

Digital Footprints

Online identity management and search in the age of transparency

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Mary Madden, Senior Research Specialist

Susannah Fox, Associate Director

Aaron Smith, Research Specialist

Jessica Vitak, Research Associate

Summary of Findings

The nature of personal information is changing in the age of Web 2.0.

The vast array of data points that make up “personal information” in the age of online media are nearly impossible to quantify or neatly define. Name, address, and phone number are just the basics in a world where voluntarily posting self-authored content such as text, photos, and video has become a cornerstone of engagement in the era of the participatory Web.

The more content we contribute voluntarily to the public or semi-public corners of the Web, the more we are not only findable, but also knowable.

Internet users are becoming more aware of their digital footprint; 47% have searched for information about themselves online, up from just 22% five years ago.

Unlike footprints left in the sand at the beach, our online data trails often stick around long after the tide has gone out. And as more internet users have become comfortable with the idea of authoring and posting content online, they have also become more aware of the information that remains connected to their name online.

Nearly half of all internet users (47%) have searched for information about themselves online, up from just 22%, as reported by the Pew Internet Project in 2002. Younger users (under the age of 50) are more prone to self-searching than those ages 50 and older. Men and women search for information about themselves in equal numbers, but those with higher levels of education and income are considerably more likely to monitor their online identities using a search engine.

Few monitor their online presence with great regularity.

Just 3% of self-searchers report that they make a regular habit of it and 22% say they search using their name “every once in a while.” Three-quarters of self-searchers (74%) have checked up on their digital footprints only once or twice.

This Pew Internet & American Life Project report is based on the findings of a representative, random-digit-dial daily tracking survey on Americans' use of the internet. In addition, quotes are included from a non-random sample of respondents who participated in a online survey about people-focused searches online. No numerical data is included from the online sample. Unless noted, all numerical data was gathered through telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates between November 30 and December 30, 2006, among a sample of 2,373 adults, aged 18 and older. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is +/- 2%. For results based on internet users (n=1,623), the margin of sampling error is +/- 3%. Online responses were collected from 337 internet users between February 1-13, 2007.

Summary of Findings

Most internet users are not sure exactly what personal information is available online, however:

- Roughly one third of internet users say the following pieces of information are available online: their email address, home address, home phone number, or their employer. One quarter to one third of internet users say they do not know if those data points are available online.
- One quarter of internet users say a photo, names of groups they belong to, or things they have written that have their name on it appear online.
- Few internet users say their political affiliation, cell phone number, or videos of them appear online.

In interviews with the Pew Internet Project, privacy advocates and professional researchers argued that many of these data points are indeed available about most people, either on the open Web or in select online databases.

Most internet users are not concerned about the amount of information available about them online, and most do not take steps to limit that information.

Fully 60% of internet users say they are not worried about how much information is available about them online.

Similarly, the majority of online adults (61%) do not feel compelled to limit the amount of information that can be found about them online. Just 38% say they have taken steps to limit the amount of online information that is available about them.

Online adults can be divided into four categories based on their level of concern about their online information and whether or not they take steps to limit their online footprint:

- **Confident Creatives** are the smallest of the four groups, comprising 17% of online adults. They say they do not worry about the availability of their online data, and actively upload content, but still take steps to limit their personal information.
- The **Concerned and Careful** fret about the personal information available about them online and take steps to proactively limit their own online data. One in five online adults (21%) fall into this category.
- Despite being anxious about how much information is available about them, members of the **Worried by the Wayside** group do not actively limit their online information. This group contains 18% of online adults.
- The **Unfazed and Inactive** group is the largest of the four groups—43% of online adults fall into this category. They neither worry about their personal information nor take steps to limit the amount of information that can be found out about them online.

Internet users have reason to be uncertain about the availability of personal data; 60% of those who search for their names actually find information about themselves online, but 38% say their searches come up short.

The majority of internet users who have the inclination to query their names with a search engine do find some relevant results (60%), but a sizable segment (38%) report that a simple search does not yield any information connected to their name.

Among those who have searched for their name online, 62% find that the amount of relevant information about them generally matches their expectations. One in five self-searchers (21%) are surprised by how *much* information they find online about themselves, while 13% express disbelief at how *little* information comes up in their results.

- Fully 87% of self-searchers who locate information connected to their name say that most of what they find is accurate, up significantly from the 74% who reported this five years ago.
- In contrast, 11% of self-searchers who find information about themselves online say that most of it is not accurate, down from 19% five years ago.
- Just 4% of all online adults say they have had bad experiences because embarrassing or inaccurate information was posted about them online.

One in ten internet users have a job that requires them to self-promote or market their name online.

While most Americans do not actively manage their online presence, there is a segment of internet users who have jobs that require them to market their name on the internet or make information about themselves available online. As one might expect, those motivated by work-related expectations are much more likely to use a search engine to track their digital footprints.

- Those with the highest education levels report a greater tendency towards managing their professional presence online. Fully 18% of working college graduates report that their employer expects some form of self-marketing online as part of their job, compared with just 5% of working adults who have a high school diploma.
- Employees who are required to market themselves online are far more likely to monitor their presence with a search engine. Fully 68% of these “public personae” use a search engine to look up their own name, compared with just 48% of employed internet users who are not required to market themselves online as part of their job.
- One in five working American adults (20%) says their employer has a special policy about how employees present themselves online—including what can be shared and posted on blogs and other websites.

Among adults who create social networking profiles, transparency is the norm.

The Pew Internet Project has reported extensively on teenagers' use of social networking websites, finding that 55% of online teens have created an online profile and that most restrict access to them in some way. Looking at adults, their use of social networking profiles is much lower (just 20%), but those who use the sites appear to do so in a more transparent way.

- Among adult internet users who maintain an online profile, 82% say that their profile is currently visible compared with 77% of online teens who report this.
- Among adults who say they have a visible profile, 60% say that profile can be seen by anyone who happens upon it, while 38% say their profile is only accessible to friends.
- Teens with visible profiles make more conservative choices with respect to visibility; just 40% said their profile was visible to anyone, while 59% reported access that was restricted to friends only.

More than half of all adult internet users have used a search engine to follow others' footprints.

When asked about eight different groups of people one might search for online—ranging from family and friends to romantic interests and business colleagues—53% of adult internet users said they had looked for information connected to at least one of these groups.

- Most are casually curious in their searches for others. Just 7% of those who have searched for information on key people in their lives report doing so on a regular basis.
- Users are most likely to search for someone they have lost touch with. Fully 36% of adult internet users say they have used a search engine to find information about someone from their past.
- 19% of adult internet users have searched for information about co-workers, professional colleagues or business competitors.
- 11% of adult internet users say they have searched online for information about someone they are thinking about hiring or working with.
- 9% of online adults say they have searched online for information about someone they are dating or in a relationship with. Perhaps due to safety concerns, online women tend to do their dating homework more than online men.

Basic contact information tops most searchers' wish lists.

Despite all the new forms of personal information available online, the most popular type of “people search” relates to finding someone’s contact information, like an address or phone number.

- 72% of people searchers have sought contact information online.
- 37% of people searchers look to the Web for information about someone’s professional accomplishments or interests.
- 33% of people searchers have sought out someone’s profile on a social and professional networking site.
- 31% have searched for someone’s photo.
- 31% have searched for someone else’s public records, such as real estate transactions, divorce proceedings, bankruptcies, or other legal actions.
- 28% have searched for someone’s personal background information.

Digital Footprints: Summary of Findings at a Glance
The nature of personal information is changing in the age of Web 2.0.
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Few monitor their online presence with great regularity.
Most internet users are not concerned about the amount of information available about them online, and most do not take steps to limit that information.
Internet users have reason to be uncertain about the availability of personal data; 60% of those who search for their names actually find information about themselves online, but 38% say their searches come up short.
One in ten internet users have a job that requires them to self-promote or market their name online.
Among adults who create social networking profiles, transparency is the norm.
More than half of all adult internet users have used a search engine to follow others' footprints.
Basic contact information tops most searchers' wish lists.
Source: Madden, Fox, Smith and Vitak. <i>Digital Footprints</i> . Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project, December 16, 2007.

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Methodology

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About Princeton Survey Research Associates International: PSRAI conducted both the telephone and the online surveys analyzed in this report. The firm has offices in Princeton, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C.

Part 1.

The Changing Nature of Personal Information

“People have known for decades that each time they place an order from a mail-order catalogue or contribute to a political cause, they are adding information to a database. ... People are isolated in their reflections about their electronic personae. On the Internet, such matters are more likely to find a collective voice.”

- Sherry Turkle, *Virtuality and its Discontents* (1995)

“I see one important future thread in the WWW having nothing to do with marketing, selling, or other commercial activities, but just the way that individuals create a persistent identity for themselves in cyberspace.”

- Tim O'Reilly, *Cork Express* (1995)

Americans continue to expect control over their personal information, but have softened some of their views about privacy.

Over the past decade, many Americans have softened their views about being monitored at work or being asked highly personal questions, yet nearly all adults say it is important to control access to their personal information.

In 1994, a Harris Interactive telephone survey found that 65% of American adults said it is “extremely important” to not be monitored at work. A survey fielded one week after 9/11 found that percentage had dropped to 40% of adults, while 42% expressed that view in 2003.¹ The Pew Internet Project now finds in a similar survey that just 28% of adults say it is “very important” to not be monitored at work.²

A 1994 Harris Interactive survey found that 49% of American adults said it is “extremely important” that individuals in social and work settings not ask them things that are highly personal.³ The percentage who felt strongly about personal questions rose a bit in 2001 to 55% of adults, but has since fallen to 48% in 2003 and 42% in the current Pew Internet Project survey.

¹ Public Opinion Quarterly: “Trends: Privacy in the Information Age,” by Samuel J. Best, Brian S. Krueger, and Jeffrey Ladewig. Fall 2006. Vol. 70/No. 3.

² The Pew Internet & American Life Survey used comparable question wording, but readers should note that the positioning of questions, as well as the allowance of a voluntary “does not apply” category can produce some variance in response.

³ Public Opinion Quarterly, Fall 2006.

By contrast, a Pew Internet Project survey finds that 85% of adults say it is “very important” to control who has access to their personal information. This finding is in line with the trends found in previous studies such as the 1994 Harris Interactive survey which found that 80% of adults said it was “extremely important” to be in control of who can get information about them.⁴ The current Pew Internet Project survey finds that 59% of all adults have put that value to work and refused to give information to a business or a company because they thought it was not really necessary or was too personal.

The nature of personal information is changing in the age of Web 2.0.

However, general questions about privacy do not capture the vast array of data points that make up “personal information” in the age of social media. Name, address, and phone number are just the basics. Social networking and photo sites make it easy to find someone’s image online, even if it was meant to be kept private. Most people’s vacation pictures are not meant for public consumption, but unfortunately, some people are just famous enough to garner media attention.⁵ Facebook’s Beacon program, which was meant to be a viral marketing tool for online vendors, was quickly scaled back when members complained that they did not want their friends and family members to know what they were buying them for Christmas.⁶

Public comments on blogs, discussion groups, and listservs are also archived and searchable. People’s screen names can become like a secondary identification, often overshadowing a person’s offline notoriety⁷ or exposing a CEO’s predilection for defending his own company through unattributed postings.⁸ John Battelle has referred to this “clickstream exhaust” we leave behind as our “digital footprints,” the term that inspired the title and appears throughout this report.⁹

Beyond the footprints visible to the casual searcher, even more information is kept in corporate databases. The five most popular search engines routinely archive a user’s search terms, their computer’s address, and the unique identifier for their Web browser

⁴ Public Opinion Quarterly, Fall 2006.

⁵ Nelson Hernandez, “President Apologizes for Questionable Photos,” The Washington Post, October 18, 2007. See: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/17/AR2007101702244_pf.html

⁶ Louise Story and Brad Stone, “Facebook Retreats on Online Tracking,” New York Times, November 30, 2007. See: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/30/technology/30face.html?_r=2&ref=technology&oref=slogin&oref=slogin

⁷ Allen Salkin, “All-Stars of the Clever Riposte,” New York Times, September 30, 2007. See: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/30/fashion/30commenters.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

⁸ David Kesmodel and John R. Wilke, “Whole Foods Is Hot, Wild Oats a Dud -- So Said 'Rahodeb,’” Wall Street Journal, July 12, 2007. See: http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118418782959963745.html?mod=home_whats_news_us

⁹ While the term “digital footprint” has been used for many years, it has been gaining traction in recent discussions about the persistence of our personal data trails online. See, for instance, John Battelle, “From the Ephemeral to the Eternal.” Available at: <http://battellemedia.com/archives/000647.php>

for 13-18 months.¹⁰ That means your idle search for celebrity gossip will be kept on file along with your (many, no doubt) work-related searches.

Public records have also always been available as a scattered, but useful, way to track down personal information about other people. As Daniel J. Solove notes in his book, *The Digital Person*, “Our expectation of limits on the degree of accessibility emerges from the fact that information in public records has remained relatively inaccessible until recently. Our personal information in public records remained private because it was a needle in a haystack, and usually nobody would take the time to try to find it. This privacy is rapidly disappearing as access to information is increasing.”¹¹

The digitization of public records and the increasing accuracy of search engines has made it easy in recent years for the general population to join creditors, law enforcement, and other professional investigators in the hunt for individuals’ personal information.

Barbara Quint, editor-in-chief of *Searcher*, remembers when print directories gave way to the first online databases listing academic publications and affiliations, which created a reverse directory of scholars. Proprietary databases like Lexis Nexis were then joined by general search engines in the arsenal of tools available to researchers. Quint observes that information brokers have pushed their content online because they need new market outlets; consumers now have both the means and the motivation to join the “virtual chase.”¹²

Chris Hoofnagle, a senior fellow to the Berkeley Center for Law and Technology and privacy expert, asserts that creditors are another force driving the growth of the personal information market. They make it their business to find a wayward bill payer’s physical location and contact information, resulting in an online database that lists names, addresses, and phone numbers.¹³ These are the data points uploaded to the internet as a matter of course, along with other public records like home sales, court records, and newspaper accounts. Layered on top of these publicly available sources are proprietary databases containing information such as cell phone numbers and political affiliations. This is the **passive digital footprint**, the one that grows with no deliberate intervention from an individual.

<p>Passive Digital Footprint: Personal data made accessible online with no deliberate intervention from an individual.</p>

The allure of easy uploads, combined with the ever-finer antennae of search engines, have widened many internet users’ digital footprints to encompass details of their personal lives that would have taken a private investigator months to compile just a few

¹⁰ Center for Democracy & Technology: “Search Privacy Practices: A Work in Progress.” August 2007.

¹¹ Daniel J. Solove, *The Digital Person* (New York: NYU Press, 2004), 143. See also: *The Future of Reputation: Gossip, Rumor, and Privacy on the Internet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007)

¹² See <http://www.virtualchase.com/>

¹³ See and <http://www.epic.org/>

years ago. Bloggers describe their daily lives, complete with photos. Social networking profiles list personal interests along with friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. Online photo and video repositories are tagged with names, places, subject matter, and dates. People are not just findable, they are knowable.

This new realm of voluntarily posted text, images, audio and video has become a cornerstone of engagement with Web 2.0 applications. Indeed, being “findable and knowable” online is often considered an asset in participatory culture where one’s personal reputation is increasingly influenced by the information others encounter online. As Clive Thompson argues in a recent article for *Wired*, this creates a new paradox: “The reputation economy creates an incentive to be *more* open, not less. Since internet commentary is inescapable, the only way to influence it is to be part of it. Being transparent, opening up, posting interesting material frequently and often is the only way to amass positive links to yourself and thus to directly influence your Googleable reputation.”¹⁴

The more content we contribute to the public or semi-public corners of the Web, the more we grow our **active digital footprint**. These are the traces of data we contribute voluntarily, often in specific contexts with specific audiences in mind. However, digital data is easily disembodied from the original context in which it was created—obscuring indicators such as time, place, and intended audience. A contentious comment posted as part of a debate taking place on a community association blog may be written with neighbors in mind, but may in fact be viewed by a range of friends, family or professional colleagues for years after it is published, and not necessarily understood in its original context. At the same time, positive outcomes can and do occur as the result of our growing active digital footprint. Estranged family members find one another after years of separation, former flames reunite, and employers can learn about a job candidate’s volunteer work. Stories of positive and negative consequences such as these follow in later sections of the report.

<p>Active Digital Footprint: Personal data made accessible online through deliberate posting or sharing of information by the user.</p>
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In 2000 and 2002, the Pew Internet Project released two reports pertaining to the social impact of publicly-available personal information online. One report, entitled “Trust and Privacy Online,” detailed the then-ascendant worry about businesses and other entities tracking internet users’ behavior online.¹⁵ The other report, “Search Engines,” found that

¹⁴ Clive Thomson, “The See-Through CEO,” (*Wired*: March 2007). Available at: http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/15.04/wired40_ceo.html

¹⁵ Susannah Fox, “Trust and Privacy Online,” (Pew Internet Project: August 20, 2000). Available at: http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/19/report_display.asp

about one-third of internet users had looked up someone else's name online, most likely looking for a specific piece of information, like an address.¹⁶

The landscape has changed so dramatically in the intervening years that those reports seem almost quaint. Hoofnagle, the privacy expert, remembers that experts used to debate the definition of “personally identifiable information.” He says that after 9/11, “the argument that anonymity is a luxury became tenable, whether or not it has merit. And Web 2.0 brought the voluntary disclosure of personal information to the mainstream.”

While the internet-fueled headlines declaring that “Privacy is Dead” have been appearing since the 1990's, internet expert Esther Dyson argues that the notion of privacy doesn't fully capture the challenges of the current environment online. “We need to stop talking about privacy and start talking about control over data,” she says, and argues that, in the future, users are going to want more granular control over their data—making detailed decisions about what gets shared with whom that more closely reflect the distinctions we make in offline life. “Users may be overwhelmed when first setting up an account, but when they get more comfortable with an application, they will exert more control.”

While the concepts of passive and active digital footprints are helpful in discussing some of the key differences between the involuntary and voluntary disclosure environments, it is also the case that voluntarily or actively shared information in one setting may be involuntarily or passively disclosed in another. Facebook's initial attempt to leverage its members' online activities to create mini-feeds of all the updated information in a user's friend network was an example of this scenario. Details that were viewable on a friend's profile—such as a user's relationship status, changes to photos and the addition to new friends—were automatically “pushed” to a user's friends in the form of a constantly updated mini news feed. In the case of the News Feed feature, no new content was being published or exposed that had not already been voluntarily shared by the user, but the way it was delivered drew criticism from many users.¹⁷

However, it is still the case that most internet users are not social networkers or bloggers and most have not experienced the sometimes messy work-in-progress norms being hashed out by those who are heavily invested in social media. Adult internet users are far more likely to have used a search engine to find someone online than they are to have used a social networking site or created a blog. With 91% of online adults using search engines and 41% doing so on a typical day, search still reigns supreme in any kind of information-gathering pursuit online. And as Fred Stutzman, a Ph.D. student at the School of Information and Library Science at UNC-Chapel Hill and Co-Founder of ClaimID.com noted in a recent interview, “The technology that everyone wants is the laser to remove bad results from Google.”

¹⁶ Susannah Fox, “Search Engines,” (Pew Internet Project: July 3, 2002). Available at: http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/64/report_display.asp

¹⁷ Story and Stone, November 30, 2007.

Part 1.

To be sure, the nature of search is evolving dramatically—with new specialized tools and new forms of content being indexed at a radical pace. More specifically, the evolution of people-based search raises important questions about the way we manage our current and future identities online. How many people are even aware of their digital footprints? How accurate are the results we find about ourselves online? Who and what do we search for when we seek information about others online? These are just a few of the issues addressed in this report, which presents data from telephone surveys of the public gathered over time through Pew Internet Project surveys, quotes from interviews with experts in the field and stories shared through an online survey administered by the Project.¹⁸

¹⁸ Select experts in the field of privacy, identity and presence online were interviewed by the authors in person and via telephone during the month of November 2007. Additional quotes are noted throughout the report as coming from respondents who participated in an online survey as part of a convenience sample intended to gather personal stories and feedback to further illustrate findings from the telephone surveys.

Part 2.

Searching for Self: “Curiouser and Curiouser”

47% of internet users have searched for information about themselves online, up from just 22% five years ago.

The practice of “Googling” yourself – typing your name into a search engine to see what information is available about you online – has doubled in popularity in the last five years. Close to half of all adult internet users (47%) have used search engines to look up information and content associated with their names online, up from just 22%, as reported by the Pew Internet Project in 2002.¹⁹ Yet, most users remain humble as they go about their daily lives online; few internet users make a regular habit of their self-searching. Just 3% of self-searchers report that they monitor online information “on a regular basis,” and 22% say they search using their name “every once in a while.” The vast majority of self-searchers (74%) have checked up on their digital footprints only once or twice.

Younger users (under the age of 50) are more prone to self-searching than those ages 50 and older. Young adult internet users (ages 18 to 29), who often lead the adoption curve for many online activities, are just as likely as users ages 30 to 49 to search for themselves online (49% vs. 54%). And while those ages 50 to 64 have less experience with submitting a query about themselves online (39% have done so), wired seniors are the least likely to track their online trails (with just 28% of those ages 65 and older searching for their name online).

Change over time: Adult internet users are now twice as likely to use a search engine to look up their own name online.

Men and women search for information about themselves in equal numbers, but those with higher levels of education and income are considerably more likely to monitor their online identities using a search engine. While 59% of internet users with at least a college degree have used search engines to look up their own name, just 40% of users with lower levels of education have done so. Two-thirds (64%) of internet users living in households earning an annual income of \$75,000 or more have at least dabbled in self-searching, while 41% of users living in households earning less than \$75,000 per year have done so.

¹⁹ The 2002 report, “Search Engines,” was based on a survey conducted in August 2001. The question wording in that survey was “Have you ever used an online search engine to look up your own name or see what information about you is on the Web?” Question was based on those who use a search engine to look up information online. Trend percentages were recalculated to reflect total internet users.

Searching for Self: “Curiouser and Curiouser”

The “broadband effect”—the finding that internet users who have high-speed connections at home are more likely to engage in most online activities—also rings true with this online pastime.²⁰ More than half of those with high-speed connections at home (56%) search for information about themselves using search engines, compared with one in three home dial-up users (34%).

11% of internet users have a job that requires them to self-promote or market their name online.

A modest segment of internet users have jobs that require them to market their name on the internet or make information about themselves available online. Of those who are currently employed (some 62% of the adult population), one in ten say they need to market themselves or make information about themselves available online as part of their current occupation. That translates into roughly 6% of the total adult population and 11% of all adult internet users who are expected to post information about themselves online as part of their current profession. The range of professions among these “public personae” varies widely (everything from musicians to ministers to lawyers) but those who have careers in education and real estate were among the most represented occupations in this group.

Public Personae: The 11% of adult internet users who have jobs that require self-presentation or self-marketing online.

Men are marginally more likely than women to say that their job requires some form of online promotion; 12% of working men report this, compared with 8% of working women. Those with the highest education levels report a greater tendency towards managing their professional presence online. Fully 18% of working college graduates report that some form of self-marketing online is part of their job, compared with just 5% of working adults who have a high school diploma.

Those motivated by work-related expectations are more active in monitoring their presence online.

Among this small group of public personae, most, but not all, keep tabs on the information that is available about them on the internet. Fully 68% of those who say they need to post information about themselves online as part of their job use a search engine to look up their own name (compared with 48% of employed internet users who are not required to market themselves online).²¹ Some of these employees may be required to actively engage in online forums or blogs, while others simply have a bio, photo or

²⁰ Multivariate regression analysis shows that the presence of a home broadband connection has a significant positive impact on the likelihood that an individual has ever engaged in numerous online activities, controlling for demographic and socio-economic characteristics such as age, income, race and education. For further discussion of this “broadband effect” referred to here, see, “Home Broadband Adoption 2007,” available at: http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Broadband%202007.pdf

²¹ Hereafter referred to as, “other employed internet users.”

Searching for Self: “Curiouser and Curiouser”

contact information available online on their employer’s website, thus minimizing the need to use a search engine to monitor their relatively static online identity. It is also important to note that other public personae who do not monitor their online presence may see little need to; they may have a name that is so common that a simple search does not yield relevant results.

However, overall, public personae take a more active role in monitoring and managing their digital footprint. Looking at the frequency with which public personae query their own name, 43% of those who have done a personal name search say they do so at least every once in a while, compared with just 25% of other employed internet users who have done a personal name search.

Public personae are more likely to say that a wide range of personal content (both creative and mundane in nature) is available online.

Not surprisingly, public personae tend to say that a wide range of personal, professional and contact information about them is available online (whether or not they posted that information). Some of the personal details that internet public personae know are available online include:

- An email address (51% of public personae say their email address is available online for others to see, compared with 30% of other employed internet users). Looking at all adult internet users, 32% say their email address is available.
- Things they have written with their name on it (48% vs. 22%). Among all adult internet users, 24% say that writing they have authored is available online.
- A home address (45% vs. 34%). One in three (35%) adult internet users believe their home address is available online.
- Groups or organizations they belong to (44% vs. 22%). Close to one in four adult internet users (23%) say that information about the organizations they belong to is posted online.

Internet users who market themselves online are also likely to post creative content. For instance, 32% of public personae create or work on their own webpage, compared with just 14% of all adult internet users. A similar number (34%) create or work on webpages or blogs for others (compared with 13% of all adult internet users). More than four in ten (43%) have shared their own personal creations online, such as artwork, photos, stories or videos, while just 22% of all adult internet users have done so. Likewise, while 60% public personae have uploaded photos where others can see them, a relatively modest 36% of internet users—have posted pictures online.

However, public personae have not widely embraced social networking tools for professional or personal uses.

While they are active content creators, public personae are not diving head first into the online social networking pool. They are no more likely than other internet users to create a profile on a social networking site (SNS) such as MySpace or Facebook—25% of public personae have created an SNS profile, compared with 20% for employed internet users who are not required to market their names online.²²

One in five working adults in the U.S. say their employer has policies or guidelines about self-presentation online.

Policies regarding behavior at work can influence choices made in one’s personal online life. At the moment, one in five working American adults (20%) say their place of employment has a specific policy about how employees present themselves online, including what can be shared and posted on blogs and other websites.

However, a modest segment of the working public—one in ten—admits that they don’t know if their place of employment has policies or guidelines about how employees present themselves online.

Working adults who have at least some college education are more likely than those with less education to say their employer has policies or guidelines about the kinds of personally identifiable information they can post online. Roughly one in four employed adults with some college education say there are policies regarding self-presentation online at their place of work, compared with one in seven employed adults with a high school diploma or less education. Those in the highest income bracket – employed adults living in households earning \$75,000 or more per year – are also more likely than lower income groups to report these types of restrictions in their workplace.

Few regularly repeat their personal name searches.

While some professions require a high level of visibility online, most Americans are not required to manage their online presence as part of their jobs. Instead, the average internet user is casually curious about his or her online footprints. Looking at all adult internet users, 35% say they have used a search engine to look up their name only once or twice. Another 10% say they do so every once in a while, while just 2% report self-searching on a regular basis.

To look at the data another way, among the 47% of internet users who are self-searchers, 74%, have used a search engine to look up their own name only once or twice, while

²² Please see Part 3 for a more extensive discussion of social networking site users.

Searching for Self: “Curiouser and Curiouser”

22% say they search for information about themselves every once in a while. Just 3% say they monitor their online identity on a regular basis.

Self-searchers ages 30 to 49 are the most active online identity explorers; 31% search every once in a while or on a regular basis. A smaller segment (22%) of self-searchers ages 18 to 29 seek information about themselves online with that same level of frequency.

Most who have the inclination to conduct a personal name search find relevant results.

Overall, 60% of those who search for their names actually find information about themselves online, but 38% say their searches come up short.

While younger users (under the age of 50) are more likely than older users to have conducted a personal name search online at all, among self-searchers, older users are more likely to find information about themselves. Seven in ten self-searchers ages 50 to 64 say they have found information about themselves when searching online, compared with half of self-searchers ages 18 to 29.

Self-searchers who fall into the highest education and household income brackets also yield more productive queries; 69% of self-searchers with a college degree say they find material linked to their name online, while roughly half (54%) of those with lower education levels say the same. Self-searchers living in households earning \$75,000 or more per year get similar results; 69% of those in the highest income bracket find content associated with their name when performing personal name searches, while just over half (55%) of self-searchers living in homes earning less than \$75,000 annually say their personal name searches yield results.

Those who search for their own name see a familiar footprint.

Most of those who have searched for content associated with their name say that they find “what was expected” (62% of self-searchers, which is roughly comparable with what we found in 2002). Given that the size of the self-searching group has more than doubled in the last five years, this means the number of people finding information about themselves has dramatically increased, but the proportion that say the search results generally meet their expectations has stayed about the same.

Looking more closely at those who have been “surprised” at the amount of information found online, 21% of self-searchers say they did not expect to find so much information about themselves online (22% reported this in 2002). The other 13% react with disbelief at how little information can be found online about them (compared with 16% in 2002).

Searching for Self: “Curiouser and Curiouser”

Female self-searchers are more likely than male self-searchers to be surprised about how much information they find about themselves (24% vs. 17%). Similarly, those ages 50 to 64 are more prone to react with surprise at how much information comes up in their searches when compared with other age groups. While 32% of self-searchers ages 50 to 64 say they have been surprised to find so much information connected to their names, just 19% of those 30 to 49 and 13% of those ages 18 to 29 offer the same response.

User Stories Demonstrate the Wide Range of Information Found Online.

In a separate online survey conducted February 1-13, 2007, we invited respondents to conduct a real-time search on their name and share the results with us. While those who responded to the online questionnaire were part of a convenience sample designed to gather stories and experiences, many of their responses echoed themes similar to those that emerged from the national sample.

Those who were most active online or who were required to manage their online presence as part of their job were generally also the most aware of what material is available about them. When asked to open up a separate window and conduct a search for their own name, respondents reported a diverse mix of content ranging from mundane and predictable to bizarre and surprising. Various quotes from these respondents are highlighted throughout the report.

The graphic below presents online survey respondents’ descriptions of the various kinds of information that came up in their personal name search. While the presentation of these quotes was designed to appear as a series of search results, each quote comes from a separate participant in our online survey.

Searching for Self: “Curiouser and Curiouser”

Self Searching: what we find about ourselves online Search

Web Results 1 - 6 are from a Pew Internet Online Survey. (0.24 seconds)

[“\[I found\] postings...”](#)
from what I thought were password-protected listservs.”

[“Googling my name is useless...”](#)
I have been quite careful for the almost 15 years I have been on the internet not to use my real name, and to always use an alias...I am very protective of my identity.”

[“Everything about me is online...”](#)
There’s my blog, my Wikipedia entry (which is wrong), my bio on a bazillion sites (which are mostly outdated) and anything else you can imagine. (I know that if you look long enough, you’ll find naked pictures.)”

[“I discovered that you can rent my novel rather than buy it...”](#)
and I learned that it is for sale in at least one foreign country. I (and probably my publisher) was unaware of these possibilities...”

[“I keep a fairly close eye on what shows up for a search on my name...”](#)
your history on the web is long preserved.”

[“There are several news articles...”](#)
related to a problem I had breast-feeding a two-year-old during a two-year-old story hour. I was a trustee of the library as well. I know I will have to account this to someone in a professional setting sometime.”

Nearly nine in ten internet users who locate information about themselves say that most of what they find is accurate, up from 74% five years ago.

Looking at our national samples over time, online Americans who find information about themselves via search engines are now more likely to say that information is accurate. As was the case five years ago, internet users who encounter information about themselves online overwhelmingly report that most of the content they find is correct. Fully 87% of self-searchers who locate information connected to their name say that most of what they find is accurate, up significantly from the 74% who reported this in our report on search engines in 2002. In contrast, 11% of self searchers who find information about themselves online say that most of it is not accurate, down from 19% in 2002. Another 2% say they don’t know or declined to answer, down from 7% in 2002.

Searching for Self: “Curiouser and Curiouser”

Accuracy is up among those who search:
Adult internet users who locate information about themselves online are now more likely to say that most of what they find is accurate.

However, it is still the case that many users do not search at all. Looking at the adult internet population as a whole, 53% of online adults have never searched for their own name to see what information is available about them online. Another 18% of internet users have searched, but did not find any relevant information in their results. One quarter of online adults have searched, found information, and said most of what they found was accurate. That leaves just 3% of online adults who say they searched and found mostly inaccurate information about themselves.

- In addition, 6% of all online adults say they have asked someone to remove information about them that was posted online, including things like photos or videos.
- Just 4% of all online adults say they have had bad experiences because embarrassing or inaccurate information was posted about them online.

Those who have encountered mostly inaccurate results in their searches are the exception both in our random sample of the general public, as well as in our online survey. Online respondents who found inaccurate results were invited to explain what kind of information they found in their search and why they considered it to be inaccurate. Some of these anecdotes, which illustrate some of the various forms of “inaccurate” search results are included in the section below:

Searching for Self: “Curiouser and Curiouser”

That’s Not True! Individuals’ Stories about Bad Info in Search Results

Please tell us about any inaccurate information you found. What was wrong about it? Do you feel it was a serious problem for you or not?

“Wildly incorrect biographical information, propagated throughout the net from source allmusicgroup (they refuse to let me fix errors in my own profile). Other family members’ street addresses listed as mine (and vice versa) despite none of us having ever lived at the others’ addresses. Address info 10 years out of date. My posts to email groups that were once private, but then were bought out by Yahoo and published without permission.”

“I have an old piece lying out there stating that web logs are not going to be all that interesting - which is quite funny because today I advise corporations on blogging - but actually I just use it openly to tell people that I myself was very skeptical in the beginning - which resonates with a lot of people - but you could say it is damage control :-)”

“Several comments of decidedly false and slanderous/libelous nature were made about me during a long-term flame war in a newsgroup”

“(…) the main inaccuracies are information that’s outdated and incorrect information I have purposely fed into the system to confound it, simply because I’m tired of so much invasion of privacy involving data about me that’s posted without my permission - so now when I fill out forms that ask for info that may not be necessary, I don’t always give truthful answers any more”

“About half of the results on the internet are from spam websites, which crawl the internet and repost those links/messages under a different banner. I find lots of this kind of information, which is not related to me or my work in any way -- it is spam.”

Part 3.

Measuring Our Online Footprint: The Trails of 2.0

One in three online adults say their home address and information about who they work for is available online.

When asked about specific kinds of personal information that might be posted online, internet users express varying degrees of awareness about the availability of certain information about them. In some cases, such as on many social networking sites, users post information about themselves. In other cases, as with government records, information is published online by someone else.

The most common pieces of information reported to be online are one's home address and "your employer or the company you work for." Fully 35% of internet users say that their home address is available online, while 40% say their address is not available. Another 25% say they don't know whether or not their home address can be found online.

Likewise, 35% of internet users say that information about who they work for is available online, while 44% say that information is not available. Another 11% say they don't know whether or not that kind of information is posted online and 9% say the question doesn't apply to them.

Among those who are employed, nearly three in four (73%) say that their company or employer maintains a website. However, just one in four workers whose employers have a presence online (27%) say those websites contain specific information about them—such as their biography, their contact information or a photo of them.

Many users are uncertain about the availability of their email address.

Email addresses may be more readily available than users think; 32% of internet users say they know that their email address is available online, while 29% say it is not available. However, the availability of one's email address is the topic most likely to inspire uncertainty among our respondents; 38% say they don't know whether or not their email address is available online.

Home phone numbers are also reported to be available by roughly the same number of people. Fully 30% of internet users say they know that their home phone number is

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available, while 47% say their number is not posted online. Another 23% say they don't know if their home number is accessible online.

One in four internet users (24%) say that “things they've written that have their name on it” are available online. These could take the form of a blog post, blog comments, a professional bio or any number of documents that may be posted to a website. By comparison, 59% of internet users say they aren't aware of any personally identifiable writing of theirs available online. Roughly one in six internet users (17%) don't know whether or not personally identifiable writing is available online.

Another one in four internet users (23%) say that photos of them are accessible online. However, these could be photos posted with or without a caption and may or may not be associated with the correct name of the subject. Two in three internet users (67%) believe that no photos of them are available online, while 10% say they don't know.

Likewise, 23% say that information about the groups or organizations they belong to is available online while 63% say those kinds of details are not posted. Another 12% are uncertain about the availability of information regarding their affiliation with certain groups or organizations.

What We Know About Our Digital Footprints			
<i>% of internet users who say the following is available about them online</i>			
	Yes	No	Don't Know
Home address	35%	40%	25%
Company or employer	35	44	11
Email address	32	29	38
Home phone number	30	47	23
Things you've written that have your name on it	24	59	17
Photo of you	23	67	10
Groups or organizations you belong to	23	63	12
Political party or affiliation	11	68	19
Cell phone number	6	71	18
Video of you	2	92	5

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking Survey, November 30-December 30, 2006. Margin of error is ±3% for results based on total internet users (n=1,623).

Just one in ten internet users believe that information about their political party affiliation is available online.

Less commonly reported is the availability of political party affiliation. Just 11% of adult internet users think that their political party affiliation is available online, while 68% say that information is not posted. However, 19% say they don't know whether or not information about which political party they support is accessible online.

A scant 6% of online adults report that their cell phone number is available online. Seventy-one percent believe their cell phone number is not posted, and 18% say they don't know. Another 4% said the question did not apply to them. In the most recent Pew Internet Project Survey, 87% of online adults said they had a cell phone.²³

Of all the various kinds of information we inquired about, video was the type of content users felt was least likely to appear online. Just 2% of adult internet users say that video of themselves is available online while 92% say they aren't aware of any video of them online. Another 5% said they didn't know whether or not video of them could be located online.

Users often share “second degree” personal information through content posted on social media sites.

Aside from all the different kinds of “first degree” personal content one might post online, there are many different genres of “second degree” personal information that may or may not be explicitly connected to one's offline identity. This information might include everything from a social networking profile that includes personal information and stories not connected to one's real name, to photos that include images of family members and friends or reveal information about one's location at a certain point in time.

“First degree” personal information includes material about you that you knowingly provide.

“Second degree” personal information is material about you that may not be connected to your real name or is provided by someone else, with or without your knowledge.

As internet users become more comfortable with the idea and practice of posting different kinds of creative content online, and the tools and applications that facilitate this practice expand every day, the range of details we trail behind us continues to expand.

²³ Pew Internet & American Life Project Consumer Choice Survey, August-September 2007.

One in three adult internet users has posted creative content online.

Overall, 33% of internet users have posted some kind of creative content online—either through sharing personal creations or maintaining a webpage or blog. Fully 22% have shared something online that they personally created, such as their own artwork, photos, stories or videos, while 14% report working on their own webpage. Thirteen percent of adult internet users have created or worked on webpages or blogs for others, and 8% say they have created their own blog.

Taking into account photo uploading of any kind, an even greater number could be considered content posters. Fully 36% of adult internet users report uploading photos where others can see them online. That compares to 47% of teens.²⁴ Most photo sharers say that they do place some restrictions on the photos they share, though few do so religiously. One in three online photo sharers say they restrict access to their photos “most of the time,” but 24% say they restrict access “only sometimes.” Another 39% say they never restrict access to the photos they post.

A much smaller segment of the online population, just 8% of adult internet users, reports posting video online. Those who restrict access to video content do so at similar levels as those who post photos; 23% say they limit access “most of the time,” 30% do so “only sometimes,” and 42% never restrict who can watch the videos they post.

Social Networking Profiles: With adults, transparency is the norm.

Over the last five years, a plethora of social networking sites (SNS) has appeared, offering internet users new ways to communicate with friends, coworkers, and even strangers. The most popular of these sites are currently ranked as some of the most-viewed websites on the internet, attracting millions of users around the world. The top three social networking sites in the U.S. according to Alexa’s traffic rankings were MySpace (No. 3 overall), Facebook (No. 5) and LinkedIn (No. 34), as of December 1, 2007. The value of these sites is contingent on users voluntarily sharing various forms of personal data such as contact information, work and education history, and photographs. However, each site provides unique features to control what information gets shared with other users in a given network. For instance, there are notable differences in the default privacy settings when a user initially creates an account, and differing requirements for the minimum amount of information a user can display. However, it is important to note that users can provide fake information in many of these fields, thus further obscuring their identity if they wish to do so.

²⁴ See Pew Internet & American Life Project, Parents and Teens Survey, October-November 2006.

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The Pew Internet Project has reported extensively on teenagers' use of social networking websites, finding that 55% of online teens have created an online profile and that most restrict access to them in some way.²⁵ Looking at adults, creation of social networking profiles is much lower (just 20%), but those who do maintain profiles appear to do so in a much more transparent way.

Looking at all adult internet users who maintain an online profile, 82% say that their profile is currently visible compared with 77% of online teens who report this. Among adults who say they have a visible profile, 60% say that profile can be seen by anyone who happens upon it, while 38% say their profile is only accessible to friends. However, teens with visible profiles appear to make more conservative choices with respect to visibility, just 40% said their profile was visible to anyone, while 59% restricted their profile to friends only.

Social Networking and Online Profiles		
The percentage of online adults and online teens in each group who create profiles online:		
	Adults	Teens
Total	20%	55%
Men/Boys	22	51
Women/Girls	19	58
Age - Teens		
12-14	n/a	45
15-17	n/a	64
Age - Adults		
18-29	50	n/a
30-49	15	n/a
50-64	8	n/a
65+	2	n/a
Household income		
Less than \$50,000	30	55
\$50,000 or more	14	56
Race/ethnicity		
White, non-Hispanic	18	53
Non-white	28	58

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking Survey, November 30-December 30, 2006. Margin of error is $\pm 3\%$ for results based on total internet users [$n=1,623$].

²⁵ Amanda Lenhart and Mary Madden, "Teens, Privacy and Online Social Networks" (Pew Internet Project: April 18, 2007). Available at: http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/211/report_display.asp

Most internet users feel as though it would be “pretty easy” for someone to locate or contact them based on the information available about them online.

When thinking about all of the information that is available about them on the internet, respondents were asked to assess how easy they thought it would be for someone to locate or contact them if they wanted to. Overall, 47% of adult internet users say they think it would be “pretty easy” for someone to find them, compared with 29% who think someone would have to work at it, but could find them eventually. Another 17% believe it would be “very difficult” for someone to locate or contact them based on the information they found online.

Men are somewhat more likely than women to think that it would be “pretty easy” to locate them using online resources; 50% of online men reported this compared with 43% of online women. About half of internet users age 30 and older think it would be pretty easy for someone to locate them, compared with one third of younger internet users.

Young adults, many of whom maintain a profile on a social networking site, are more likely than other internet users to believe it would be “very difficult” for someone to locate or contact them.

Previous research by the Pew Internet Project examining teenagers’ privacy choices on social networking sites suggests that these young users often restrict access to or withhold posting certain kinds of contact information.²⁶ This sense of control over one’s personal data may influence respondents’ sense of their own accessibility.

Teens who maintain an online profile are relatively confident about their level of accessibility online. Fully 36% say they think it would be “very difficult” for someone to identify them from their online profile. Forty percent of teens with profiles online think that it would be hard for someone to find out who they are from their profile, but that they could eventually be found online. And 23% of teen profile creators said it would be “pretty easy” for someone to find out who they are from the information posted to their profile.

When asked a more general question about the availability of personal information online (not only that which is posted to a profile), internet users age 18 to 29 nearly match their teen counterparts: 25% say it would be “very difficult” for someone to locate or contact them based on the information they find online. Forty percent of internet users age 18 to 29 say someone would have to work at it but they could locate them eventually. And 33% of young adult internet users say it would “pretty easy” for someone to locate them based on online information.

²⁶ Lenhart and Madden, April 2007.

Measuring Our Online Footprint: The Trails of 2.0

Penelope Hughes, vice president of online services for the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, noted in a recent interview that “a majority of users of the National Sexual Assault Hotline are under age 25, and we have found them to be very savvy when it comes to protecting their identity and personal information online. In fact it appears that many people are turning to the Online Hotline precisely because of the added anonymity our online service provides.”

Fifty percent of 18-29 year-old internet users have created a social networking profile, compared with 15% of 30-49 year-old internet users and 8% of 50-64 year-old internet users.

Fred Stutzman, a Ph.D. student at the School of Information and Library Science at UNC-Chapel Hill and Co-Founder of ClaimID.com, has found that college-aged users of social networking sites draw a clear delineation between “hard contact information” (the things we’ve been taught to protect – address, phone number, etc.) and the kind of information they post to a profile.²⁷ As Stutzman noted in a recent interview, “Social networking sites may bias the way we think about our personal information, and we may lose focus of the many other places where our information is searchable and accessible online.”

Indeed, 26% of adult internet users who have created a social networking profile say it would be “very difficult” for someone to find them, compared with 15% of internet users who have not joined a social networking site.

Ari Schwartz, deputy director of the Center for Democracy & Technology, has another theory about the gap between young and older adults when it comes to privacy: “Young people don’t realize that what they are doing will have an impact later on. Older people understand how information impacts them over time and therefore are more careful.” So while young internet users may successfully mask their physical location, they upload photos that reveal all sorts of personal information. An employer who is barred from asking if a job applicant has children can find out that information online, for example, as proud parents blog about their kids, upload photos, and otherwise trumpet their status.

However, ultimately, “findability” is determined by a complex set of online and offline disclosures that may or may not be voluntary. Mary Ellen Bates, the principal of Bates Information Services, said in a recent interview that people in their teens and twenties have fewer “anchor points” in the offline world than do older adults. Young people “use tools and resources that don’t require disclosure” like mobile phones. By contrast, she said, “Anyone over the age of 35 could be unpleasantly surprised about their exposure because they do have landline phones and LinkedIn pages that list their employment histories. Wherever you have disclosed information, it can be traced.”

²⁷ See, for instance, Frederic Stutzman, “An Evaluation of Identity-Sharing Behavior in Social Network Communities,” Available at: http://www.ibiblio.org/fred/pubs/stutzman_pub4.pdf

Part 4.

Searching for Others: Forget the Phone Book

More than half of all adult internet users have used a search engine to find information about various people in their lives.

When asked about eight different groups of people one might search for online—ranging from family and friends to romantic interests and business colleagues—53% of adult internet users said they had looked for information connected to at least one of these groups. Most users go to a general search engine, but as the demand for people-centered information grows, so too has the number of specialized “people search” tools available to the average user.

Some people search tools, such as PeekYou or Rapleaf automatically create composite profiles of users based on the information gleaned from social networking sites, blogs and other content tied to one’s real name, username or email address. Other specialized search tools, such as Polar Rose, focus on analyzing and identifying online images with facial recognition technology. The accuracy of these tools varies, and in most cases, it is up to the user to correct or update inaccurate or vestigial information connected to one’s online identity.²⁸

Similar to the frequency with which users monitor their own online presence, most users are casually curious in their searches for others. Just 7% of those who have searched for information on people in their lives report doing so on a regular basis, while the majority, 54%, has done so only once or twice. Another 36% say they use search engines to find information about other people every once in a while.

Overall, male and female internet users are equally likely to have searched for information connected to at least one key group of people in their lives. However, age variations present a much different story. Internet users under the age of 50 are much more likely than other age groups to say they have used a search engine to find information online about other people. And contrary to what we find with many online trends,²⁹ young adults ages 18 to 29 are not the leaders in this practice. Internet users age 30 to 49 are the most likely age group to say they have searched for information connected to people in their lives (63% have done so, compared with just 52% of those

²⁸ For a discussion of people search tools, see Paula J. Hane, “People Search Tools Populate the Web,” (*Information Today*, September 1, 2007), Available at: <http://newsbreaks.infotoday.com/nbReader.asp?ArticleId=37403>

²⁹ Susannah Fox and Mary Madden, “Generations Online,” (Pew Internet & American Life Project: January 22, 2006). Available at: http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/170/report_display.asp

Searching for Others: Forget the Phone Book

ages 18 to 29 and 44% of those ages 50 and older). It may be that internet users in their 30s and 40s have lived long enough to have lost track of friends and are also savvy enough to use the internet to rekindle those relationships.

People Search: Who we look for online							
<i>Have you ever used a search engine to find information online about...?</i>							
	<i>All Adult Internet Users</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-49</i>	<i>50-64</i>	<i>65+</i>
Someone from your past or someone you have lost touch with	36	37	35	35	42	30	30
Friends	26	28	23	32	29	17	18
Family members	23	25	21	24	26	18	18
Co-workers, professional colleagues or business competitors	19	23	16	17	25	16	8
Neighbors or people in your community	17	16	19	19	21	12	9
Someone you just met or someone you were about to meet for the first time	12	11	12	16	14	6	4
Someone you are thinking about hiring or working with	11	13	9	9	15	8	5
Someone you are dating or in a relationship with	9	7	11	16	10	4	2
Yes to at least one	53	56	51	52	63	44	44

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking Survey, November 30 – December 30, 2006. Margin of error is $\pm 3\%$ for results based on total internet users (n=1,623). Significant differences are noted in bold.

Blast from the past: We're most likely to search for those with whom we have lost touch.

Fully 36% of adult internet users say they have used a search engine to find information about someone from their past. The internet helps to reconnect men and women alike, and has been used at relatively equal levels across age groups with one exception: those who are ages 30 to 49 are more likely than any other age group to have searched for information about those they have lost touch with (42% have done so).

In a separate question, we asked respondents whether or not they had been contacted by someone from their past who had located them through information found online. Overall, 20% of internet users say someone has reached out to reconnect with them after finding their contact information online.

Stories of reconnection were also repeatedly echoed in the findings from our online survey, where accounts of reuniting with long lost friends, family and former flames were among the most commonly shared. For example:

Friends

“I found a high school friend who I'd been out of touch with for about 10 years. We now visit each other, know each other's partners and kids, and email regularly.”

“[I was] surprised to find an old friend only through a public document related to a tax lien that was put on her house a few years ago. The scanned document itself was online. This came up in a simple search, not a specialized or paid search of public documents. It did give me the address I wanted.”

“[I] found out that a high school friend who enjoyed playing music is nationally recognized as one of the best contemporary bluegrass banjo players in the country. I dropped him a note and, amazingly enough, though he lives across the country, he was playing in my area the next day and we were able to get together while he was here. (This is 600 miles away from the town we lived in as teens.)”

Family

“I was able to find my birth-sister (I was adopted) online because she has a small business that she advertises online. We now email one another, and will meet in the spring, hopefully.”

“I used the internet to trace my birth family. I'd found my birth father with a search, and he gave me the name of my birth mother. Through a combination of looking up in person and via the internet, I patched together the history of my birth mother through past records (property records, birth records, divorce records), address searches, and personal websites.”

Former flames

“The guy I had a high school crush was sent home to his home country in Latin America shortly after a major political change there. We lost contact with him, and had no idea if he was dead or alive during the tumultuous years that ensued. Through searching his name on the internet last year, I discovered that he was now in senior management of a multinational bank.”

“Got in touch with my first boyfriend, ever... found his wedding photos online and OMG, she looks like me!”

“I found an ex-boyfriend online. His company website had a photo of him and he doesn't look nearly as good now as he did when we were together!”

Work-related searches: 19% of adult internet users have searched for information about co-workers, professional colleagues or business competitors.

While less common than personal searches for family and friends, close to one in five adult internet users say they have searched for information about co-workers, professional colleagues or business competitors. Male internet users are more likely to conduct this type of search (23% of online men, compared with 16% of online women). Looking across age groups, those ages 30 to 49 are the most likely to conduct work-related people searches; 25% report doing so compared with just 16% of users ages 50 to 64.

11% of adult internet users say they have searched online for information about someone they are thinking about hiring or working with.

As professional and personal information about job candidates, service providers and other prospective co-workers becomes increasingly accessible online, employers and others who may influence a decision to hire someone have started to turn to the Web as part of the reference-checking process. However, the potential for candidate research goes both ways; prospective employees can also find out more about places where they are interviewing for jobs, who their co-workers might be, and what praise or complaints former employees may have shared online.

Overall, roughly one in ten adult internet users say they have used a search engine to find information online about someone they are thinking about hiring or working with. Men and women are equally likely to conduct this kind of research, but age tells a different story. Those who are 30 to 49 are considerably more likely than any other age group to search for information about prospective employees or co-workers; 15% have done so, compared with just 9% of those ages 18 to 29 and about 7% of those ages 50 and older.

Searching for Others: Forget the Phone Book

Internet users in higher socio-economic brackets are more likely than others to find relevant information about themselves online. Therefore, it is not surprising that those with the highest levels of education and income exhibit the greatest tendency to turn to search engines to find information about those they may hire or work with. Close to one in four internet users (23%) living in households earning \$75,000 or more per year say they have searched for information about someone they are thinking about hiring or working with, while just 7% of those earning less than that amount have done so. Likewise, 18% of internet users with a college degree have searched online for information about those they may hire or work with, while 7% of those with lower levels of education have done so.

However, in our telephone survey, we found that those who had used search engines as part of the candidate research process came from a wide range of occupational backgrounds, and included multiple teachers, managers, pastors, lawyers, doctors, lobbyists and engineers—among many others.

Dating-related searches: Women and young adults do their relationship homework online.

The internet continues to play an important role in establishing and maintaining romantic relationships.³⁰ Overall, 9% of online adults say they have searched online for information about someone they are dating or in a relationship with. Perhaps due to safety concerns, online women tend to do their dating homework more than online men (11% of online women vs. 7% of online men have done this). Likewise, young adults, who are more actively engaged in the dating scene and whose social lives tend to be more deeply infused with online media are also more apt to do their dating homework online when compared with older users. While 16% of users ages 18 to 29 have researched romantic partners online, 10% of those ages 30 to 49 have done so. That compares with less than 5% of users ages 50 and older who say they have done this.

Basic contact information tops the list of things people search for.

Far and away the most popular type of “people search” conducted online relates to finding someone’s contact information, like an address or phone number. Nearly three in four (72%) people searchers have sought contact information online. Second to contact information, curiosity related to someone’s professional accomplishments or interests has inspired 37% of people searchers to tap the Web for further details. Social and professional networking profiles garner a similar audience, with 33% of people searchers hunting for someone’s profile online. Similarly, looking up information about someone else’s public records and looking for a photo of somebody have each motivated 31% of the people searching audience to look online. And 28% of people searchers say they have generally looked for “personal background information about someone.”

³⁰ Mary Madden, “Online Dating,” (Pew Internet & American Life Project: March 5, 2006). Available at: http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/177/report_display.asp

Inquiring Minds: What we search for	
<i>Thinking about all the times you looked up information online about someone else...Have you ever looked online for...?</i>	<i>Those who have searched for information about others online (n=863)</i>
Someone's contact information, like an address or phone number	72
Information about someone's professional accomplishments or interests	37
Someone's profile on a social or professional networking site	33
Someone else's public records, such as real estate transactions, divorce proceedings, bankruptcies, or other legal actions	31
A photo of somebody	31
Personal background information about someone	28
Have not looked online for any of these	10

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking Survey, November 30 – December 30, 2006. Margin of error is ±4% for results based on those who have searched online for information about others (n=863).

Among the six types of searches we inquired about, men and women were equally as likely to have sought each kind of information with one exception: men are considerably more likely than women to seek out information about someone's professional accomplishments or interests. Fully 42% of men who search for others have looked up information about someone's professional achievements or interests compared with 32% of women who search.

Photo and profile searches motivate an exceptionally large segment of people searchers ages 18 to 29 (57% and 50%, respectively) relative to older adults. Just 27% of people searchers ages 30 to 49 have looked for a photo of someone online and 33% have searched for someone's profile on a social or professional networking site. However, when it comes to contact info or searches for public records, those ages 30 to 49 are the most experienced group.

Yet, most users in search of information about others have some difficulty finding the information they want.

When users go online to look for information about someone, they do not typically have great success. Among those who have searched for information about others, just 19% say they “always or almost always” find what they need when they look online. Another 23% report that they find the information they seek “most of the time.” However, 34% say they find the information they need only “some of the time” and 21% “hardly ever” find what they’re looking for.

Searching for Others: Forget the Phone Book

Women are more likely to report successful searches when compared with men (47% of women who search for information about others find what they need always or most of the time, vs. 37% of men who search). Unlike what we have found in the past with questions about the general use of search engines, success rates for finding specific information about a person vary little by age, education or income among people searchers. Across the board, among those who have searched for information about others, few find that their searches consistently yield the results they need.

36% of online adults use search engines to look up information about celebrities and public figures.

In a separate question, respondents were asked about their use of search engines to find information about celebrities and other public figures. Overall, 36% of online adults have used a search engine to find information about famous or notable people. This compares to 23% of online adults who report using a search engine to find information about a family member, and just 9% who report using a search engine to find information about someone they are dating.

Men are more likely than women to use a search engine to look up information about celebrities or public figures (39% vs. 32%). Younger users are also significantly more likely to use search engines for this purpose: while 47% of respondents ages 18 to 29 use a search engine to look up information about public figures, this number drops to 39% among people ages 30 to 49 and 26% among people ages 50 to 64.

The likelihood of using search engines for this purpose also increases with education and income. While just 27% of respondents with less than a high school diploma use search engines to look up information about public figures, 44% of college graduates do so. Likewise, the segment that seeks information about celebrities and public figures increases from 31% of users living in households earning less than \$30,000 per year to 44% of those who live in households earning more than \$75,000 per year.

Part 5.

Managing Identity: Approaches and Attitudes

Most internet users are not concerned about the amount of information available about them online, and most do not take steps to limit that information.

Most internet users do not seem to think much about the size and scope of their digital footprint. Fully 60% say they are not worried about how much information is available about them online. The youngest and oldest internet users express the most laissez-faire attitude about their personal information online.

Similarly, the majority of online adults (61%) have not taken steps to limit the amount of information that can be found about them online. Just 38% say they have taken steps to limit the amount of online information that is available about them. Overall, those who are more aware of their online presence are more likely to restrict access or limit the information available about them in some way. Looking at those who have searched for information about themselves online, for instance, 46% have taken steps to limit the information available about them, compared with just 32% of non-self-searchers.

Even among those who do express concern about the availability of their online information, many do not take steps to limit access to personal data.

Although the number of internet users who worry about their online information is similar in size to the segment that takes steps to limit access to personal data, the two groups do not neatly overlap. For many internet users, concerns about online personal information do not translate into action. Among internet users who worry about their personal information, just over half (54%) say they take steps to limit the amount of personal information that is available about them.

By comparing the intersection of these two questions (worrying about the amount of one's personal information available online, and whether or not an individual takes steps to limit his or her online personal information) four mutually exclusive groups can be created. Online adults can be divided into four categories based on their level of concern about their online information and whether or not they take steps to limit their online footprint:

Managing Identity: Approaches and Attitudes

- **Confident Creatives** are the smallest of the four groups, comprising 17% of online adults. They say they do not worry about the availability of their online data, and actively upload content, but still take steps to limit their personal information.
- The **Concerned and Careful** fret about the personal information available about them online and take steps to proactively limit their own online data. One in five online adults (21%) fall into this category.
- Despite being anxious about how much information is available about them, members of the **Worried by the Wayside** group do not actively limit their online information. This group contains 18% of online adults.
- The **Unfazed and Inactive** group is the largest of the four groups—43% of online adults fall into this category. They neither worry about their personal information nor limit the amount of information that can be found out about them online.

Managing Digital Footprints: Four Groups			
Group name	% of online adults	Worry about how much info available is available about you online?	Take steps to limit the amount of info available about you online?
Concerned and Careful	21%	Yes	Yes
Worried by the Wayside	18%	Yes	No
Confident Creatives	17%	No	Yes
Unfazed and Inactive	43%	No	No

Source: Pew Internet Project December 2006 survey of 2,373 adults; 1,623 are internet users. Margin of error for all internet users is +/-3%.

These four groups are further differentiated by several factors, including their tendency to search for information about themselves and others online, the amount of personal information available about them online, their participation in online content creation activities such as social networking or blogging, and demographic and other behavioral factors. In general, individuals who limit their online personal information (the Concerned and Careful and the Confident Creatives) are most similar to each other, while the Worried by the Wayside and Unfazed and Inactive groups also have a substantial amount of overlap. The demographic and behavioral characteristics of these groups are discussed in more detail below.

Managing Identity: Approaches and Attitudes

Demographic Composition of Different Groups				
	Concerned and Careful	Worried by the Wayside	Confident Creatives	Unfazed and Inactive
Gender				
Male	46%	46%	52%	50%
Female	54	54	48	50
Age				
18-29	25	20	31	21
30-49	46	46	44	41
50-64	23	28	19	28
65+	6	6	5	10
Education				
Less than high school	6	8	6	7
High school graduate	26	32	30	30
Some college	29	27	30	27
College graduate	39	33	34	36
Annual Household Income				
Less than \$30,000	22	21	28	22
\$30,000-\$49,999	24	23	27	28
\$50,000-\$74,999	25	20	14	18
\$75,000+	29	35	31	32
Internet experience				
% with broadband at home	68	63	65	60
Average number of years online	9	8	8	8

Source: Pew Internet Project December 2006 survey of 2,373 adults; 1,623 are internet users. Margin of error for all internet users is +/-3%. Margins of error for comparison between subgroups are +/- 6% for Concerned and Careful (n=337); +/- 6% for Worried by the Wayside (n=289); +/- 7% for Confident Creatives (n=269); and +/- 4% for Unfazed and Inactive (n=728). Values in bold are significantly higher than non-bolded values in the same row.

Confident Creatives are active internet users whose comfort with online expression may influence their lack of concern about managing their personal data.

Confident Creatives are the youngest of the four groups, and are comfortable utilizing online spaces as a forum for self-expression and personal research. They tend to be proficient online content creators, and are relatively likely to use search engines to look up information about themselves and others. Their ability to post potentially personal content while simultaneously limiting the amount of information available about them

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indicates a level of comfort with online technologies that may not be present in other groups.

Confident Creatives are frequent self-searchers with well-informed expectations about the amount of personal data available about them online. Fully 60% have used a search engine to look up their own name or see what information is available about them online, and one-third (33%) of these self-searchers say that they search their own names every once in a while or more frequently. Nearly three-quarters (71%) of self-searching Confident Creatives say that the amount of information they find when they search their own names is about what they expected, versus just 15% who say that they are surprised by how much information is available about them online.

Confident Creatives tend to have sizeable online footprints, and are likely to say that key pieces of their personal information are posted online, including things they've written that have their name on it (35%), photos of themselves (32%) and the groups or organizations they belong to (29%). They are also very likely to search for other people's profiles on social networking sites (46%) and to use a search engine to find information online about their friends (36%), family members (32%) or people they have lost touch with over the years (46%).

Online Content Creation by Different Groups				
% in each group who:	Concerned and Careful	Worried by the Wayside	Confident Creatives	Unfazed and Inactive
Create or work on your own online journal or blog	11%	4%	17%	6%
Share something online that you created yourself	31	16	32	17
Upload photos where others can see them	43	26	51	32
Create or work on your own webpage	15	10	25	12
Have created a social networking profile	25	10	36	16

Source: Pew Internet Project December 2006 survey of 2,373 adults; 1,623 are internet users. Margin of error for all internet users is +/-3%. Margins of error for comparison between subgroups are +/- 6% for Concerned and Careful (n=337); +/- 6% for Worried by the Wayside (n=289); +/- 7% for Confident Creatives (n=269); and +/- 4% for Unfazed and Inactive (n=728). Values in bold are significantly higher than non-bolded values in the same row.

Looking more closely at the youthfulness of this group, 31% of Confident Creatives are under the age of 30. By comparison, just 21% of the Unfazed and Inactive group fall into that age bracket. Confident Creatives are also the most likely to create their own webpage (25% of Confident Creatives do this compared with 15% of the Concerned and Careful, for instance) and to create a profile on a social networking site (36% have an SNS profile compared with 25% of the Concerned and Careful—the next youngest group). Their high levels of participation in these activities differentiates them from the Concerned and Careful group, with whom they are otherwise similar in their online surveillance and

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content creation habits. The nature of these activities (social networking in particular) indicates a level of comfort with “making themselves available” online that distinguishes the Confident Creatives from the other groups evaluated here, and that may help explain their ambivalence towards the relatively wide availability of their personal information online.

The Concerned and Careful partake in a wide range of online activities, but some also have experience with the dark side of having their online information available.

Much like the Confident Creatives, a majority of the Concerned and Careful group use search engines to look themselves up online—fully 52% of the Concerned and Careful group has searched on their own name. However, unlike Confident Creatives, Concerned and Careful adults are more likely to express surprise at how much of their personal information is available. Over one-quarter (28%) of Concerned and Careful self-searchers are surprised by how much information is available about them, compared with just over half (53%) who say that they find about what they expected.

Like the Confident Creatives, members of the Concerned and Careful group say that things they have written with their name on them (29%), photos of themselves (27%) and the groups or organizations they belong to (28%) are posted online. Members of the Concerned and Careful group also engage heavily in online content creation, particularly with respect to posting photos (43%) and sharing their own artistic creations online (31%). Yet, just 25% have created a social networking profile and just 15% create or work on their own webpage, making them less likely than Confident Creatives to participate in each of these activities.

Members of the Concerned and Careful group are also differentiated from Confident Creatives by their relatively high likelihood to have had a bad experience with embarrassing or inaccurate personal information posted online. Nearly one in ten Concerned and Careful members (9%) have had a bad experience as a result of embarrassing or inaccurate online personal information compared with just 4% of Confident Creatives, for instance. Likewise, Concerned and Careful self-searchers are more likely to say that most of the information they find about themselves online is not accurate. In addition, 24% have a child that uses the internet, among the highest of any group and significantly higher than the comparable figure for Confident Creatives (15%). These factors may help explain why the Concerned and Careful are more worried about the availability of their online personal information than Confident Creatives, despite many other similarities between the two groups.

The Worried by the Wayside group expresses a classic privacy conundrum: They say they worry about the amount of personal information available about them online, but then do little or nothing to control access to that data.

While expressing concern about the amount of personal information that is available about them online, members of the Worried by the Wayside group do not take steps to limit that information. Their worries may in part be driven by fear of the unknown—although the Worried by the Wayside do not have an unusually large amount of personal information online and are unlikely to have had a bad experience with inaccurate online data, they are often surprised by the amount of information that is available about them and feel like it would be easy to locate or contact them based on their online personal data.

Members of the Worried by the Wayside group are as likely, or less likely, than other groups to have key pieces of personal information posted online with one exception—fully 41% of the Worried by the Wayside say that their home address is posted online compared with just 31% of the Confident Creatives.

The Worried by the Wayside group does not make a habit of posting personal creative content online. Just 4% have their own online journal or blog, 16% share their own artistic creations online, and just one in four (26%) upload photos online for others to see.

Yet despite the relative scarcity of their online information, this group tends to express surprise about the amount of information available about them. Although just 40% of Worried by the Wayside group members search their own names online and the amount of content they post is not exceptional, fully 36% of Worried by the Wayside self-searchers say they are surprised about how much information they find on themselves.

The fact that the self-seeking Worried by the Wayside are surprised about how much information is available about them is notable, since they are also the group that is most prone to looking for sensitive information about others. Fully 36% of the Worried by the Wayside say they have used the internet to look for personal background information about someone, and 43% say that they have looked online for others' public records such as real estate transactions, divorce proceedings or other legal actions. Both of these rates are among the highest of any of the groups evaluated. Further detail is provided in the chart below.

Managing Identity: Approaches and Attitudes

Background Checks				
% in each group who:	Concerned and Careful	Worried by the Wayside	Confident Creatives	Unfazed and Inactive
Have looked up someone else's personal background information online	25%	36%	30%	25%
Have looked up someone else's public records online	33	43	29	25

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking Survey, November 30-December 30, 2006. Margin of error is $\pm 3\%$ for all internet users ($n=1,623$). Margins of error for comparison between subgroups are $\pm 6\%$ for Concerned and Careful ($n=337$), $\pm 6\%$ for Worried by the Wayside ($n=289$), $\pm 7\%$ for Confident Creatives ($n=269$) and $\pm 4\%$ for Unfazed and Inactive ($n=728$). Values in bold are significantly higher than non-bolded values in the same row.

Perhaps because of their success in locating sensitive data about others, fully 57% of the Worried by the Wayside group say it would be “pretty easy” for someone to locate or contact them based on the information available about them on the internet. This is the highest of any group and may explain their concerns about online personal data, even though they do not post an inordinate amount of data and take few steps to limit what is available.

The Unfazed and Inactive group is the most detached from all aspects of their digital footprint.

Members of the Unfazed and Inactive group neither worry about the amount of personal information that is available about them nor take action to limit their personal data. Compared with the other three groups, they are the least invested in building and managing their online identities, and are unlikely to have had any bad experiences as a result of information posted about them on the internet.

Along with the Worried by the Wayside group, members of the Unfazed and Inactive group are among the least likely to search for their own names online—just 41% say they have done this, and most of these self-searchers (68%) say that they found about what they expected when they conducted their search. The Unfazed and Inactive group also shows little inclination to search for information about others. Even in comparison with the Worried by the Wayside group (with whom they are generally similar in their online searching habits), the Unfazed and Inactive group shows a pronounced disinterest in searching for information about co-workers or colleagues (just 14% have done this), someone they are thinking of hiring or working with (7%) or someone they are thinking of dating (5%). Also like the Worried by the Wayside, they are relatively unlikely to post online personal content such as photos (32%), their own artistic creations (17%) or a personal journal or blog (6%).

Managing Identity: Approaches and Attitudes

Among the groups evaluated here, the Unfazed and Inactive group is both the oldest (one in ten are age 65 or older) and the least likely to work for an employer with a company website. Fifty percent of the Unfazed and Inactive group works for an employer or company with its own website, compared with 60% of the Worried by the Wayside, 62% of the Concerned and Careful and 64% of Confident Creatives. Ultimately, this group is not required or motivated to invest a great deal of effort into creating, managing or monitoring their digital footprint.

Information Posted Online and Searched by Different Groups				
% who say the following information is available online:	Concerned and Careful	Worried by the Wayside	Confident Creatives	Unfazed and Inactive
Things you've written that have your name on them	29%	21%	35%	18%
A photo of you	27	18	32	20
Groups or organizations you belong to	28	21	29	18
% who have used a search engine to find information about:				
Themselves	52%	40%	60%	41%
Family members	31	17	32	17
Friends	35	23	36	18
Someone from your past you have lost touch with	45	36	46	28
Co-workers, colleagues or business competitors	26	21	22	14
Someone you are dating or in a relationship with	13	11	12	5
Someone you are thinking of hiring or working with	14	12	16	7
Someone's social networking profile	37	25	46	27

Source: Pew Internet Project December 2006 survey of 2,373 adults; 1,623 are internet users. Margin of error for all internet users is +/-3%. Margins of error for comparison between subgroups are +/- 6% for Concerned and Careful (n=337); +/- 6% for Worried by the Wayside (n=289); +/- 7% for Confident Creatives (n=269); and +/- 4% for Unfazed and Inactive (n=728). Values in bold are significantly higher than non-bolded values in the same row.

Part 6.

Looking Ahead: Persistent Presence Online

The way we manage our digital footprints will evolve over time.

While personal name searches have grown dramatically over the past five years and the explosion of the participatory Web has increased the size of our active digital footprint, few internet users have made digital identity management a routine part of their online lives.

Indeed, identity management is not an urgent need for most people. Few are currently required to make themselves available online as part of their job, and few have had a bad experience because of embarrassing or inaccurate information posted online.

However, as the Pew Internet Project has noted in previous research, the way people think about the internet's role in their lives tends to change over time, often through the experience of significant or transitional moments. One might learn through the course of changing jobs, for instance, that the internet can be an indispensable resource for professional networking, but the heated debates of a local neighborhood organization are best left off of the searchable, public Web (where potential employers might look). And because these learning moments—whether experienced individually or collectively—tend to occur over time, the pace with which users might change their approaches to online identity will necessarily be tempered by the pace of those experiences.

What's in a name? When it comes to anonymity, unique names may—or may not—smell as sweet.

The challenge of managing or tracing a digital footprint can vary significantly based on the relative uniqueness of one's name. In our interviews with expert searchers, we heard repeatedly about the dreaded task of finding information about someone with a common name and few other distinguishing characteristics. In contrast, in our online survey, respondents told us stories about the difficulty of removing or controlling bad information due to the universally unique and search-friendly nature of their name.

At the same time, in professional life, when attempting to establish one's online reputation and make one's work easily findable online, having a distinctive name can be considered a huge benefit to increasing one's "searchability." The drive to be recognized

online is so strong in certain circles that some parents have even begun to consider these issues when naming their children.³¹

Changes to the way we search and how we exert control over our personal data will continue to shape the way we understand identity and presence online.

As the indexing reach of search engines and databases continues to expand, internet users gain access to a much richer array of online content; images, videos, books, and social networking profiles are all increasingly searchable online. Geo-tagging, the process of adding location-specific metadata to websites, images and other content, adds a new offline dimension to search, with its own overflowing basket of privacy implications.

Looking ahead, it is easy to imagine a time when the “early days” of text-based search may seem like a world apart from a reality where all kinds of formats—including people, documents and things—are searchable across all kinds of devices. A dramatic increase in the availability of location-based information (tied to where we are, where we’ve been, or where we’re going to be) fueled by the proliferation of mobile devices was suggested as the single biggest change on the horizon by several of the experts consulted for this report.

Ultimately, many big “time will tell” questions remain about the nature of our persistent presence online. Will we come to be more forgiving of embarrassing or unflattering information trails as more of us have our own experiences with personal data leftovers gone bad? Will we become less trusting of information found about people online unless it is vetted in some way? Companies and conferences have already been created to address the growing demand for online reputation management services, and it will undoubtedly be a topic of continued interest to researchers for many years to come. Indeed, we need not look further than the 2008 election to anticipate many fascinating case studies for exploring the evolution of online identity management. The details of *those* personal stories certainly promise to be persistent—both online and in print.

³¹ Kevin J. Delaney, “You’re a Nobody Unless Your Name Googles Well,” Wall Street Journal, May 9, 2007, Available at: <http://online.wsj.com/public/us>

Methodology

This report is based on the findings of a daily tracking survey on Americans' use of the Internet. The results in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International between November 30 to December 30, 2006, among a sample of 2,373 adults, 18 and older. 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 2.3 percentage points. For results based on Internet users (n=1,623), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.7 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.

In addition, quotes are included from a non-random sample of 337 internet users who participated in an online survey about people-focused searches online. The survey, conducted February 1-13, 2007, invited respondents to conduct a real-time search on their name and share the results with us. No numerical data from the online sample is included in this report.

The primary 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.

New sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. The sample was released in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger population. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. At least 10 attempts were made to complete an interview at sampled households. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Each household received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone at home. In each contacted household, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest male currently at home. If no male was available, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest female at home. This systematic respondent selection technique has been shown to produce samples that closely mirror the population in terms of age and gender. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day.

Non-response in telephone interviews produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population, and these subgroups are likely to vary also on questions of substantive interest. In order to compensate for these known biases, the sample data are weighted in analysis. The

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demographic weighting parameters are derived from a special analysis of the most recently available Census Bureau's March 2006 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. This analysis produces population parameters for the demographic characteristics of adults age 18 or older, living in households that contain a telephone. These parameters are then compared with the sample characteristics to construct sample weights. The weights are derived using an iterative technique that simultaneously balances the distribution of all weighting parameters.

Following is the full disposition of all sampled telephone numbers:

Sample Disposition	
	<u>Final</u>
Total Numbers dialed	21,200
Business	1,477
Computer/Fax	1,382
Cell phone	36
Other Not-Working	4,923
Additional projected NW	3,193
	<hr/>
Working numbers	10,189
Working Rate	48.1%
No Answer	311
Busy	61
Answering Machine	1,336
Callbacks	189
Other Non-Contacts	893
	<hr/>
Contacted numbers	7,400
Contact Rate	72.6%
Initial Refusals	2,986
Second Refusals	1,403
	<hr/>
Cooperating numbers	3,011
Cooperation Rate	40.7%
No Adult in HH	35
Language Barrier	386
	<hr/>
Eligible numbers	2,590
Eligibility Rate	86.0%
Interrupted	217
	<hr/>
Completes	2,373
Completion Rate	91.6%
	<hr/>
Response Rate	27.1%

PSRAI calculates a response rate as the product of three individual rates: the contact rate, the cooperation rate, and the completion rate. Of the residential numbers in the

Methodology

sample, 73 percent were contacted by an interviewer and 41 percent agreed to participate in the survey. Eighty-six percent were found eligible for the interview. Furthermore, 92 percent of eligible respondents completed the interview. Therefore, the final response rate is 27 percent.