

“DIGITAL DIVIDE” REMAINS WIDE – ONLY SIX-IN-TEN CANADIANS AGED 55+ HAVE ACCESS TO THE INTERNET

CANADIANS AGED 55+ HAVE NOT INTEGRATED THE INTERNET INTO THEIR DAILY LIVES



Ipsos Reid

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Vancouver, BC — A new study released by Ipsos Reid, *Older Canadians and the Internet*¹, has found that older Canadians lag significantly behind those in other age groups when it comes to their online usage and proficiency, showing that ‘digital’ divide is still alive and well in Canada.

Currently, only 61% of Canadian adults aged 55 or older have access to the Internet from any location, compared to 88% of adults aged 18–54, a gap of 27 points. And while this gap has narrowed slightly in the past three years, it is not significant enough to draw any conclusions about longer-term implications. In 2001, just over eight-in-ten Canadian adults aged 18–54 (82%) had access to the Internet, while just under half of those aged 55 or older (48%) had access. The gap was between 34 and 36 points from 2001 to 2003, and has since narrowed to 24 to 27 points in the past three years.

In addition to being less likely to be online overall, older online adults spend nearly 35% less time online per week than younger Canadians (8.7 hours aged 55+; 13.3 hours aged 18–54), and the gap in terms of usage has not narrowed appreciably over the past six years.

Steve Mossop, President of Market Research Canada West for Ipsos says “Some ‘experts’ would like us to believe that the Internet is a universal medium that can reach all Canadians whether it be for a marketing, communications, or social perspective, but our research shows that there are considerable flaws in this thinking. The Internet is by no means universal, and there are important gaps like the older Canadians segment that it simply cannot be ignored. The ‘digital divide’ was predicted to disappear – but our research shows that while the gap is narrowing slightly, the divide is very real.”

¹ The “Older Canadians and the Internet” survey is a special feature of the *Canadian Inter@ctive Reid Report*, Quarter 3, 2006.

Behaviourally, older Canadians lag behind the younger groups in each of 20 common online activities online Canadians have ever participated in. The gap is largest for listening to Internet radio (-34%), downloading free MP3 files (-32%), visiting blogs (-23%), conducting online banking (-21%), researching courses and schools (-21%), comparison shopping (-20%), searching for real estate (-18%), researching trips (-17%), using the Internet at work for personal reasons (-17%), and purchasing online (-14%). The gap is smaller for activities such as purchasing travel (-6%), using online photo services (-7%), and visiting homes for sale first found online (zero gap). The only online activities online Canadians aged 55 and older are more likely to participate in are taking courses directly online (+3%), buying/selling investments (+3%), and earning a degree or diploma online (+4%).

Attitudinally, the gaps are quite large. Only one-in-eight online adults aged 55 and older (13%) claim expert/very skilled experience and knowledge of the Internet, compared to 35% among 18-54 year olds. There is a large difference in how older and younger Canadian adults feel they use the Internet in their daily lives. Those aged 55 and older are less likely to feel the Internet is an important part of their daily routine (41% agree among those aged 55+ vs. 53% agree among those aged 18-54), and online Canadians aged 55 and older are significantly more likely to be “very concerned” about online security (45% aged 55+; 37% aged 18-54).

Steve also says, “This large gap in access combined with older Canadians’ lack of experience and skill and what appears to be an inherent distrust of online security begs whether online marketers are truly reaching this audience with their current campaigns and efforts. Further, it indicates that new and unique strategies may need to be developed to reach what is a rather lucrative and rapidly growing² spending group in Canadian society.”

² According to Statistics Canada, 2001, Canadians aged 55 and older accounted for about 6.8M residents, or 22% of the overall population, and in 2005, they grew to 7.7M residents.

The **Canadian Inter@ctive Reid Report** is the largest, most comprehensive and authoritative source of its kind about quarterly Internet trends in Canada. The results are based on two separate data collection instruments. In the first, 1,000 web users from Ipsos Reid's Canadian Internet Panel are surveyed online. Panelists are chosen through random telephone surveys conducted on an ongoing basis across Canada. Results are complemented by a further 1,000 interviews via telephone with Canadian adults in order to verify results of the panel, and track issues among non-Internet users.

Telephone interviews for this release were conducted from October 18 to 22, 2006 while the online data was collected from October 19 to 23, 2006. An oversample of adults aged 55 and older was included to boost the accuracy of results among this group, bringing the telephone sample to 1,203 and the online sample to 1,260. These data are statistically weighted to reflect the population proportions of regular online users by online expertise and regional distribution. With national samples of 1,203 and 1,260, one can say with 95% certainty that the overall results are within a maximum of ± 2.8 percentage points of what they would have been had the entire population of Canada's regular online users been surveyed. The margin of error will be larger for subgroupings of the survey population.

- 30 -

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