories develop.

Another increase seen in Internet users over the past five years is online shopping. Five years ago, the concern over lack of security buying online was high. The USC Annenberg study showed a dramatic increase in online purchasing, where in 2001, Internet users bought an average of 11 items per year online, then in 2004, the average number of items purchased online per year increased to 30. This raises the question of how online shopping will affect visits to traditional shops in terms of retail trade. Discount companies like Amazon. com not only survived the " Dot Com" bust of the late 1990's but also have continued to thrive thanks to their offering of low prices and a broad range of products available with consistent good service.

Another increased use of the Internet has been for booking travel; Expedia and Travelocity have excelled in online bookings for everything from airline tickets to tour packages at discounted prices Advertising in the mass media has brought discount travel to the forefront on the Internet for users who

wish to shop for bargains at their leisure without consulting with a travel agent.

Online advertising has perhaps seen the most action in terms of attraction/intrusion on the Internet. In 2000, U. S. companies spent billions of dollars in online advertising, only to pull back in the economic recession that ensued after the March 11th, 2000 to October 9th, 2002 " Dot Com Crash." Topping the year 2000, 2004 saw the highest reported year spent on online advertising by U. S. companies, with an impressive total of $9. 6 billion (Rick Bruner, 2005, p. 16).

However, the entire landscape of advertising is changing due to the Internet. According to Bruner, consumers are demanding more control over advertising, hence newer browser programs that block " pop-up" ads. In addition, companies are demanding more accountability from advertising agencies, therefore advertisers must completely change their way of thinking to adapt to the new Internet media, since the more traditional methods are now deemed obsolete.

Since 2000, an ongoing problem has emerged; adware and spyware have made their intrusive presence known to many, spurring the invention of combative software that intercepts and blocks both programs. Adware and spyware technologies are having a difficult time keeping up with the security breaches, which forces Internet users to conduct frequent computer scans to clear out any intrusions that can affect computer performance.

Consumers have never experienced so much control over what content they want. Bruner (2005) reports that by the end of 2004, consumers had invested an enormous amount of money into technologies affording them more power over their media experiences such as:

- XM Radio, 2. 5 million subscribers

- Netflix, 3 million subscribers

- DVR Services, 6 million

- Video-on-Demand, 10 million

- Apple iPods, 11 million

The past five years has also wreaked havoc in the music and video industries, with Internet users downloading and swapping music files in enormous proportions; so much so that recording companies and artists have claimed tremendous losses in revenue due to the illegal duplication and distribution of their products. There doesn't seem to be an immediate solution to this problem, because street savvy programmers find their way around protected music and video files.

Part of what has made the changes to the Internet possible is broadband, the latest high-speed technology that has been embraced by Internet users. According to Bruner, by the end of 2004, 54% of Internet households were connected via broadband, an increase of 31% over 2003. High speed Internet allows audio and video streaming in real time and offers fast downloads. Broadband users have a higher rate of using the Internet for shopping, listening to music, gaming and accessing entertainment information (USC Annenberg, para. 5).

Broadband has changed the way search engines do business. In 2004, both Google and Yahoo! launched video search engines. All three major portals (MSN, Yahoo! And AOL) are now engaged in " aggressive video content strategies" (Bruner, 2005, p. 17).

Another activity that is still escalating is " blogging." This is a word that has reached the English language amongst Internet users and in the mass media. A " blog" is a weblog or an electronic journal. Where in 2000, only a few blogs were being published by writers of different interests, " blogging" has now gained an enormous amount of popularity, although most Internet users do not consider it to be a reliable source of accurate information.

Consumers can now create blogs quickly and easily, making everyone a budding author. With this new phenomenon, advertisers have gained a piece of the action by creating technology for advertising on blog sites, paying the consumer a stipend for using the blog space (Bruner, 2005, p. 18). Blogs have gained ground over popular news media sites; in February of 2005, Blogspot (a blog hosting site) enjoyed a unique U. S. audience of 7. 6 million, while New York Times. com saw 5. 7 million (Bruner, 2005, p. 18).

Of a major concern in the past five years has been online security. Web sites such as eBay, Amazon. com, Yahoo! and other major players experienced intrusion by hackers in 2000, causing server overloads and downtime at a damaging high cost. Since then, steps have been taken to protect the integrity of the high-profile sites in business, banking and government. Consumers are watchful regarding online credit card transactions, and with

the advent of highly encrypted security programs, online shopping has become safer. However, this does not prevent hackers from accessing credit card companies and banks. Even though Internet users who shop online are aware of the risks of identity theft, they are surprisingly using the Internet for shopping more than ever before.

Below are the statistics for 2004 Internet usage, published by Pew Internet's Senior Fellow Deborah Fallows:

The tasks of everyday life and the Internet

- 88% of online Americans say the Internet plays a role in their daily routines. Of those, one-third say it plays a major role, and two-thirds say it plays a minor role. The activities they identified as most significant are communicating with family and friends and finding a wealth of information at their fingertips.
- 64% of Internet users say their daily routines and activities would be affected if they could no longer use the Internet.
- 53% of Internet users say they do more of certain everyday activities simply because they can do them on the Internet. The most popular are communicating with family and friends and looking up information.
- 92% of Internet users say the Internet is a good place to go for getting everyday information.
- 85% say the Internet is a good way to communicate or interact with others.
- 75% say the Internet is a good place to conduct everyday transactions.

- 69% say the Internet is a good way to entertain themselves in everyday life.

- 87% of Internet users who ever use maps or get driving directions do this online.

- 69% of Internet users who say they get weather reports get such reports online.

- 63% of Internet users who say they get news in their lives get news online.

- 55% of Internet users who ever check sports scores in their lives get such information online.

- 50% of Internet users who ever look up phone numbers, addresses or zip codes in their lives get such information online.

- 79% of Internet users who say they communicate with friends and family use the Internet for such communications.

- 52% of Internet users who exchange greetings, cards and invitations go online to do so.

- 46% of Internet users who say they ever plan gatherings and arrange personal meetings use the Internet for such purposes.

- 26% of Internet users who ever plan meetings with new people or dates use the Internet for those purposes.

- 55% of the Internet users who buy tickets for movies, plays and sporting events do such activities online.

- 44% of the Internet users who say they do banking and bill paying use the Internet for those purposes.

- 33% of the Internet users who ever purchase everyday items go online to buy things such as books and groceries.

- 22% of the Internet users who schedule appointments and meetings use the Internet for such purposes.

- 46% of the Internet users who ever play games do so online.

- 34% of the Internet users who say they have hobbies go online to pursue their hobbies.

- 23% of the Internet users who say they listen to music or radio regularly do so online.

- 18% of the Internet users who say they read for pleasure will read online.

- 16% of the Internet users who watch videos, movie previews, or cartoons do so online.

- 45% of Internet users who ever get the news get it both online and offline. Of that group, 22% access news more often online; 71% get news more often offline from places like newspapers, radio and TV.

- 27% of Internet users who ever purchase tickets do so both online and offline. Of those 38% buy tickets more often online; 57% buy them more often by phone, mail, or in person.

- 26% of Internet users who ever do banking or pay bills do so both online and offline. Of those, 34% do it more often online; 54% do it more often in offline.

In Fallow's research, she reports that " 92% of online Americans say using the Internet is a good way to get everyday information; 85% say it is a good way to communicate with other people; 75% say it is a good place to

accomplish everyday tasks or transactions; and 69% say it is a good place to entertain themselves."

In her report, Fallow says that getting information is the most highly regarded use of the Internet, a feature which really has not changed much in the last five years; what has changed, however, is the presentation of that information and the ease of access due to better search engines.

In previous surveys, Fallows reports that information sought on the Internet has its own pattern of surges in focused areas; for example, in the years 2000 – 2002, people searching for information on religion increased 94%. This is likely due to the 9/11 attacks and the attempt for Americans to understand Islam in the months and year following the attacks. The search for sports scores increased by 75% over the same period of time, and medical information searches increased by 59%.

Due to tracking devices in search engines, researchers can monitor the trends of what the Internet population is thinking and talking about at any given time, enabling information sources to bolster their offerings.

In general, the Internet seems to have improved the lives of most users polled. It enables people to live where they want and work via telecommuting; people on vacation can stay in touch with loved ones on a daily basis without the high cost of phone calls, productivity has increased with the use of the Internet in the home, business and college.

Outline

This report explores the changes of Internet usage over the past five years (2000 – 2005). It covers the following aspects of Internet use:

1. Population connected to the Internet

2. Households (increases between 2002 and 2004, reported by IT & Society Magazine and USC Annenberg's Center For the Digital Future, respectively)

3. Businesses

4. People combining home and business use

5. Demographics

1. Common Forms Of Interpersonal Communication

2. Instant Messaging

3. Email

1. New Laws Governing Internet Usage

2. Cyber-stalking

3. Spamming

1. Online Purchasing

2. Shopping

3. Travel

1. Advertising

2. Changes in advertising to suit the Internet consumer

3. Adware and Spyware

4. Consumer control of content

1. Broadband

1. Blogging

1. Online Security

1. Survey Results, Everyday Tasks Conducted Online

2. Deborah Fallows results, Pew Internet

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