

Apparently, if you spend more than **one hour a week online**, you're a geek. Too right, says Paul Smith.

# Sad, but true



Recent scientific tests have shown conclusively that I am a sad geek. A huge international study of online usage has proven, beyond a reasonable doubt, that I — in common, I must add, with everyone else online — have no life.

**Apparently, spend more than** one hour a week online, and you start to lose friends (*friend* [*n*]: a person known well to another and regarded with liking, affection, and loyalty). Now, this comes as something of a surprise to me, as I have always thought of myself as rather a happy geek, as any of my IRC mates will confirm. I am happily — nay, delightfully — married to Del, although admittedly she was chosen on the somewhat spurious grounds that her name sounded oddly comforting. (I was seeing a woman called Compack at the time so, of course, it could have been worse.)

**My circle of close friends** does not end there, though. Oh no, far from it. Because, of course, there is also Edward. He is a dear and loving soulmate, whose capacity for warm affection is outshone only by his importunate need for feeding (but that is a common cat thing and I can't argue with it). I also have another friend and his name is Sean, and he really is sad. But that's another story.

**So, having comprehensively** torn down the fallacious conclusions of this (ha!) "study", I will now turn to the provenance of its shortcomings. And, yes, the eagle-eyed reader will have noticed that I have mentioned its damning methodological flaw already: it looked at those who spend "one hour a week online". Of course, now that I have spelt it out, you will find it risible, but I must say it is shocking to find yet another example of supposedly intelligent people spouting off on a subject about which they clearly know nothing. It is obvious: you cannot spend just one hour online per week. It is ridiculous. It is preposterous. It is, as a geek would probably tell you, "too fine a level of granularity".

**What they probably** meant to say, these so-called scientists in their fancy white coats with their pocket protectors attached incorrectly, is that they were studying sessions of more than one hour each. For, email blinking aside, it is impossible to be online much

less than an hour at a time. Anyone who purports to do so is just not doing it properly. And the vain boast "Well, I have got a T1 line and can get everything done in a flash" cuts no mustard around here, mate. As everyone knows, faster connections to the internet do not less time online make. They just mean you get more done.

**Rather late in my life** I have discovered, to the united cheers of British Telecom shareholders everywhere, another net-based time and money displacement activity: online gaming. I missed the whole networked Doom thing because, frankly, mindlessly shooting aliens held no appeal for me. However, I have recently been "reviewing" — and I use that word in case Del reads this — a game called Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six, about leading a counter-terrorist team in various situations. It is simply brilliant and just sucks great chasms out of my time-space continuum. The one problem with it is that both the computer-controlled "tangoes", as we TC pros call them, and many of my own troops, are suicidally moronic.

**I need real people** controlling them. Hop over to the (free) Internet Gaming Zone and you can get all the

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real people you need. It is dead simple to join games. Just choose a game, and that game's host will launch the game on your PC and you're in. It is *sooooo* cool! And, despite being in the far-flung UK and possessor of a bandwidth-challenged dialup connection, I have no latency problems whatsoever.

**All this adds up** to whacking great phone bills. I am still awaiting a response from British Telecom about my 0.5p a minute at all times Friends & Family ISP proposal, and I am off now to the launch of its Home Highway ISDN-for-everyone launch to see whether that will be any cheaper — or at least free to journalists. And all this as I wait to be asked to join the West London ADSL trial. Now, with so much excitement going on in my life, who dares call me sad?

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