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PEW INTERNET LIFE REPORT

Wired Workers: Who They Are, What They're Doing Online

The Internet has grown in importance at America's work places to the point where 37% of full-time workers, and 18% of part-time workers, have Internet access at work. Some 38 million full-time workers in the nation have Internet access at their jobs and two-thirds of them (67%) go online at least once per day. When they are online, most are doing job-related research and using email.

Seventy-two percent of full-time workers with Internet access at work say it has improved their ability to do their jobs.

Wired workers are most likely to be older, highly educated men with significant online experience. Thirty-two percent of full-time workers with Internet access at the office are over 45 years old (compared to 14% of all Internet users). Fifty-five percent of wired workers are men and 45% are women (in comparison, the entire Internet population is now split evenly between the sexes). Thirty-one percent of wired workers have college degrees and another 20% have a graduate degree (compared to 24% of all Internet users who have a college degree and 13% who have a graduate degree). In terms of online experience, wired workers are more likely to be veterans than newbies. Forty-one percent of wired workers have been online for three or more years (compared to 31% of all Internet users) and only 9% got Internet access within the last six months (compared to 16% of all users). Wired workers are also more likely to have Internet access both at home and at work, which is another indication of a more Net-savvy, experienced population. Seventy-three percent of full-time workers with Internet access on the job also go online from home (compared to 36% of all Internet users).

Wired workers are very task-oriented and they do not spend long periods online during the day. Fifty-eight percent of full-time employees with Internet access at work spend an hour or less online on a typical day.

The degree to which the Internet is a force in the workplace is highlighted by two findings in the tracking poll of the Pew Internet & American Life Project. On the productivity side, 47% of all Internet users and 72% of those with Internet access on the job say the Internet helps them do their jobs.

At the other end of the spectrum, 17% of Internet users (and 11% of all Americans) say they know someone who has been disciplined or fired because of his or her use of the Internet on the job. This is not surprising. There are legal encouragements to make sure employees are not abusing their Internet access. Business executives can be sued if they do not maintain a safe and harassment-free work environment. That gives these executives encouragement to watch what happens on their computer systems. Moreover, the Internet is bursting with opportunities for workers to use their computers for fun or profit that is not related to their jobs. That can prompt executives to make sure workers are productively engaged when they are on the clock.

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The Pew Internet Project survey suggests this kind of thing is happening most frequently to those who have the highest paying, most sophisticated jobs. Americans with higher levels of education and income are more likely to know someone in that situation. Fifteen percent of Americans with a college degree know someone who was fired or disciplined because of online activities, compared to 3% of Americans who have not finished high school. Nineteen percent of Americans with a household income exceeding \$75,000 per year know someone in that situation, compared to 8% of those whose household income falls below \$30,000 per year.

Other studies have found related developments. An American Management Association study released in April reported that 73.5% of major U.S. firms monitor employee phone calls, email, Web surfing, or computer files. One out of five companies say they have fired employees for misuse of company telecommunications resources. Financial firms are the most likely to monitor email and Web surfing. Fifty-five percent of banks, brokerages, insurance, or real estate companies monitor employee email. Seventy-three percent of these firms monitor employee Internet usage.

Yet many Internet users continue to conduct personal business during working hours. Of the 11 million Americans who go online only from work on a typical day, 50% goof off at least once online per day, according to the Pew Internet Project survey. These workers might be surfing the Web just for fun, checking sports scores, buying products like books or toys, or taking part in some other form of leisure or hobby activity online.

METHODOLOGY

The survey results are based on telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates among nationwide samples of adults, 18 years of age or older, in the continental United States. The results are drawn from several daily tracking polls conducted between March 1 and August 15, 2000. These surveys were conducted using a rolling daily sample, with a target of completing at least 75 interviews each day throughout the field period. In all, these tracking polls yielded samples of 12,571 adults (6,413 of whom are Internet users).

For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys may introduce some error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The sample for this survey is a random digit sample of telephone numbers selected from telephone exchanges in the continental United States. The random digit aspect of the sample is used to avoid "listing" bias and provides representation of both listed and unlisted numbers (including not-yet-listed numbers). The design of the sample achieves this representation by random generation of the last two digits of telephone numbers selected on the basis of their area code, telephone exchange, and bank number.