The Knowledge Economy and Distressed Communities

IV: Internet Access and Use 2002

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INTRODUCTION

Internet access and use is increasing across the United States and Michigan, and for many people it has become a common element of their work and daily lives. At the same time that the Internet is becoming mainstream, there remain groups and locations that are not actively utilizing this technology. While use of the Internet should not be mandated or required for those who have no interest in the technology, we must strive to provide opportunities for access and use for those who currently cannot gain access.

This report addresses Internet access in Michigan, drawing from a survey of 989 Michigan residents conducted in October/November 2002. The survey asked how often respondents used the Internet, with this information further detailed in terms of demographic factors and geography. The survey was conducted by the Office of Survey Research, Institute for Public Policy and Social Research, at Michigan State University.

INTERNET ACCESS IN MICHIGAN

In Fall 2002, the Internet was widely used in Michigan, with almost 40% of those surveyed reporting daily access, and a further 17.9% online three to four times a week. At the same time that close to 60% of those surveyed were regularly online, almost a quarter of the population stated that they had never accessed the Internet. Increasing accessibility is evident through comparison to our 2000 survey, presented in Figure 1, with those online at least three to seven times weekly increasing from 52.4% to 57.8%, and those who have never been online decreasing from 32.7% to 24.8%.

Figure 1

Survey results for 2002 are presented in Figure 2, with the following findings of note:

- Men (44.4%) were more likely than women (36.0%) to be daily users of the Internet, but this difference decreased when daily and 3-4 times a week use is
aggregated, so that frequent use of the Internet narrowed between men (58.7%) and women (56.9%). The rates for those who have never been online were similar for men (23.9%) and women (25.7).

- Frequent use of the Internet (3 times a week to daily) was highest for Republican respondents (72.3%) followed by Independents (57.2%) and Democrats (44.8%). The rate for those who had never been online was highest for Independents (30.9%), followed closely by Democrats (28.8%) and much lower levels for Republicans (14.3).

- Clear differences emerge in terms of Internet use and race or ethnicity. 60% of white respondents were online frequently (daily to 3 times a week), with a much lower rate for African Americans (36.9%). The rate for those never online was similar across race, with 24.5% of whites and 28.2% of African-Americans never accessing the Internet.

- Hispanic respondents in Michigan were online daily at a rate similar to the total population, but when daily and 3-4 times a week are combined, only 43.7% of Hispanic residents would be classified as frequent users. Hispanic residents also report a very low rate for never being online, 12.5%, with the profile for this group showing a greater range of occasional uses of the Internet compared to the survey average for Michigan.
The survey also allows analysis of Internet access in terms of income, education, and age.

- Access by income is presented in Figure 3, showing a clear association between increasing income and increasing rates of access to the Internet. There is also a corresponding decline in the population of those never online as income increases. The highest rates of use occur for those earning over $70,000, with half of those earning over $40,000 reporting daily use. In contrast, three-quarters of those earning less than $10,000 have never been online.
Internet access is also divided across education levels, which are associated with income in that higher levels of education correlate with higher incomes on average. The survey results across education include:

- Daily Internet use increases with education from only 13% of those who did not finish high school reporting access to two-thirds with a graduate degree and even higher levels for those with some post graduate training.

- The pattern of daily access is maintained when daily and 3-4 times weekly access is considered jointly, where 20% of those not completing high school would be considered online frequently in contrast to at least three-quarters of those with a college degree or higher qualifications.
The age profile for Internet use changes for different age groups, currently peaking for those surveyed in the thirties and forties. Additional age related findings include:

- While young people are often presented as the major users of the Internet they are not online as frequently as other age groups. Close to 60% of respondents aged 18-29 are online 3-7 days a week, increasing to three-quarters of those in their 30s declining slightly to almost 70% of those in their forties.

- Older residents of Michigan were also using the Internet, with over 60% of those in their fifties online frequently and over 40% of those aged 60-64 years. The lowest rate of use was reported by residents aged over 65, where less than a quarter would be online frequently.

- Those reporting that they had never accessed the Internet ranged from only 2.4% of those aged 24-29 years to 68.1% of those aged over 65 years.
The final dimension analyzed in the survey was Internet use across Michigan’s regions. The summary of results is presented in Figure 6, including:

- High levels of daily use were reported in the Upper Peninsula and the southwest of the state, where half of those surveyed used the Internet daily. The lowest rate of daily use occurred in Detroit where a little over a quarter of those surveyed reported daily access.

- The highest levels of frequent use (3-7 days/week) exceeds 60% of those surveyed in southwest and east central Michigan followed closely by the Upper Peninsula and southeast Michigan. The least frequent use occurred in Detroit where 40.5% were online 3-7 days a week.

- Regions with high populations who have never been online include the northern Lower Peninsula (32.8%), the Upper Peninsula (28.1%) and Detroit (27.2%)
CONCLUSION

The 2002 survey of Internet use in Michigan showed positive movement in use over findings for 2000. At the same time, digital divides emerged for a number of measures of Michigan society, such as gender, political identification, race and ethnicity, income, education, age and region. These results establish that divides exist, with those most likely to be online being well educated and affluent, while those never online tended to have lower levels of educational achievement, lower incomes, to be African-American or older Michigan residents. These results serve as a reminder that as the Internet becomes a common element of mainstream life for many in Michigan there remain many who may lack the means to be online, or who find that the information they seek is not provided via the Internet.