

Data Memo

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RE: Search Engine Use
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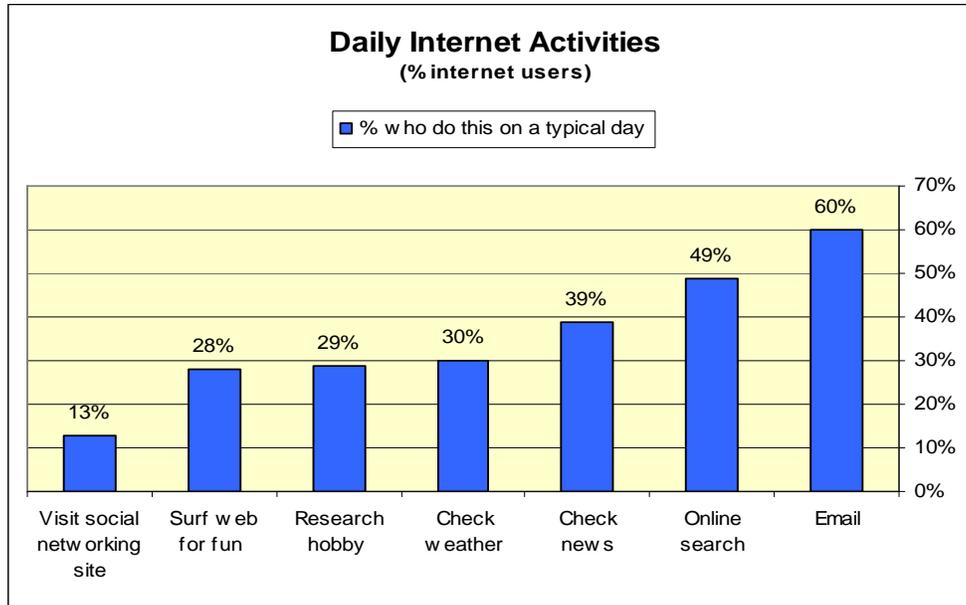
Almost half of all internet users now use search engines on a typical day

The percentage of internet users who use search engines on a typical day has been steadily rising from about one-third of all users in 2002, to a new high of just under one-half (49%).

With this increase, the number of those using a search engine on a typical day is pulling ever closer to the 60% of internet users who use email, arguably the internet's all-time killer app, on a typical day.¹ Underscoring the dramatic increase over time, the percentage of internet users who search on a typical day grew 69% from January 2002, when the Pew Internet & American Life Project first tracked this activity, to May 2008, when the current data were collected. During the same six-year time period, the use of email on a typical day rose from 52% to 60%, for a growth rate of just 15%.

These new figures propel search further out of the pack, well ahead of other popular internet activities, such as checking the news, which 39% of internet users do on a typical day, or checking the weather, which 30% do on a typical day.

¹ The most recent numbers for those who use email on a typical day comes from a PIP survey conducted December 2007.



This chart shows the percentage of internet users who did these activities "yesterday," which in a tracking survey like this one yields a picture of the "typical day" online. For most people the average day includes lots of emails (60% of internet users), general searches (49%), and news reading (39%) if they are online at all (30% of internet users are offline on a typical day).

WHO IS MAKING SEARCH A HABIT?

Those who are using search engines on an average day are more likely to be socially upscale, with at least some college education and incomes over \$50,000 per year. They are more likely to be internet users with at least six years of online experience and to have their homes wired for fast internet connections. Younger internet users are more likely than older users to search on a typical day. Men are more likely than women to search on a typical day.

Here are the numbers:

Education: Internet users with higher levels of education are more likely to use search on a typical day, with those having at least some college education significantly more likely to do so than those with less education. Here are the percentages:

College graduate +	66%
Some college	49%
High school graduate or less	32%

Income: Internet users living in higher-income households are more likely to use search on a typical day, with those having an income higher than \$50,000 per year being significantly more likely than those with lower incomes. Here are the percentages:²

\$75,000 +	62%
\$50,000 – 74,999	56%
\$30,000 – 49,999	34%
<\$30,000	36%

Broadband use: Those who use broadband connections at home are significantly more likely than those who use dial-up to have ever tried using search engines at all, by 94% to 80%. They are dramatically more likely to search on a typical day, and this difference persists when other factors, such as age and education, are held constant. These are the percentages according to type of internet connections for those who search on a typical day:

Broadband at home	58%
Dial-up at home	26%

Age: Younger internet users have been consistently more likely to search on a typical day over the last five years of survey research. Here are the percentages of searchers in different age groups who search on a typical day:

18 – 29 years	55%
30 – 49 years	54%
50 – 64 years	40%
65 years and older	27%

Gender: While just about equal numbers of men (91%) and women (88%) report having ever used search engines at all, men are significantly more likely than women to search on a typical day.

Men	53%
Women	45%

Data collected since 2002 show that men who use the internet have consistently been more likely than women to integrate search into their daily lives. The percentage of online men who search on a typical day has risen steadily from 33% in 2002 to 53% currently. The percentage of women has also risen, increasing from 25% in 2002 to 45%.

Data from past surveys also suggest that men have been more engaged with search in general.³ Online men say they have searched more frequently; they have expressed greater confidence in their search abilities (although women have reported being equally

² Twenty percent of respondents refused to answer or answered “don’t know” to the income question.

³ “Search Engine Users: Internet searchers are confident, satisfied and trusting – but they are also unaware and naïve” (Pew Internet & American Life Project, January 2005) Available at:

http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/146/report_display.asp

successful in getting satisfying search results). Men have also been more aware than women of some of the controversial issues surrounding search, e.g., the existence of paid v. unpaid search results, and the differences between the two.

WHY ARE MORE INTERNET USERS NOW INTEGRATING SEARCH INTO THEIR ONLINE ACTIVITY?

While the number of internet users who search on a typical day has been steadily rising, this is the second time since the Pew Internet Project began tracking search engine use that we have seen a demonstrable leap in the numbers. The first came in late 2005, when percentage of users searching on a typical day rose from about 30% (in June 2004) to about 40% (in September 2005). We speculated at that time about a few possible reasons behind the increase, pointing out that it was a time of much media coverage and buzz about search engine companies, including the Google IPO.⁴

Now, the percentage of users searching on a typical day has risen again, from about 40% to 49%. What has changed in the search world that might account for this increase?

One likely reason is that users can now expect to find a high-performing, site-specific search engine on just about every content-rich website that is worth its salt. With a growing mass of web content from blogs, news sites, image and video archives, personal websites, and more, internet users have an option to turn not only to the major search engines, but also to search engines on individual sites, as vehicles to reach the information they are looking for.

Another reason may be related to the fact that fully 55% of American homes have a high-speed internet connection.⁵ Of all the demographic variables we analyzed, the presence of a home broadband connection had the strongest relationship with a user's propensity to use a search engine on a typical day. Previous studies have shown that when a user upgrades to home broadband, she is more likely to turn to the internet first when she has a question – and now she is increasingly likely to visit a search engine to find the answer.

Finally, it may be that general search engine sites have become so useful and well tuned that people turn to them for an increasingly broad range of questions.

⁴ “Search engine use shoots up in the past year” (Pew Internet & American Life Project, November 2005) Available at: http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/167/report_display.asp.

⁵ “Home Broadband 2008” (Pew Internet & American Life Project, July 2, 2008) Available at: http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/257/report_display.asp

About the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project

The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project explores the impact of the internet on children, families, communities, the work place, schools, health care and civic/political life. The Pew Research Center is a nonprofit "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. The Center and its projects are nonpartisan and take no position on policy issues. Support is provided by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Survey questions

Spring Tracking Survey 2008

Final Topline

5/19/08

Data for April 8 – May 11, 2008

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

Sample: n = 2,251 adults, age 18 and older
Interviewing dates: 04.08.08 – 05.11.08

Margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points for results based on total sample [n=2,251]
Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on internet users [n=1,553]

Q6a Do you use the internet, at least occasionally?

Q6b Do you send or receive email, at least occasionally?⁶

	USES INTERNET	DOES NOT USE INTERNET
Current	73	27

Q7 Did you happen to use the internet YESTERDAY?⁷

Based on internet users [N=1,553]

	YES, USED INTERNET YESTERDAY	NO, DID NOT USE INTERNET YESTERDAY	DON'T KNOW/ REFUSED
Current	70	30	1

⁶ Prior to January 2005, question wording was "Do you ever go online to access the Internet or World Wide Web or to send and receive email?"

⁷ Prior to January 2005, question wording was "Did you happen to go online or check your email yesterday?"

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?⁸

Based on internet users [N=1,553]

	TOTAL HAVE EVER DONE THIS	----- DID YESTERDAY	HAVE NOT DONE THIS	DON'T KNOW/ REFUSED
Use an online search engine to help you find information on the Web				
Current	89	49	10	*
December 2006	91	41	9	1
August 2006	88	42	11	*
Nov/Dec 2005	91	38	9	1
September 2005	90	41	9	*
May/June 2004	84	30	16	*
June 2003	89	31	10	1
Jan 2002	85	29	14	1

⁸ 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?”