



Pew
& Internet
American Life
PROJECT

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PEW INTERNET PROJECT DATA MEMO

28% OF AMERICAN ADULTS ARE WIRELESS READY

More than one quarter of all Americans use devices – either laptop computers with wireless modems or cell phones – that enable them to go online to surf the Web or check email. According to a March 2004 survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 28% of Americans – and fully 41% of all Internet users – have within the past month used a laptop that can connect wirelessly to the Internet or a cell phone that lets them send and receive email.

This means that 56 million American adults are “wireless ready.” That is, they have used devices that allow them to connect to the Internet by wireless means.

The March 2004 survey asked respondents the following questions:

- In the past month, have you used a laptop computer with a wireless modem?
- In the past month, have you used a cell phone that can send and receive email?

For the wireless-enabled laptop, 18% of Internet users said they had used such a device. For cell phones, 29% of cell phone users said they had used a cell phone in the past month that can send and receive emails. Taken together, the share of American adults who have used either type of device that can connect wirelessly to the Internet comes to 28%, or 41% of adult Internet users.

These questions are a measure of people’s technological capability to go online wirelessly, not a measure of how many Americans use wireless connections or how often they do it. For the latter issue, our February 2004 survey found that 17% of Americans have logged on to the Internet with a wireless connection, 6% on the typical day.

However, there is evidence that Internet users who are wireless ready take their online use on the road. Among Internet users with wireless ready devices:

- 10% say they go online from some place other than home or work on an average day.
- 23% say they do this once or twice a week.
- 44% say they have at one time logged onto the Internet away from home or work.

This means that, on a typical day, approximately 5 million Americans with wireless ready devices go online from some place other than home or work. Some of this away-from-home activity could take place at friends' homes, or using computers at cyber cafés or libraries. However, much of it is likely to be students doing schoolwork in coffee shops, professionals logging on to free wireless hot spots that some cities now provide, or travelers using the wireless network at an airport.

Who can go online wirelessly?

Young adults are more likely than older Americans to have wireless-ready computers and Internet-connected cell phones. For instance, 22% of the Internet users in Generation Y (those ages 18-27) have used laptops with wireless connections in the past month, compared to 17% of Baby Boomers (those ages 40-58). Even more dramatic differences are evident with phones. Fully 45% of Gen Y Internet users also have phones that can use the Internet, compared to 25% of Baby Boomers.

As is always the case with technology adoption, those who live in high-income households and those with high levels of education are more likely to be wireless ready than those who have high school diplomas and those who live in households with moderate or lower levels of income.

Finally, those who have a great deal of experience with the Internet and those with broadband connections are more likely to be wireless ready than Internet newcomers and those with dial-up connections.

The Pew Internet Project surveyed 2,200 adults age 18 and over between February 17 and March 17, 2004, 1,518 of whom were Internet users. The margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points for results based on the full sample and plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on Internet users.