

Health and behavior

Women no longer a blip on computer screen

If numbers are indicative, every day is mothers' day

By Karen Thomas
USA TODAY

Mother's Day 2000 may well be remembered as a "Eureka moment" for women on the Web, says Nancy Evans.

"Who knew that this thing that was so male-dominated would now become the great tool and liberator of women?" wonders the co-founder of iVillage.com, the largest online community devoted to women. "Who knew this piece of hardware would permeate the gap between work and home?"

A new survey says 9 million women have gone online for the first time in the past six months and discovered the wonders of e-mail, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

The survey, out Wednesday, says women are more likely than men to credit the Internet for strengthening ties with family and friends: 60% say e-mail has enhanced connections with relatives; 71% say it has made friendships better.

"It doesn't take the place of an actual phone call or hugs, but it does let the other person know you want to keep in touch," says Faith Smith, 43, who has four e-mail accounts and writes her 27-year-old stepdaughter every morning.

Pew found that parents and children who e-mail each other regularly communicate online as often as they do on the phone. More than 75% of them talk on the phone once a week or more.

Smith's first foray onto the Internet was in January. It was "magical," says the mother of two from Carrollton, Ga., who works as a doctor's receptionist and weekend gospel radio DJ. She sings in a choir and moonlights as a romance novelist, too.

Dismissing the notion that computers foster a reclusive lifestyle, the Pew study found that 72% of Internet users visited a relative or friend a day earlier, compared with 61% for non-users. Internet users also were more likely to have telephoned their friends and relatives.

Net users "are more likely to do social activities on any given day," says survey director Lee Rainie. "Even if you look at intense users who spend a lot of time on computers, they are not losing contact with others."

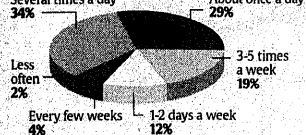
That's a stark contrast to a study earlier this year that concluded the more time people spend online, the more isolated they become. That study, from Stanford University, found that one in 10 Net users had re-

Net enters daily life, bolsters relationships

About 55 million Americans are online on a typical day, and those users are rapidly making the Web part of their daily lives.

In the past six months, 9 million women have gone online for the first time. That's nearly 10% of the adult women in the USA, and they're using the Net more than men to maintain family ties.

Percentage of Internet users who go online



Percentage of USA with Internet access

Sex



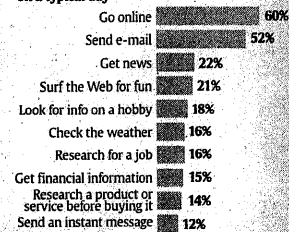
Race/ethnicity



Age

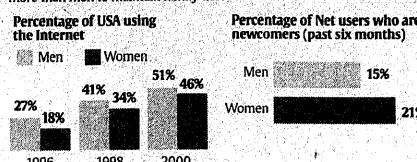


What those with Internet access do on a typical day



Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, survey of 3,533 adults, including 1,690 Internet users

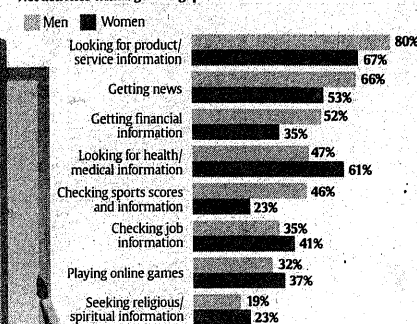
Percentage of USA using the Internet



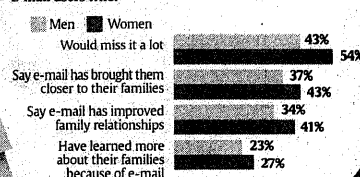
Percentage of Net users who are newcomers (past six months)



Net activities with a gender gap



E-mail users who:



By Marcy E. Mullins and Sam Ward, USA TODAY

Moms, families: Tell us about the Net

Do you use the Net and e-mail to stay in touch with family and friends? Does the Net bring you closer, or pull you apart? Tell us via e-mail at:

eworld@usatoday.com
Include a daytime phone number. We'll publish selected responses.

they communicate more since going online; 26 million Americans have used e-mail to start communicating regularly with a family member with whom they had not had much contact.

Survey findings also show that one of the Internet's biggest draws for women is access to health and religious information. Women also play more online games than men, according to the study.

A medical issue is what persuaded Gray to go online last year.

Undergoing treatment for breast cancer, she was attending the one support group near her rural home. "Unfortunately, one woman in the group had a recurrence and died, and everybody stopped coming. I had gotten back to normal, but I still needed to talk about it with people who had been there."

An online support group turned out to be the perfect solution.

Women are looking for that same support and camaraderie for parenting, Evans says. Experts are fine, but women want to talk "with people who are living it."

Recently, iVillage kicked off its second annual Take Your Moms Online project, in which schools host teen daughters who teach Internet basics to their mothers.

This year, many more "moms in their 40s were taking their mothers online," Evans says. Among new users, the fastest-growing segment is women over 50, the Pew study found.

"Most girls in their 30s have been exposed to it and are more comfortable with computers," says Gray, who now hosts daily chat about breast cancer. "Then you get to the rest of us. This is technology we would have loved to have 40 years ago!"

Evans predicts that as more women master the Internet, they will begin "using it in grass-roots ways for social change. In the old days, we'd sit around with yellow legal pad and go door-to-door. With the Internet, we can move the needle on that in a matter of days."

Remember, she adds: The Internet was a major tool in organizing this weekend's Million Mom March to gun-law reform.

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Last words for college grads

Poets, CEOs, pols and dot-com stars fill speaker lists

Poets, politicians and dozens of the dot-com economy are sought-after speakers for commencements around the USA this spring.

And President Clinton puts in some final commencement appearances as commander in chief. He's addressing the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn., on



Simmons College in Boston.

May 23

► Cokie Roberts, political commentator for National Public Radio and ABC-TV, at Douglass College on the New Brunswick campus of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey.

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