

**eworld**  
Living with technology  
eworld@usatoday.com

# Net traffic surges for Summer Games

## Sites are a hit, but fall short of TV's reach

By Mike Snider  
USA TODAY

The Summer Olympics may have crossed the finish line, but the results are still rolling in — the tallies, that is, of the Web's performance in what were billed as the first official Games of the Internet era.

IBM and NBC logged gold-medal traffic numbers at the official sites. IBM's Olympics.com site had 8.7 million visitors worldwide, and racked up 11.3 billion "hits" (a measure of the number of Web site elements seen). That's a staggering amount of traffic compared with the 634 million hits during 1998's Winter Games in Japan.

The most popular site for Olympics fans in the USA was NBCOlympics.com, which attracted more than 2.3 million visitors, according to audience tracking firm PC Data. America Online had about 2.2 million users surfing for Olympic data, although not necessarily for AOL's own proprietary content.

Though such traffic surges mean immense crowds on the Net, they're still dwarfed by the numbers of television viewers — usually more than 20 million each night — who watched NBC's time-delayed broadcasts.

Only 4% of U.S. adults used the Net to get Olympics information daily, compared with 58% who used TV and 12% who looked to newspapers, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, which surveyed 1,032 adults by phone during the Games. Even frequent surfers were 20 times more likely to get Olympics updates from TV than the Net, the Pew survey found.

### TV's more relaxing

Each night during the Olympics, says Keith Hartstein of Medfield, Mass., his family would watch an hour or two of NBC's broadcasts "and complain about the commercials," says Hartstein, 43. "We're on the Web fairly often. I'm on it every day. It just wasn't that big of a deal that I wanted to find out ahead of time. I prefer to watch it unfold on TV."

Watching the tube is more relaxing than interacting with a PC, says Jeff Gill, 43, of Westford, Mass. "At the end of the day, I just want to sit down and watch."

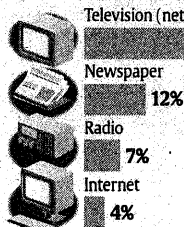
Those passionate about particular sports had more opportunities than ever to keep up with the results in cyberspace. At the Flynn household in Manassas, Va., soccer buffs Kay and her son, Ryan, 13, would log on to find out how the U.S. soccer teams fared that day. "They would check (the Net) in the morning, so they

## How Internet users accessed the Olympics

	Unique visitors	Percentage of audience <sup>1</sup>
<b>Top five Olympic sites</b>		
1. nbcolympics.com	2,329,000	29.9%
2. sydney.aol.com	2,175,000	28%
3. olympics.com (IBM)	1,686,000	21.7%
4. ESPN Olympic domains	999,000	12.8%
5. Yahoo Olympic domains	702,000	9%

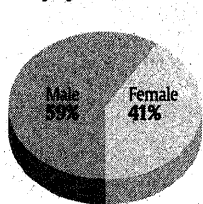
1 - Of those who visited Olympic sites. Source: PC Data, for week ending Sept. 30.

### On a typical day during the Olympics, U.S. adults got Olympic information from:



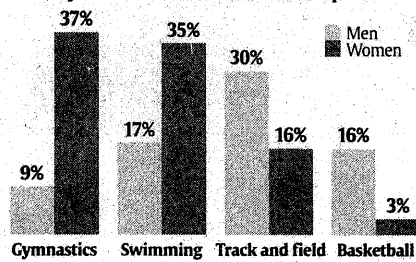
Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, Sept. 15-Oct. 1 phone survey of 1,032 adults; margin of error ± 3 percentage points among general population, ± 7 percentage point for Net users who sought Olympic information

### Though the Net population is evenly split, more men than women were drawn to Olympic sites:



Source: PC Data Online, week ending Sept. 23

### And they were drawn to different kinds of sports:



Source: Pew Internet Project, pct. of Net users who said they were greatly interested in those sports online

By Gary Viscigaitis, USA TODAY

wouldn't have to watch it at night" if they weren't happy with the outcome, says husband Bill Flynn, 53.

He looks forward to the day when he can choose events to follow online. "I will tap into a live feed somewhere and watch the race live. I can watch the 100-meter dash and just spend 15 seconds," he says.

### Net complements broadcasts

The potential of video Net broadcasts is unclear. Industry experts maintain that delivery remains unreliable, and most home users don't have the required fast connections. The International Olympic Committee also doesn't want to alienate broadcasters who have paid millions for video rights.

But one lesson learned from these Games is that the Web won't necessarily cannibalize TV viewership, according to Michael Goss of Quokka Sports, NBC's partner in NBCOlympics.com.

Among typical surfers at the site, a third to a half simultaneously watched NBC's coverage. "The Web is never going to replace television. Understanding how

these mediums complement each other (is) the Holy Grail," Goss says.

Some industry observers suggest the IOC may not be able to resist allowing certain video applications online. "Streaming video and audio will have its place within the Internet coverage," says IBM's Eli Primrose-Smith. "That will change the balance of power among the property owners, broadcasters and Internet providers."

Unlike with TV, Net users will be able to tailor what they see. "TV can't necessarily provide that," Primrose-Smith says.

The IOC could even sell Net sponsorship rights to individual events, such as "IBM's track and field, or swimming for Microsoft," says Christopher Todd, analyst with Jupiter Communications. "The potential is there for them to embark on a variety of revenue models."

### Ratings may spark change

Lower than expected TV ratings and increased Net interest will have NBC and the IOC wondering how to best present future Games, says Allen Weiner of tracking firm NetRatings. They'll "go back to the drawing board to change not only how TV covers the Olympics but how the Web covers it."

In the 2004 Summer Games in Athens, he says, "NBC is still going to have this challenge" of a five- to eight-hour time difference from the USA. "A lot is going to happen in media delivery between now and then."

The IOC is "not as interested in video on the Internet" as other multimedia options, says IOC spokesman Franklin Shervan-Shrieber. However, he acknowledges that well-heeled Net users who can afford fast connections (the most sought-after customers for sponsors) deserve attention.

During the first week of December, the IOC meets in Switzerland to discuss digital rights for future Games. "We're very hopeful we can go to the IOC and convince them and broadcasters it is in their best interest to open things up a little," says Quokka's Goss.

Meanwhile, Quokka is focusing on creating multimedia solutions to satisfy fans. The NBCOlympics.com site delivered a real-time Action Tracker combining text commentary, live images and statistics for following swimming, track and field, and some other sports. IBM's Olympics.com had a similar scoreboard for certain sports, such as basketball, volleyball and sailing.

For future Games, Goss says, the Action Tracker could be upgraded with faster-loading sequential photos and audio, and expanded to cover all sports. "Potentially by Salt Lake City (for the 2002 Winter Games) and definitely by Greece, we'll be able to offer people the choice of seeing every event they are interested in," he says.

E-mail msnider@usatoday.com

## Codes are an inside job

**Answer desk**  
By Tamara E. Holmes

### Click here

#### Video games:

► [www.n-lightning.com](http://www.n-lightning.com)

#### Shortcut guides:

► [www.odintech.com/beginners/keyboard.html](http://www.odintech.com/beginners/keyboard.html)

► [www.commandcorp.com/cc/keystroke.html](http://www.commandcorp.com/cc/keystroke.html)

mission invites people to complain if they believe they've been defrauded. The "Consumer Protection" area of the Web site lets you fill out an online form.

If the incident you'd like to report has to do with stocks or securities, you can report it to the Securities and Exchange Commission. If you click on the "Enforcement Division" area of the agency's site, you'll find instructions for e-mailing, snail-mailing or faxing a com-

A deal  
you  
can't find

