

Young people are active Internet users, with 99 percent of all respondents saying they have used the Internet at some point and 79 percent accessing the Internet from home. A majority of parents (65 percent) emphasized school work when asked what their kids use the Internet for. Meanwhile, kids said they liked to use the Internet for a wide variety of activities: playing and downloading music and games, using e-mail and instant messaging, visiting chat rooms and doing homework.

Not surprisingly, the majority of young people are ahead of their parents in their knowledge and exploration of the Internet. One half of young people said they think they know more about the Internet than their parents do. Eight-four percent said they are by themselves when they go online, at least some of the time, and 70 percent said their parents talk to them very little or not at all about what they do online.

While the majority of children ages 9 to 12 years using chat rooms are doing so safely, more than half of older children, ages 13 to 17, are going into private and adult-only chat rooms. Across all age categories, boys are more likely than girls to visit private and adult-only chat rooms, as are children who have no household rule about doing so. The vast majority of children who visit private and adult-only chat rooms do so when they are alone.

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Fifteen percent of children and youth who have used the Internet have met someone in person that they had previously only ever talked with on the Internet. Of those respondents, 15 percent went alone to such a meeting. More males (73 percent) than females (27 percent) were likely to put themselves at risk in this way.

More than half of young Internet users (53 percent) have received pornographic junk mail. Of these, the vast majority (78 percent) did not tell their parents. Almost one half of youth in secondary school

said that someone had made unwanted sexual comments to them on the Internet. Girls are more likely than boys to have received unwanted sexual comments.

The survey also shows that many Canadian children and youth do not appreciate the importance of safeguarding their personal information. In fact, 21 percent of young Internet users indicated they would give out both their name and address to win a prize in a contest. Again, boys are more likely than girls to give out this information.

Marketing to Young Consumers ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

The Internet is far ahead of television and print media in engaging, targeting and marketing to kids. In Canada, while television has standards for advertising to kids, the Internet is largely unregulated. According to the Media Awareness Network, companies engage children interactively, building entire online environments to create associations with products, establish brand loyalty, and collect information about current and future customers.

While parents have traditionally had to consent to organizations collecting information from their children, the Internet makes it comparatively easy to collect information without any parental involvement or awareness. Children do not generally possess the developmental capacity or moral judgment to determine whether it is appropriate to provide personal information to a third party, particularly when an incentive for releasing personal information is offered, or when the request to release information comes from a favoured fictional character whom the child may regard as authoritative. Kids routinely give out information such as their name,

address, phone number, birth date, gender and interests. When armed with their parents' credit cards, children can make online purchases and even gamble online. Even when they don't have a credit card, they can still be the victim of fraud, for example, by being tricked into repeatedly dialling into a foreign site and incurring significant telephone charges.

The Committee on Consumer Policy at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has examined the issue of companies marketing to children. The OECD's *Guidelines for Consumer Protection in the Context of Electronic Commerce*, published in 1999, state that businesses should take special care with advertising and marketing directed at children. Accordingly, the 2001 *Canadian Code of Practice for Consumer Protection in Electronic Commerce* requires companies to follow certain guidelines when communicating with children, such as obtaining parental consent prior to collecting children's personal information, limiting their e-mail marketing to children, and preventing monetary transactions with children.



Helping Kids Be Cyberwise ■ ■ ■

In our technological society, it has become increasingly important that Canadians be in a position to harness the incredible potential of the Internet. The *Canadian Strategy to Promote Safe, Wise and Responsible Internet Use* (<http://connect.gc.ca/cyberwise>) is a five-point plan jointly launched by the Honourable Brian Tobin, then Minister of Industry, and the Honourable Anne McLellan, then Minister of Justice, on February 15, 2001. The strategy provides Canadians with information, resources and tools to help them protect children against the dangers of illegal and offensive Internet content. Through a partnership of government, the private sector, parents, educators and community leaders, the intent is to educate and empower young Canadians to use the Internet wisely and safely.

In his remarks at the strategy's launch, former Minister Tobin underlined the strategy's importance. "I'm extremely pleased to be able to say that Canada now has a comprehensive strategy in place to deal with the serious issues of illegal and offensive online content. Speaking both as Industry Minister, and as a parent, I can't overstate the importance of making certain that our children are in a position to harness the incredible learning potential of the Internet, without being subject to potentially harmful content."

A Five-point Action Plan ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

1. Give Canadians the Tools They Need

The first challenge is to ensure that parents, educators and community leaders are aware of the risks associated with Internet use. Educating and empowering Canadians enables them to take action within their institutions and homes. This requires a variety of approaches. Most important is the active participation of parents and adults responsible for youth in educating, monitoring, setting rules and participating with children in their Internet use. Government and the private sector play an important role in encouraging, supporting and funding educational resources and tools, such as Web site labelling and filters, that can help limit children's access to undesirable sites.

Looking for help? Go to these Web sites:

- Media Awareness Network (<http://www.media-awareness.ca>)
- The Internet Protection Portal (<http://www.caip.ca/portal>)
- Industry Canada's SchoolNet National Advisory Board (<http://www.schoolnet.ca/snab/brochures/brochures.asp>)
- For information on filters or Internet content labelling, visit <http://strategis.gc.ca/internet>. For a complete and detailed list of resources, go to <http://connect.gc.ca/cyberwise/>.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

■ about the Government of Canada's work to help children surf the Internet smartly and safely, contact Susan Gardiner, Senior Analyst
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■ about *Consumer Quarterly*, contact Cathy Enright, Office of Consumer Affairs
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Or write to:

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Consumer Quarterly is also available on Consumer Connection, the Office of Consumer Affairs' home page on *Strategis*, Industry Canada's business information Web site:

English
<http://consumer.ic.gc.ca>

French
<http://consommateur.ic.gc.ca>

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2. Work with Safety-minded Service Providers

Since Internet service providers (ISPs) connect users to the Internet, they can perform an important service with regard to illegal and offensive content on the Internet. The Government of Canada works closely with the Canadian Association of Internet Providers and individual ISPs to establish good business practices throughout the industry. These practices include providing information on Internet safety, operating complaint lines and making available Internet filtering software or information on where customers can obtain such software. The Canadian Association of Internet Providers has a code of conduct for its members (<http://www.caip.ca/issues/selfreg/code-of-conduct/code.htm>).

3. Enforce the Law in Cyberspace

In Canada, anything that is illegal offline is illegal online. Canada's laws apply in cyberspace, but they must keep pace with illegal uses of new technology. The Government of Canada plans to amend the *Criminal Code* to deal more effectively with those who use the Internet to lure children. There is also legislation currently before the House on the luring of children.

Eliminating child pornography is a top Government of Canada priority. RCMP computer crime investigators are located in Canada's major centres and work closely with Internet service providers. New Internet-specific training for police officers focusses on the sexual exploitation of children and includes investigative techniques for the search and seizure of illegal computer data.

4. Investigate Hotlines

According to the Media Awareness Network survey, Canadian parents tend not to complain about offensive material even when they want to. Why? They don't know who to call. In many countries, hotline investigators act as crime stoppers, handling reports about potentially illegal material and contacting service providers and the police when necessary. The Government of Canada, child protection advocates, law enforcement agencies and the private sector are examining the costs and benefits of establishing a Canadian hotline, initially focussing on child pornography and Internet luring, to report and help prevent the sexual exploitation of children on the Internet.

5. Work Toward Global Answers

Canada alone cannot tackle illegal and offensive content on the Internet. Governments, law enforcement officers and industry are working together to find solutions that transcend national boundaries. The Government of Canada hosts global summits, conducts international studies and is helping to draft the Council of Europe's convention on cybercrime. Canadian investigators are now working with experts from 30 countries on the Interpol Specialist Group on Crimes Against Children, and the G-8 countries are now sharing information on Internet-based investigations.

