The Internet at Home

A report on Internet use in the home

Prepared by Kate Aisbett of Entertainment Insights,
a division of Laeta Pty Ltd

for the Australian Broadcasting Authority

December 2001
Sydney

Australian
Broadcasting
Authority

ISBN 0 642 27049 X

Published by:

Australian Broadcasting Authority
PO Box Q500
Queen Victoria Building NSW 1230

Design by:

Media and PR
Australian Broadcasting Authority

Printed by Printing Headquarters

Contents

Executive summary

The reasons people in Australia obtain personal computers and modems, and get connected to the Internet at home, are many and varied. However, how Australians use the technology, and the effects of Internet use on family life, had not been extensively researched until 2000 when the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) undertook comprehensive social research into the experiences of Australian families in accessing the Internet. The ABA's research was iterative of aspects of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' tracking of Australians' access to a range of information technology, adding new depth in qualitative detail, as well as extending the quantitative base.

The research focus was on:

- the Internet's impact on family dynamics;
- rules and routines around use of the Internet;
- perceptions of benefits and risks;
- users' information needs; and
- the Internet's impact on the use of other media.

An innovative three-stage research process provided depth and cross-validation for the research findings. The three stages comprised of:

- qualitative focus groups with adults, teenagers and children;
- a national quantitative survey of 1203 adults (stratified by state, gender and home-connection status); and
- a 'cyberpanel' of 310 Internet-using households with children under 18-years-old from across Australia. Adults, children and teenagers in the cyberpanel were engaged in online surveys and email communications. Children aged 6 to 10 years were interviewed by telephone and some newly-connected homes participated in in-depth telephone interviews.

The research results are rich and surprising and challenge some commonly held assumptions about the Internet in the home.

Australians online

Adult use of the Internet

The ABA's national survey of adult Australians, conducted in August 2000, indicates that the majority (61%) of Australians had access to the Internet. Home and work were the most common places of access and were of equal standing.

Young people's use of the Internet

The ABA's national survey drew information from parents on their children's access to the Internet. Just over half (52%) of those 17 years and younger have Internet access. Likelihood of access to the Internet was related to the age of the child, increasing with older age groups. Fifty-eight per cent of children between 5 and 12 years were reported to have access compared to 86% of children aged 13 to 18 years. Of the children with Internet access, 80% had access at school and 52% at home.

Frequency of use

For many, the Internet was used regularly, at specific times and complemented radio listening in the mornings and television viewing in the evenings. Half of adult Internet users connected daily or almost daily and a further 24% connected two to three times a week.

Use of email

The national survey explored how frequently people used common Internet applications. Email was the most commonly used Internet service. Most Internet users (82%) have used email and 48% tended to use email 'all the time'. Most Internet users (78%) use it to obtain information, although this was more likely to be occasional. Three-quarters of users say they 'surf' the Internet but this, too, is occasional.

A minority of Internet users used chat rooms and instant messaging. Similar numbers have downloaded music or games from the Internet. Only 16% of respondents acknowledged that they had looked up sites for their sexual content. Many Internet users used these types of services occasionally rather than regularly.

The Internet and other media

While many people use the Internet for a range of information services, a comparison with other media showed television is still the primary source for news and information for most users. In the people's ranking of importance of the different media, radio and newspapers were similarly rated well behind television. The Internet received the lowest ranking as a source for news and information. Those with home access, on average, ranked the Internet ahead of radio and newspapers as a source for news and information. Television in Internet homes, however, was still ranked the most important source for news and information.

Generally, the data does not support the view that the Internet is supplanting other media. That it is supplementing other sources of information seems the more feasible interpretation.

The Internet at home

The changing profile of Internet-connected households

The ABA survey found that as at August 2000, 30% of Australians had the Internet connected at home. Connection to the Internet at home was more common among those with higher education qualifications and higher annual household incomes. Adults with children and teenagers were more likely to have an Internet connection and males were more likely than females to have a home Internet connection.

The profile of home Internet access, however, is continually evolving. More than one-third (37%) of home Internet users had connected in the previous year and a further 27% in the previous two years. Only 10% had their home access for more than four years.

Although people living in a mainland capital city had a higher incidence of home Internet connection, people living in regional areas were more likely to have connected in the previous year. People on incomes less than $50,000 p.a. and people with no tertiary education were more likely to have only recently gained home access (within the previous year). The National Office for the Information Economy (NOIE) and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data for the same period show similar trends.[1]

Internet connection in the home

The national survey showed that 64% of Internet connected homes were connected via a single telephone line to the home. A further 31% had a second telephone line and 5% were connected by cable. In-depth interviews with people discussed how they managed their lines into the home. Strategies included training friends to use email rather than the phone, self-imposed time restrictions on Internet use, or being limited by time-based Internet service provider (ISP) access packages.

1 ABS, *Use of the Internet by Householders*, Australia, August 2000. NOIE, *Current State of Play* , November 2000.

Families' Internet usage

Reasons why people get connected

The work and study needs of adults emerged as a significant reason for families getting connected (28%), on par with the children's study and education needs (27%).

The location of the computer

The study or office (42%) was the most common location for the Internet-connected computer. The family room/lounge room was the next most common location (32%) followed by the 'spare' room (7%) and the adult bedroom (5%). Families indicated that they located the computer in the living area to enable supervision and interaction with the children during Internet sessions.

Frequency of parents' use

In the panel online surveys, the usage patterns of children and their parents, and the patterns across the household, were explored. The main findings included:

- In half the cyberpanel homes, everyone in the family used the Internet. This rose to over three-quarters of households where the youngest child was 12 years and older.
- Seventy per cent of families had one family member that used the Internet at home daily. Children and teenagers were much less likely to use it daily (27%) than their parents (54%).
- The adults and children in the household perceive parents as the most frequent users. Two-thirds of the parents in the cyberpanel perceived it was either themselves or the other parent who use the Internet the most. Similarly, in the national survey, 73% of parents with the Internet at home reported themselves or their partner as the most frequent user. Children surveyed gave views similar to parents. Parents were the most commonly mentioned 'frequent users'.

Parents as Internet experts

The research challenges the popular belief that parents lag behind their children in their interest and proficiency with online technology. Most often the household Internet 'expert' is an adult. In the online surveys, 70% of parents and 58% of children and teenagers nominated one of the parents as most likely to be asked for help with the Internet. In families where a child was the main resource for help, they mostly were the eldest child in the family and aged 13 to 18 years. In a few homes, children aged 10 years and under were perceived as the most skilled.

Families' Internet experiences

Although the Internet's operational use does not necessarily draw the family together, the ABA's research found considerable family interaction around Internet use. Cyberpanel participants of all ages felt that other family members took an interest in their Internet sessions at least sometimes, and around one-quarter of the families claim family members were often involved with the parent's Internet sessions. Younger children reported more frequent involvement in their Internet sessions (53%) than older children (20%).

Families shared entertaining sites they discovered and hints on 'how to do things' on the Internet. This was particularly so during the early phase of household Internet connection. Similarly, other family members were likely to help solve Internet problems. Most families in the panel (60%) claimed they 'often' help each other use the Internet.

Time spent online

The cyberpanel research provided an indication of the time families spent online. Participants were asked to estimate the time they spent online in their last session. Most adults (59%) and young people (68%) in the panel estimated they spent less than one hour online. Children aged 12 years and younger spent less time online than teens.

Young people's use of the Internet for entertainment

The cyberpanel families provided an opportunity to contrast adult's and children's use of the Internet. Emailing and information searches on the Internet were the most common activities for most users, both parents and children. Transaction activities, like paying bills and banking, were more common among the adult members of the cyberpanel. Children more commonly downloaded games and music from the Internet, participated in chat rooms or utilised instant messaging services.

Adults tended to have targeted information requirements, while young people were more likely to surf the Internet without a particular purpose in mind (50% of children and teenagers compared with 31% of adults).

Communication portals were the most frequently visited sites by adults and children (32% for those aged under 17 years and 27% of adults). Games sites were commonly visited sites by many of the young participants, particularly, males. Children's sites, like *Neopets*, and media sites, like *Nickelodeon, Disney* or *ABC Playground*, were popular with participants aged 6 to 10 years.

Search engines, banking and transaction sites were reported reasonably commonly by adult panel participants, but rarely by children, as a favourite site.

Generally, the patterns of usage reported suggest adults make more functional use the Internet, whereas young people place more emphasis on entertainment.

What people don't like on the Internet

Perceived advantages and disadvantages of the Internet

The Internet was perceived more advantageous than disadvantageous by nearly three-quarters of respondents in the national survey, particularly people connected at home.

Perceived risks of Internet use

While advantages are generally perceived to outweigh disadvantages, most adults believed using the Internet involved some risk. The main areas of perceived risk were:

- financial dangers, e.g. fraud and credit card number theft (54%);
- personal data misuse and privacy issues (45%);
- content exposure concerns (39%); and
- viruses (21%).

The most common content concern was the perceived risk of children accessing unsuitable content (27%). Access to pornographic material, and the receipt of such content through unsolicited emails or accidental discovery, were the key concerns.

Perceived risks of content access

Parents were more likely to raise concerns regarding content on the Internet (56% compared with 29% of non-parents). Parents with the Internet at home, however, were less concerned about the content access risks (50%) than parents without home access (59%).

The perception of other risks to children, such as contact with undesirable people in chat rooms, was more common among parents (45% versus 22% of non-parents). Interestingly, it was the parents not connected at home who primarily perceived these risks. The results suggest that some parents' perception of risk could deter them from connecting to the Internet. It could also suggest that, once connected, parents develop ways of managing the perceived risk.

Common negative experiences

Fifty-four per cent of Internet users in the national survey could not recall personally experiencing something on the Internet that they didn't like or were concerned about. Exposure to pornography was the most common complaint (14% of Internet users). Most of these people found such incidents only occurred on a few occasions. Actual incidents of perceived risks, such as fraud and viruses, were only reported by a small number of respondents.

Young people and offensive content

Forty-seven per cent of cyberpanel members (aged 11 to 17 years) said they had seen or experienced something on the Internet they thought was offensive or disgusting. The content reported by young people included pornography, nudity, 'rude stuff', tasteless jokes, talk in chat rooms and violent imagery. Pornography dominated the list. Many participants reported finding the content unexpectedly via a search or having the material sent to them by persons unknown ('spammed').

Young participants described how they felt about these experiences using words like 'sick', 'yuck', 'disgusted', 'repulsed' and 'upset'. A few reported being annoyed because of the unexpected nature of the experience and because it was difficult to remove from the screen. Others reported feeling 'uncomfortable', 'shocked', 'embarrassed' or 'degraded' by the experience. A few said they were scared their 'mothers would catch them' with the content on screen.

Perceived risks of Internet content compared to other media

Seventy one per cent of parents in the cyberpanel claimed to be more concerned about what their children could access on the Internet than on television or video.

The Internet was seen as unregulated compared to other media. Parents list main concerns as:

- perceived lack of limits or control on what is available;
- lack of consumer information to assist in judging the suitability of content, comparable to a classification scheme;
- ease of access – there are no age restrictions on access to parallel MA and R rated movies at cinemas and video stores; and
- no time constraints on access, in contrast to the time zones for TV broadcasts.

The Internet was perceived as more difficult to monitor because of the individual nature of the medium. The small computer screen and the individual mouse control make it more difficult for parents to 'keep an eye on what the kids are looking at'.

The unexpected, unwanted exposure to perceived unsuitable material through unsolicited emails or use of search engines appears to heighten parents' perception that they have less control of this medium.

A small number of parents in the cyberpanel expressed concern about the potential danger from contact with undesirable people through the Internet. The ability of others on the Internet to 'deceive' young people was a theme in these concerns. Chat rooms were singled out as the potential source of this danger.

Rules and tools

Supervising children's access

Eighty-four per cent of parents supervised their children's Internet sessions and felt they could trust their child/children to respect family values in their use of the Internet.

Family rules for Internet use

Many homes with children (67%) have set rules or routines for Internet use. The most common rules reported by parents included:

- children only allowed to use it when an adult was present;
- permission required to use it;
- access to 'adult' content prohibited; and
- restrictions on timing and duration online.

When prompted, the majority of parents with home Internet access (58%) claimed they had set rules on where their child could go and what they could do on the Internet. Some parents employed software tools, such as audit trail monitoring and filter software, to block certain Internet content.

Parents had varying reasons for setting rules for children's Internet use. Limiting children's exposure to unsuitable content was the most likely reason for rules (43% of those parents who set rules). Limiting the possibility of the child making contact with undesirable people was the next most frequent reason.

Other reasons were unrelated to content issues. These included concerns about wasting time on the Internet, interference with homework, tying up the telephone line and financial concerns at the cost of spending too long connected.

Perceived effectiveness of safeguards against unwanted content

The ABA national survey found 67% of adults felt provision of a hotline to report sites people objected to was an effective content regulation mechanism. Some (24%) rated such an approach as ineffective, while the remainder were unsure. Sixty per cent also perceived technological tools, like filter software to block certain Internet content or sites, as effective. Only a minority rated these tools as ineffective (15%), however, a sizeable minority (26%) had insufficient knowledge to judge their effectiveness. Fifty-four per cent of respondents felt rating or labelling Internet sites for suitability for children, similar to video and television classification systems, was effective. However, 36% view such a system as ineffective. Similarly, while a majority (59% of adults) felt government limits on some forms of content, like sexual content, was an effective approach for people to avoid unwanted Internet content, a sizeable minority (32%) felt it would be ineffective.

Existing safeguards against unwanted content

Thirty-six percent of those that reported a negative experience took action against it occurring again. Parents were more likely to take action than non-parents (42% compared with 32%).

Installation of filter software was the most common solution for preventing exposure to pornographic content. Some parents denied children Internet access and a few restricted access by setting a password for computer access. Some had lodged a complaint.

Young people's perceptions of safeguards against unsuitable content

Cyberpanel participants aged 11 to 17 years showed a good understanding of avoiding or dealing with exposure to unpleasant content. When asked about how they responded when encountering undesirable content, participants reported taking immediate action, which commonly included exiting the site or deleting the file. Forty-four per cent of those reporting exposure to unwanted content said they had told one of their parents when they encountered unpleasant content.

Information needs

How do people find out about safeguards?

In the national survey, adults showed greatest interest in learning how to protect the computer from viruses and 'hackers' (51% of all adults were very interested) and dealing with unsolicited emails and ads (44%). One-third indicated a strong interest in information on complaints procedures.

What do parents look for as safeguards?

Parents showed a greater interest in knowing more about all Internet topics than other adults. Parents were particularly keen to learn about prevention of unsolicited emails or ads and twice as likely to want information on blocking certain content or checking history trails. Parents had a substantially greater demand for information on chat rooms and making complaints than non-parents or parents of grown children.

Parental advice

Cyberpanel parents provided tips for parents just connecting to the Internet. Thirty-nine per cent suggested the need to supervise and monitor children's use of the Internet. Some offered advice on the technological tools available to assist monitoring.

Many parents recommended discussions with children about appropriate use of the Internet. Strategies included directing children to sites designed for children and sharing the experience with them.

Many parents shared a positive assessment of the online experience, however, rules and safeguards were seen as essential elements in ensuring that the experience is rewarding.

Finally, the theme of parental education was raised in the advice of some parents. For these parents, competence and confidence with using the Internet was seen as an important part of being a responsible parent in an Internet-connected home.

Main source of information about the Internet

The majority of parents (60%) recalled previously reading advice directed to parents about children using the Internet. The most common source of that information was newspaper or magazine articles on the subject. Just over one-quarter of the parents had read about it on the Internet. A minority (15%) named their ISP as the source of that information. People who have been connected less than one year were more likely to name an ISP as the source of this information, than those connected more than a year.

Best channels to reach parents about their children's use of the Internet

Parents suggested distribution channels to reach parents seeking Internet information. The most frequently suggested distribution points were schools, a dedicated web site or ISPs.

An independent agency in Internet content regulation

In the national survey, Internet users and non-users were asked who they felt should play a part in regulating Internet content. Forty-eight per cent of respondents suggested an independent or government agency or organisation. This form of regulatory involvement was suggested by users and non-users of the Internet and more commonly recommended by those who access the Internet outside the home.

Twelve per cent felt Internet users themselves should have a role and 8% suggested ISPs as a stakeholder in content regulation. A minority (7%), felt no-one had a role, but many people (27%), largely non-users, said they did not know.

1 Introduction

Background

In mid-1999, the Australian Parliament passed the *Broadcasting Services Amendment (Online Services) Bill 1999*. This amendment to the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* established new public interest objectives pertaining to the Internet. These were:

- to provide a means of addressing complaints about certain Internet content;
- to restrict access to certain Internet content likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult; and
- to protect children from exposure to unsuitable Internet content.

The ABA was given responsibility for developing a co-regulatory system with industry and the community and now has a number of Internet content regulatory functions, including:

- investigating complaints about prohibited content;
- monitoring compliance with industry codes of practice;
- advising and assisting parents and other carers of children in relation to the supervision and control of children's access to Internet content;
- conducting and/or coordinating community education programs about Internet services; and
- conducting research into issues relating to Internet content and usage.

The research will assist the ABA in the conduct of those functions, in particular, monitoring codes of practice, provision of advice and assistance to parents and carers, and coordinating community education programs.

Research objectives

The overall aims of this research program were to:

- describe Internet usage in Australian homes, particularly in homes with children;
- identify community perceptions of benefits and risks; and
- inform the development of community education programs and advice for parents and carers.

To achieve these aims, a set of specific research objectives were established. The research was to identify:

- the impact of the Internet on family dynamics;
- any rules and routines around use of the Internet;
- perceptions of benefits and risks;
- users' information needs (particularly those of new users and parents); and
- the impact on the use of other media.

Methodology

Overview of the research approach

The research was undertaken in three stages, each contributing new information and different perspectives on the issues under investigation. This approach provided for greater depth of understanding and cross-validation for the research findings. The three stages of the research were:

- Stage one - focus groups;
- Stage two – a national survey; and
- Stage three – the cyberpanel.

Stage one - focus groups

The purpose of stage one of the research was to capture the plurality of community views on the research issues and to probe the reasons why people hold those views. The group discussions also revealed the kind of language people use to describe their experiences and thinking on the topic, and gave a sense of the depth and emotion attached to the different viewpoints.

Nine focus groups were conducted in three Australian states, in metropolitan and regional areas.[2] The composition of the groups were:

- fathers with the Internet at home;
- mothers with the Internet at home;
- parents, no Internet at home;
- 18 to 35 years, no children, Internet at home;
- 35+ years, no children under 18 years, Internet at home;
- 10 to 12-year-old males, Internet at home;
- 10 to 12-year-old females, Internet at home;
- 13 to 15-year-old females, Internet at home; and
- 16 to 17-year-old males, Internet at home.

2 Location of the groups were Sydney, NSW, Bendigo, regional Victoria, Melbourne, Victoria and Rockhampton, regional Queensland.

Stage two – a national survey

Sample

A national telephone survey of 1203 randomly-selected respondents across Australia. The sample was stratified by geographical area and home Internet connection. A quota of 600 respondents with the Internet at home was required in the sample.

Table 1.1 Quotas by region

Metro/Regional split	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	ACT	NT	Total
Capital City	250	200	100	75	75	50	25	25	**725**
Other State	150	100	100	25	25				**475**

Each house contacted for the survey was asked whether the Internet was connected. The collected data was used to weight the sample elements to provide estimates representative of the Australian population aged over 18 years. This incidence rate was then used to adjust the results using weights according to a ratio estimation technique. The weighting was adjusted for age, gender, and geographical area and Internet home penetration. A summary of interviews undertaken, and the demographic composition of the sample, is provided in table 1.2.

Table1.2 Summary of interviews undertaken

Demographics	Interviews undertaken	% Total sample	Wtd n ('000)	% Total
Total	1,203	-	13,105	-
Location				
Mainland capital cities	725	60	8,123	62
Other state regions	478	40	4,982	38
Parental Status				
Children aged under 18 years	453	38	4,344	33
No children aged under 18 years	747	62	8,732	67
Refused	3	-	29	-
Gender				
Male	549	46	6,393	49
Female	654	54	6,712	51
Age				
18 – 24 years	155	13	1,797	14
25 – 34 years	250	21	2,655	20
35 – 49 years	423	35	4,069	31
50+ years	375	31	4,583	35
Education				
Primary/some secondary	237	20	2,851	22
Completed secondary/TAFE	515	43	5,976	46
University or CAE	451	37	4,278	33
Income				
Less than $20,000 p.a.	160	13	2,161	16
$20,000 to less than $30,000 p.a.	165	14	1,993	15
$30,000 to less than $40,000 p.a.	148	12	1,689	13
$40,000 to less than $50,000 p.a.	140	12	1,515	12
$50,000 to less than $75,000 p.a.	233	19	2,265	17
$75,000 to less than $100,000 p.a.	121	10	1,109	9
More than $100,000 p.a.	121	10	996	8
Refused/ not stated	115	10	1,376	10

Interviews

The interviews were conducted using a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) system and lasted 15 minutes on average. The questionnaire used for the survey can be found at www.aba.gov.au/internet/research/index.htm.

Stage three – the cyberpanel

Overall approach

The cyberpanel methodology provided a very satisfactory research environment for exploring some of the more complex findings from the previous stages of the research. Key aspects of this approach were that it:

- allowed the study of home Internet use *in situ*, with most of the research communication and data collection conducted online;
- provided a family perspective, with children and parents within the same household participating;
- enabled a range of information to be gathered over time and allowed the monitoring of changes in concerns and attitudes; and
- allowed the testing of online information packages.

Multiple data collection methods were used. Within each household, one adult and one child were nominated family representatives. The data collection methods included:

- online surveys for parents and children aged 11 to 17 years (see www.aba.gov.au/internet/research/index.htm);
- emailed responses to questionnaires;
- in-depth telephone interviews with the most recently connected homes; and
- telephone interviews with children aged 6 to 10 years using the Internet.

Recruitment

Most online panels are recruited online, often introducing a bias towards heavy Internet users and not truly reflecting the broad range of people using the Internet. By contrast, in this study, cyberpanel families were recruited offline through the national telephone survey (stage two) and a notice placed in school newsletters across the country. The aim of the recruitment process was to capture a broad cross section of Internet-using families. The research actively sought families that had recently connected to the Internet. The participants were offered an incentive of $50 to participate.

Profile of the panel families

Three hundred and ten households with Internet connection were recruited. The geographical spread of the panel families is represented in the following map.

A full profile of the cyberpanel families is presented at appendix A.

Map


Darwin
Woodroffe
Humpty Doo
Alyangula
Cooktown
Freshwater
Broome
Townsville
Mona Park
Charters Towers
Exmouth
Alice Springs
Longreach
Biloela
Brisbane
Camp Mountain
Gold Coast
Tweed Heads
Murwillumbah
Yalgoo
Geraldton
Mingenew
Mullaway
Boggabri
Armidale
Coonabarabran
Manilla
Port Macquarie
Broken Hill
Gilgandra
Dubbo
Mudgee
Raymond Terrace
Newcastle
Perth
Golden Bay
Whyalla
Bathurst
Terrigal
Australind
Capel
Cowell
Loxton
Griffith
Sydney
Gunning
Nerrandera
Bowral
Adelaide
Canberra
Wagga Wagga
Bendigo
Benalla
Wangaratta
Mansfield
Seymour
Ballarat
Melbourne
Geelong
Moe
Warrnambool
N
0
250
500
kilometres
Penguin
Exeter
Launceston
Hobart

2 Australian families and Internet use

Australians online - the state of play in August 2000

Adult use of the Internet

The ABA's national survey of adult Australians indicates that the majority (61%) of Australians had access to the Internet. In this survey, home and work were equally common places of access. People often have multiple access locations. Forty-seven per cent of those with home Internet access also have access at work.

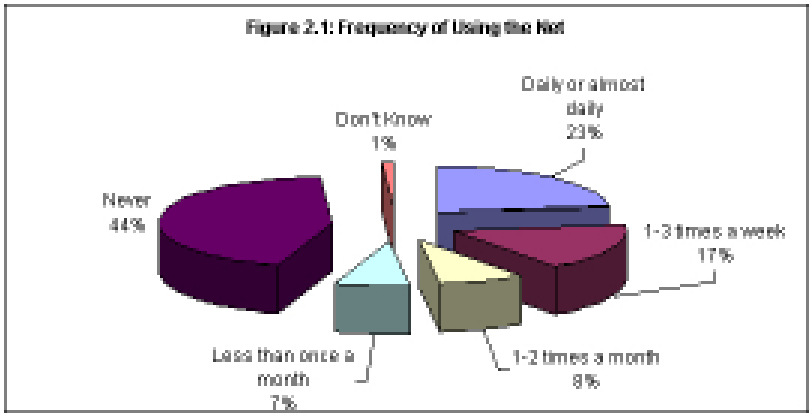
Table 2.1 Places where adults have access to the Internet

	n=1203 %
Home	30
Work	30
Place of study/library	15
Through friends or relatives	12
Other place	3
No access	39

% do not sum to 100%, people access in a number of locations

Frequency of use

Of those using the Internet, most did so regularly. The national survey indicates 23% of adult Australians used it daily or almost daily.



Education and income in relation to Internet use

People's regularity of use was related to their level of education. Forty-one per cent of those with university education used the Internet daily compared with 6% of those with secondary education. Similarly, those on incomes of more than $50,000 p.a. were more likely to use the Internet daily, as were people living in mainland capital cities (appendix B, tables 5-7).

Young people's use of the Internet

Children were increasingly gaining access to the Internet. In August 2000, the ABS estimated that 47% of 5 to 14-year-olds had accessed the Internet in the previous 12 months[3]. Children most commonly accessed the Internet at school, however 26% of children aged 5 to 14 years also had access at home.

The ABA's national survey drew information from parents on their children's access to the Internet. Fifty-two per cent of those aged 17 years and under were reported as having access to the Internet. Likelihood of access to the Internet was related to the age of the child, increasing with older age groups. Fifty-eight per cent of children aged between 5 and 12 years were reported to have access compared to 86% of children of high school age. Of the children with Internet access, 80% had access at school and 52% had home access.

The Internet at home

The changing profile of Internet-connected households

The ABA found that 30% of Australians had the Internet at home. This corresponds with the ABS data for the same period.

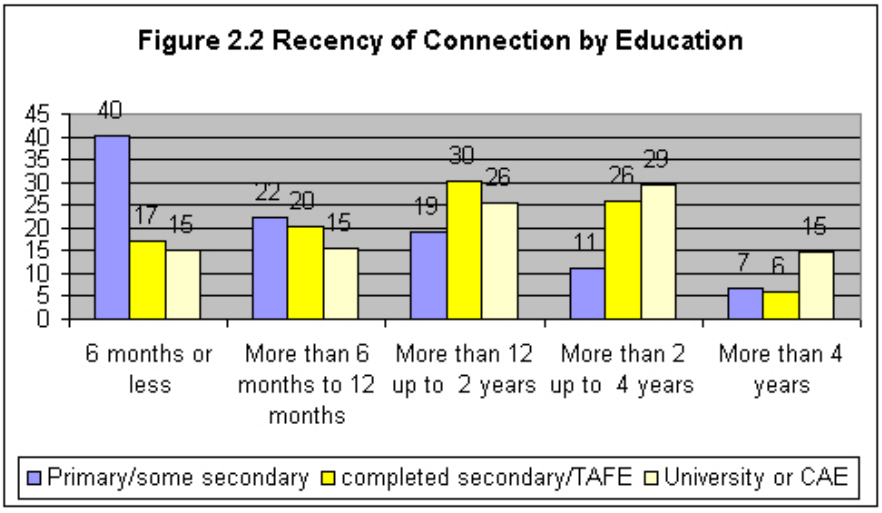
Connection to the Internet at home was more common among those with higher education qualifications and higher annual household incomes. Households with children and teenagers were more likely to have an Internet connection than households without children. Males were more likely to have a home Internet connection than females (appendix B, tables 1-4).

The profile of home Internet access, however, is continually evolving. Nationally, the increasing rate of home Internet penetration was reflected in the reported recentness of connection. More than one-third (37%) had connected in the last year and a further 27% in the last two years. Only 10% had home access more than four years.

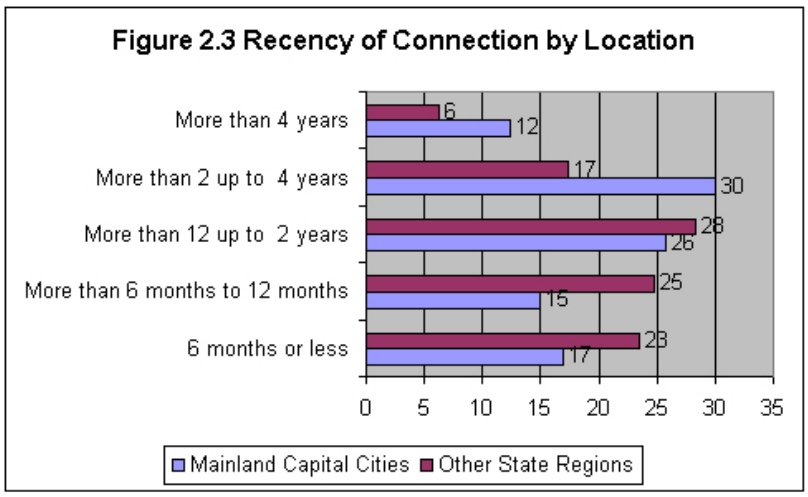
While people living in a capital city had a higher incidence of home Internet connection, people living in regional areas were more likely to have recently connected at home than those living in metropolitan areas.

3 ABS, *Use of the Internet by Householders*, Australia, August 2000.

People on incomes of less than $50,000 p.a.,and people with no tertiary education, were more likely to have only recently gained home access (within the previous year). The NOIE[4] and ABS[5] data for the same period show similar trends.



The NOIE study shows significant differences in the level of home access across the community and some interesting trends. For example, non-metropolitan areas have had a higher rate of growth since 1998 (225%) in new Internet access than metropolitan areas (105%)[6].



4 NOIE, *Current State of Play*, November 2000.
5 ibid
6 NOIE, *Current State of Play* , November 2000.

Reasons why people get connected

Families that participated in the cyberpanel reported a range of reasons for getting connected to the Internet. For adults in households, the two most frequent reasons were for 'my work or study' (28%) and for 'the children's study/education' (27%). This suggests a difference between the Internet and media, such as television or video, whose primary function is entertainment.

The reasons parents gave for getting connected differed between males and females. Fathers were more likely to say 'for work or study' (42%) or 'to pursue a personal interest or hobby' (11%), while mothers were more likely to claim 'for the children's study' (34%) or 'to keep in contact with family and friends' (16%).

Table 2.2 Main reason for getting connected

	Total n=310 %	Male parents n=117 %	Female parents n=173 %
For my work or study	28	42	19
For the children's study/education	27	15	34
Interested in the technology and what it can do	14	15	14
To keep in contact with family or friends	12	6	16
To pursue my hobby or personal interest	6	11	3
For my partner's work or study	6	2	8
Other reason	4	3	5
Not stated	2	5	0.5

The in-depth interviews conducted with cyberpanel participants provided more insight into these reasons. For example, one newly-connected cyberpanel participant explained how the new business requirements of the GST had resulted in the family coming online. Other interviewees also revealed business imperatives, including sending files home from the office to work on at night.

The recent resurgence of lifelong learning has resulted in many parents being engaged in study. According to one interviewee, it was a necessity for tertiary study to have the Internet connected, especially for those studying in regional areas.

Children's study was the second most common reason for becoming connected. Children starting high school, and the perception that school projects would need to go beyond the encyclopedia, were suggested as catalysts for getting connected. One respondent had an autistic child who was being home-schooled. This parent had found the Internet to be an asset for this purpose.

Communicating with families and friends was also an important motivation for families to connect to the Internet. The in-depth interviews and emails revealed a cyberpanel family from mid-west America, now living in regional Queensland, keeping in touch with family and friends in the US through the Internet. One young cyberpanel participant, whose mother is Papuan, lives with her grandparents in western NSW and also keeps in touch with her family through the Internet. Another participant had left work to have a baby and found the Internet was a way to keep in touch with her work colleagues. It helped her deal with the loneliness of being at home all day with the baby.

Interviews with cyberpanel participants revealed a range of reasons for being connected. While one or more reasons may have originally motivated people in getting connected, the way the Internet was later used became broader as people explored the medium. This will be discussed, in more detail, later in this chapter.

Types of connection

The national survey indicated that 64% of homes connected to the Internet were connected via a single telephone line to the home. A further 31% had a second telephone line and 5% were connected by cable. Sixty-four per cent of cyberpanel participants were also connected by the household's single phone line.

In the in-depth interviews, people discussed how they managed their communication lines into the home. Strategies included training friends to use email rather than the phone, self-imposed time restrictions on Internet use or scheduling Internet sessions for times when the phone demands were lowest, and choosing time-limited ISP access packages. A significant minority (30%) had an additional, dedicated phone line installed for Internet access. Very few participants had a cable connection to the Internet.

Table 2.3 Type of Internet connection

How the Internet is connected?	National survey %	Cyberpanel participants %
Single phone line	64	64
Second phone line	31	30
Cable	4	4
Not answered	1	2

Where the computer is located?

The study or office (42%) was the most common location for the Internet-connected computer in cyberpanel homes. The family/lounge room was the next most common location (32%), followed by the 'spare' room (7%) and an adult's bedroom (5%).

Families interviewed said they had located the computer in the living area to enable supervision and interaction with the children during Internet sessions. For some, the family room was the only option because of the house size. Only 12 of the 310 cyberpanel families had the Internet connection in the child's bedroom. Children with Internet connections in their rooms were generally older.

When the Internet is used at home

I get on the Internet at 8 [o'clock] each night for 45 minutes.
(Female, aged 13 to 15 years)

After the kids go to bed, I will get on the Internet, then after that I watch the late news.
(Father)

My boys get on the 'Net to look up the surf report each morning.
(Father)

In the focus group discussions, adults and children with the Internet connected at home, described how it had become part of the daily routine. For many, the Internet was used regularly, at a given time and in ways that complement radio listening in the mornings and television viewing in the evenings.

Regular usage patterns by home Internet users were borne out by the national survey. Half of those with the Internet at home used it daily or almost daily and a further 24% used it two to three times a week. Daily usage was more common among:

- males (54% versus 43% females);
- university educated (53% versus 43% with completed secondary, and 28% of those with some secondary education);
- higher income households (53% for households over $50,000 p.a. and 44% for households under $30,000 p.a.); and
- people aged under 35 years (53% compared to 47% of adults aged over 35 years).

Family dynamics

Families' use of the Internet

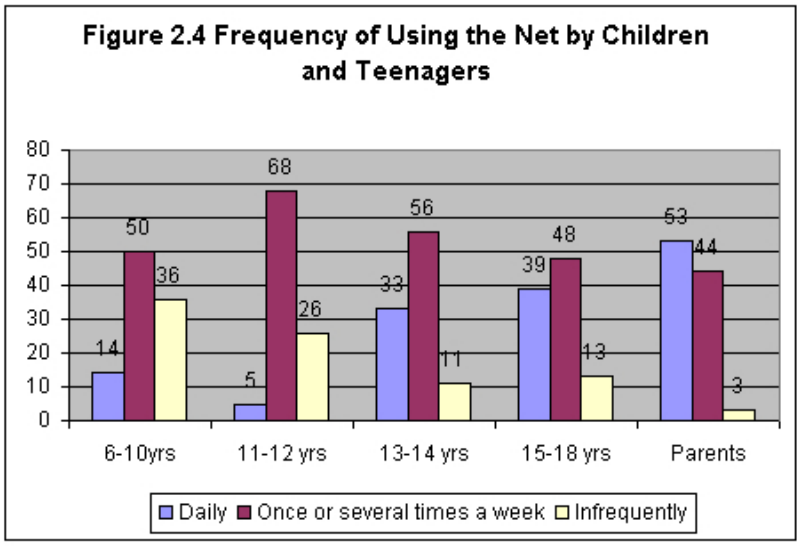
In half the cyberpanel households, each member of the family used the Internet. This rose to more than three-quarters of households where the youngest child was 12 years and older.

Seventy per cent of families had at least one family member that used the Internet at home daily. However, in only nine panel homes, did each member of the household use the Internet daily. Internet usage varied between family members. Parents were twice as likely to be the daily user of the Internet than their children.

Table 2.4 Frequency of using the Internet, by parents and children

	Parents n=310 %	Children n=228 %
Daily	53	27
Once or several times a week	44	54
Infrequently	3	18

The age of a child was a key determinant in frequency of use. A higher proportion of teenagers used the Internet daily than children aged under 12 years. Parents, however, were more likely than 15 to 18-year-olds to use the Internet daily.



When cyberpanel participants were asked to nominate the family member who most used the Internet in the home, two-thirds of the parents perceived that it was either themselves or the other parent. Mothers and fathers alike were nominated in similar proportions. In 17% of families, parents nominated males aged 13 to 17 years as the most frequent users. In 15% of families, parents nominated their daughters, commonly 16 and 17 years of age, as the most frequent users.

Child participants gave similar views. Again, parents were the most commonly mentioned. Twenty-five per cent of children in the cyberpanel perceived their mothers as the most frequent user while a similar proportion named their father. Others nominated both parents. Children under 12 years were the most likely to nominate a parent. Younger children often saw mothers as the main user. Female children, in particular, saw their mothers as the keenest Internet users in the family. Many male cyberpanel participants named themselves as the most avid user in their house. Overall, 29% of the younger participants named a male child, and 17% a female child, as the highest user.

Family involvement

Using a personal computer, with its small monitor and personalised mouse control, the Internet is necessarily a more solitary medium than television or radio. Although its operational use does not draw the family together, the research found considerable family interaction around the Internet. Cyberpanel participants of all ages felt that other family members took an interest in their Internet sessions, at least sometimes. Around one-quarter of the families claim family members were often involved with the parent's Internet sessions. Younger children were more likely to report frequent involvement in their Internet sessions (53%) than older children (12%).

Table 2.5 Family involvement in Internet sessions, by parents and children

Is the family involved with what you do on the Internet?	6-10 years n=36 %	11-12 years n=38 %	13-14 years n=69 %	15-18 years n=83 %	Parents n=310 %
Yes, often	53	37	22	12	23
Yes, sometimes	31	58	64	61	59
No	17	5	15	27	18

Families also shared entertaining sites they discovered on the Internet, particularly during the early phase of household Internet connection. Those who had been connected one year or less were more likely to frequently share entertaining sites with the family (28%) than those connected for more than one year (18%).

Table 2.6 Incidents of parents and children sharing Internet discoveries

Do you share the discovery of entertaining sites?	Youth aged 6 to 18 years n=226 %	Parents n=310 %
Yes, often	19	21
Yes, sometimes	56	62
No	25	17

Families were active in sharing hints on 'how to do things' online. More than one-third often shared such hints while more than half claim to sometimes share them. Parents and children reported similar levels of frequency. The regularity of sharing depended on how long the family had been connected to the Internet. Nearly half of the families connected one year or less more regularly shared hints on 'how to do things' online, compared to 32% of families connected for more than one year.

Similarly, if someone needs help with the Internet, other family members were likely to help solve the problem. Sixty per cent of the cyberpanel families claimed they regularly help each other use the Internet. Parents were more likely to perceive this happening more frequently than their children.

The family expert

The role of the Internet 'expert' in the family was most commonly one of the parents, according to the parents in the cyberpanel. Seventy per cent of parent respondents nominated a parent as the one most likely to be asked for help with the Internet. A majority of child panelists (58%) similarly reported one of the parents as the main source of help on the Internet.

This finding is supported by the national survey results, which indicated parents of children under 18 years were more likely to perceive themselves as computer literate than people without children under 18 years. When considering only adults aged over 35 years, parents were more likely to say they were 'very comfortable' with computers (38%) than people without children under 18 years (25%).

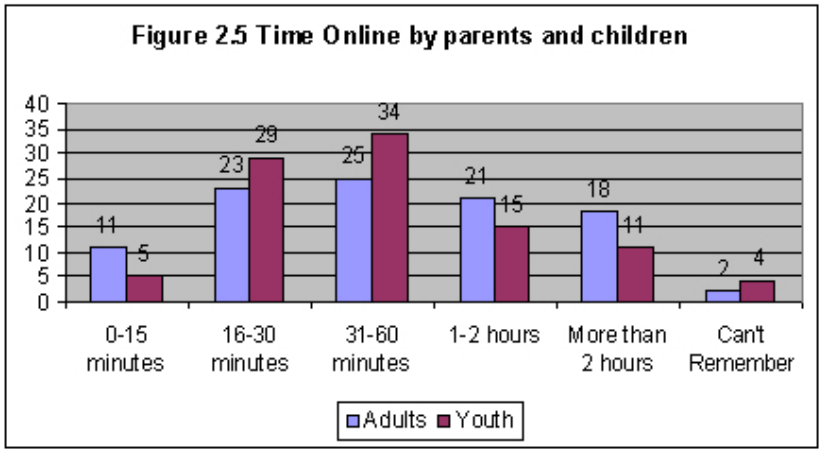
While the majority of parents perceive themselves as the family expert, around 25% of parents in the panel nominated one of the children in the household. Male children were slightly more likely to be suggested than female children. In families where one of the children was the main source of help, the child was most often the eldest child in the family and aged 13 to 18 years. In a few homes, children under 10 years were perceived as the most skilled on the Internet.

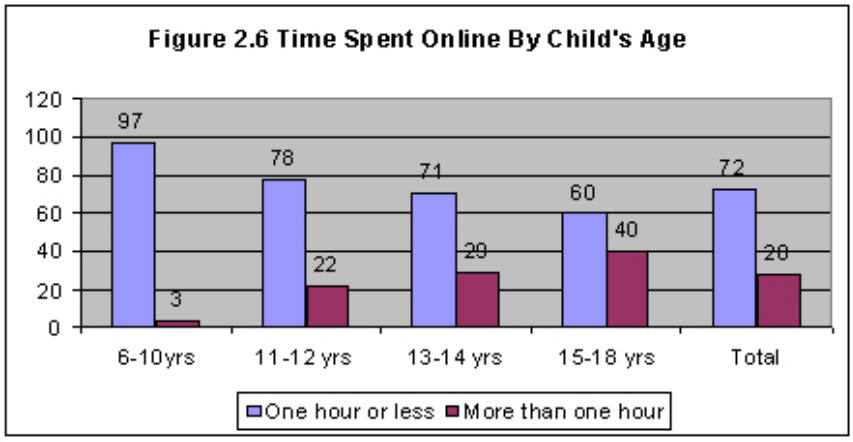
How the Internet is used?

Time spent on the Internet

The cyberpanel research provided an indication of the time families spent online. Participants estimated the time they spent online in their most recent session. Most adults (59%) and most young people (68%) estimated they spent less than one hour online. Eighteen per cent of adults and 11% of children said that they had spent more than two hours online in their most recent session.

Children aged 12 years and younger spent less time online than children in their teens. Children aged 15 to 18 years were more likely to spend more than one hour on the Internet (40%), but still the majority of this age group (60%) spent less than one hour on an Internet session.





Young, frequent Internet users were more likely to use it for longer periods of time.

Table 2.7 Time online by frequency of use (young people)

	Daily n=59 %	Weekly n=118 %	Infrequently n=37 %	Total n=214 %
One hour or less	49	80	84	72
More than one hour	51	20	16	28

The type and cost of the ISP package subscribed to appeared to affect many families' time online. For instance, some packages consisted of a flat monthly fee with a limited number of free hours per month and set rates for excess hours.

Novelty factor

The relative newness of the connection at home was another potential influence on the time spent online. In-depth interviews with newly-connected families, revealed initial usage was higher than subsequent use as the medium was explored and curiosity fed. ISPs can encourage this by offering unlimited access for the first month.

> *When you first get connected, you look up all that information you have always wanted to know. Once you have done so, then that need is satisfied.*
>
> (Mother, regional NSW)

For some, the more their skills and knowledge developed, the more time they devoted to the Internet.

> *The novelty hasn't worn off yet. Instead, the kids are finding more creative ways of using it.*
> (Father, regional Queensland)

> *The more you know about it, the more time you spend on it.*
> (Father, regional Queensland)

What the Internet is used for?

The importance of the Internet in people's lives depended on the value placed on its function, their personal tastes, and the ways they derived pleasure from it. For someone who relied on email to maintain contact with loved ones, it would be valued as a communication tool in the same regard as the telephone. For others, it was simply a useful reference resource to be used for something as mundane and trivial as settling a bet.

The national survey explored how frequently people used common Internet applications.

Table 2.8 Frequency of using Internet applications

Use of the Internet n=806	All the time %	Quite Often %	Occasionally %	Use it sometimes %	Never %
Email	42	17	23	82	18
Visit sites related to interest	15	23	40	78	22
Info for work or study	19	25	34	78	22
Surfing	6	16	52	75	25
News	5	11	32	49	51
Info for daily activities: telephone numbers, movie times	3	7	27	38	62
TV programs	0	3	28	31	69
Transactions	7	11	13	31	69
Buying	1	3	18	23	77
Chat rooms	1	4	17	22	78
Music	2	4	15	21	79
Games	1	3	16	21	79
Trading	0	2	16	19	81
Radio	0	2	15	17	83
Sexual content	1	1	14	16	84
Instant messaging (ICQ)	5	3	10	19*	79

*2% don't know

Email was the most commonly used Internet service. Most Internet users (82%) have used email and 48% of adult users use email 'all the time'. The majority of users obtained information, although this was more likely to be occasionally. For instance, three-quarters of Internet users say they surf the Internet, however, this was only occasionally. While almost half Internet users have looked up a news service, most of them only do so occasionally.

A minority of Internet users used chat rooms and instant messaging services (such as ICQ). Similar numbers have downloaded music or games from the Internet. Only 16% of respondents

acknowledged that they had, at some time, looked up sites for their sexual content. Using the Internet for these purposes was, for most who had used these applications, an occasional occurrence.

A number of services appeared to have greater appeal with certain segments of the population. Younger respondents more commonly used communication services like chat rooms or instant messaging services. Nearly half of 18 to 24-year-olds (47%) said they go to chat rooms compared with 9% of people aged 50+ years. Nearly one-third (31%) of 18 to 24-year-olds use instant messaging compared with 11% of people over 50 years. Similarly, downloading music or games was more common among younger users.

Education level was also related to the type of Internet usage. People with a university degree and those who had completed secondary school, were more likely to use the Internet for a wider range of purposes than those who have not completed secondary school.

Males were more likely to use a range of Internet services. The most pronounced differences in the use of services between males and females were observed for:

- 'surfing' the Internet (80% of males compared with 69% of females);
- trading goods (23% versus 14%);
- accessing news (58% versus 38%);
- looking at sexual content (25% versus 6%); and
- transaction processing, such as banking and paying bills (36% versus 25%).

The cyberpanel families provided an opportunity to contrast adults' and children's use of the Internet. Emails and information searches were the most common activities for most users, both parents and children. Transaction activities, like paying bills and banking, were more common among the adults. Children more commonly downloaded games and music from the Internet, and participated in chat rooms or used instant messaging services.

Table 2.9 Usage of Internet applications, by parents and children

	Adults n=310 %	Youth aged 6 - 17 years n=226 %
Read emails	93	74
Sent emails	91	68
Look up information	87	83
Paid bills or banking	46	-
Downloaded music	24	36
Used ICQ or other instant messaging service	23	33
Participated in chat rooms	14	23
Downloaded a game or games information	14	37
Purchased goods or tickets for an event	13	-
Traded shares or goods	9	-
Gambled	1	-

There were differences in the level of use of different services by different age groups.Teens were more likely to use chat rooms than the younger age groups (31% of 15 to 18-year-olds, 21% of 13 to 14-year-olds and 16% of those aged 12 years and under). Older children commonly used instant messaging services (47% of 15 to 18-year-olds, 32% of 13 to 14-year-olds and 22% of those aged 12 years and under). Downloading of music was also more common among 15 to 18-year-olds.

Gender differences were also observed within the cyberpanel families. Differences between male and female parents were observed, with fathers more likely to pay bills or trade online. Fathers were also more likely to download games and music. Similarly, male children in the households were more likely to download music or games than female children on the cyberpanel.

Favourite sites

The variety of sites people reported as their most frequently visited or favourite site reflected the range of Internet uses by the cyberpanel.

Table 2.10 Types of sites visited most often by children and their parents

	Youth aged 6 - 17 years n=228 %	Adults n=310 %
Communication /portals	32	27
Games sites	12	2
Other media	9	11
Children's sites	7	-
Music (Mp3)	5	2
Search engines	4	9
Sport and hobbies	3	5
Jokes and cartoons/video	2	1
Banking and other transactions	1	12
Shares and finance	-	7
Education	1	5
Employment and government	-	5
Other	15	13
None given	11	6

The most frequently visited sites were communication portals. *Hotmail*, in particular, was listed by many young participants, particularly those aged over 10 years. Three-quarters of the young panel participants had their own email address, but this was more prevalent among older participants. Female participants were more likely to list a communication site than males. Daily users were also more likely to list a communication site as their most visited site.

Games sites were also commonly visited by young participants, particularly males. In contrast, only a small proportion of the parents listed game sites. Media sites like *Nickelodeon, Disney* or *ABC Playground* were popular with younger female participants, particularly those aged 6 to 10 years. Adults also named a number of media sites. Some of the frequently visited sites reported included portal sites (*Ninemsn),* media sites (*i7*, *SMH*, *ABC Online)* and overseas news sources (*BBC News).*

For the purposes of this study, *Yahoo* was regarded as a portal/communication site, but it could also be categorised as a search engine. Parents more frequently listed search engines, but a small number of youth also named them. Banking and share transactions were reported reasonably commonly among the adult panel participants, along with other trading sites like *Trading Post* and *ebay*. Only a couple of the young panel members listed these types of sites as their most frequently visited. A small proportion of the adult participants also listed educational institutions sites, but only a few young people listed specific educational sites, like an HSC web site or a mathematics site.

A small proportion of young participants (17%) had their own web site and some were creating one. Very few children aged under 12 years had their own site.

Parents and youth alike were using the Internet primarily as a communication tool and information resource. Young people, however, placed more emphasis on its role as an entertainment medium, with games and children's sites for entertainment more frequently reported. The differences may be because adult respondents were less candid in their reporting of their favourite sites and gave more socially desirable responses to the researcher.

The Internet as an information resource

Most adult focus groups mentioned the Internet's role as an information resource. Many adults were in awe of the abundance of information that was at one's disposal. Difficulties in coping with such abundance was discussed and group participants exchanged advice on effective search strategies, syntax hints and preferred search engines.

> *I just think it is great to know there is somewhere you can go to find out anything. We use it for the most trivial things like settling a bet.*
>
> (Mother, Rockhampton, Queensland)

The global nature of the medium was also a key discussion topic raised in focus groups, as was combating the 'tyranny of distance' and offering immediacy and a sense of 'being there' across the world. For immigrants, the Internet delivers a level of information detail and immediacy that local media outlets were unable to provide.

> *I access the Irish Times everyday to find out the news. It is actually quicker than being there. You can get the Irish Times before it comes out in Dublin.*
>
> (Father, North Sydney, NSW)

Work and study needs motivated the majority of information searches among panelists. Young people and their parents commonly searched for information relating to personal interests and hobbies. Many adults (35%) accessed the Internet for information relating to a trip or a purchase, but few younger participants (5%) used it for this purpose. Generally, adults tended to have targeted information requirements while young people were more likely to surf the Internet without any particular purpose in mind.

Table 2.10 Information sought on the Internet by parents and their children

Types of information sought on the Internet	Parents n=270 %	Youth aged 6 - 17 years n=208 %
Searching for information for work or study	70	82
Looking at sites related to personal interest or hobby	67	61
Searching for information to plan an outing or trip	35	5
Searching for information to inform a purchase decision	32	14
Surfing the Internet, no real purpose	31	50
Looking up the latest news from a local news source	28	7
Looking up a site related to a television program	20	28
Looking up sports results	19	15
Looking up the latest news from a foreign news source	17	4
Other purpose	11	6

The Internet and other media

The ABA's national survey found 7% of people rated the Internet as their most important medium. This is in contrast to a recent US study[7], which suggested the Internet was overtaking other media in terms of its importance in people's lives. Television rated the highest for nearly half the respondents. Nearly one-quarter rated radio as most important and 19% rated newspapers highest. Not surprisingly, people with the Internet at home ranked it higher in importance than those who access it elsewhere or who are without access.

Table 2.11 Mean ranking for overall importance in daily life

	TV	Radio	Papers	Internet
At home	3.1	2.4	2.3	2.2
Some other place	3.2	2.7	2.5	1.4
No access	3.4	2.9	2.7	1.0
Total	3.3	2.7	2.5	1.5

Values: 4 – of most importance, 1 – of least importance

Respondents were then asked to rank each of the four media in terms of importance as a news and information source.

Table 2.12 Average ranking for overall importance for news and information

Medium	Ranking
Television	3.3
Radio	2.2
Newspapers	2.2
Internet	1.5

Values: 4 – of most importance, 1 – of least importance

7 *The UCLA Internet Report: Surveying the Digital Future*, October 2000.

Television received the highest average rank for news and information. Radio and newspapers were similarly ranked well behind television. Again, the Internet received the lowest ranking as a source for news and information.

On average, those with home access ranked the Internet ahead of radio and newspapers as a source for news and information. However, television was still ranked the most important source for news and information in these Internet homes.

These results correspond with findings in the previous section, which indicated that most Internet users only occasionally use the Internet for gaining information. The Internet is not the regular source of news and information like other media. Generally, the data does not support the view that the Internet is supplanting other media. That it is supplementing other sources of information seems the more feasible interpretation.

Panel participants reported spending less time on average on the Internet than they spend watching television or listening to music or the radio. Regular readers spent equal time on the Internet and reading, whereas less regular readers spent more time on the Internet than reading. Children and teenagers spend as much time playing console/computer games or sport as they spend on the Internet.

Table 2.13 Time spent on leisure activities (per day/week)

	Youth aged 6 - 17 years n=225		Parents n=310	
	n	Mean hours	n	Mean hours
Hours of TV	177	13	257	12
Listen to radio or music	178	10	225	8
Internet	168	5	243	7
Read a book	129	5	183	5
Play a musical instrument	63	4	33	5
Play console games	121	5	73	4
Play a sport	158	5	167	4
Watch videos	129	3	117	4
Read newspapers or magazines	83	2	189	4

Summary

In summary, the majority of adult Australians had some access to the Internet but the largest single grouping of users was teenage children. Moreover, adults' usage was almost twice as frequent as that of younger members of households.

Families report a high level of interaction with each other during Internet sessions, sharing Internet discoveries, playing together and helping each other learn. The family expert is most often one of the parents. Adults and children enjoy a range of Internet applications, mostly used occasionally, rather

than regularly. Email remains the most popular use for both adults and children. Information searching, particularly for work or study, is also a commonly used application.

People reported spending less time on average on the Internet than they spend watching television or listening to music or the radio. The ABA's research does not support the view that the Internet is supplanting other media. That it is supplementing other sources of information seems the more feasible interpretation.

.

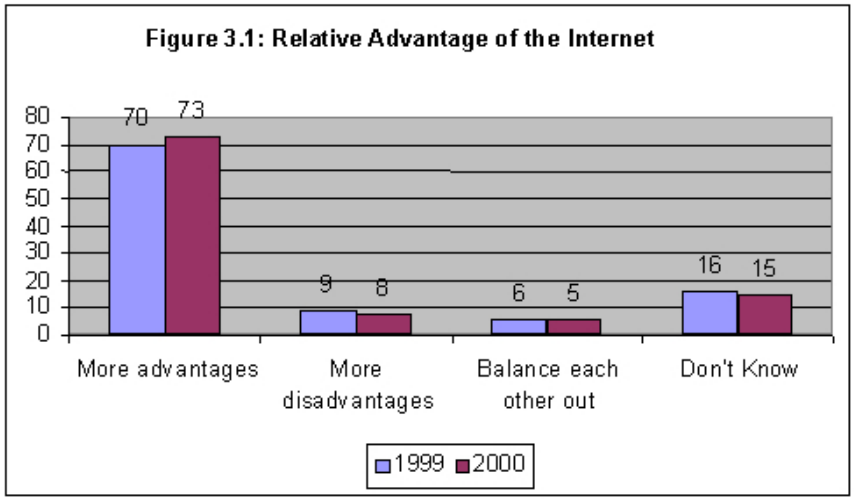
3 Rules and tools

Relative value of the Internet

In 1999, the ABA, in collaboration with other national bodies[8], conducted a survey of community attitudes to the Internet. The survey gauged the perceived advantages of the Internet relative to the possible disadvantages. This same measure was used in the ABA's 2000 study to identify shifts in community attitudes on the relative value of the Internet to users.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents perceived the Internet to offer more advantages than disadvantages. There is little change in this general rating of the Internet since the 1999 study. The current study indicates that those who get connected at home are more likely to believe the Internet has more advantages than disadvantages (90% compared with 81% that have access outside the home).

Figure 3.1: Relative Advantage of the Internet



8 Waltermann, Jenns and Machill Marcel (eds), *Protecting Our Children on the Internet: Towards a New Culture of Responsibility*, Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers, 2000.

Some segments of the community had changed their perception of the relative advantages and disadvantages of the Internet. For instance, the 1999 survey indicated that males were more likely to perceive advantages as outweighing disadvantages (74% of males versus 65% of females). In the current survey, there was no significant difference between males and females (74% versus 72%).

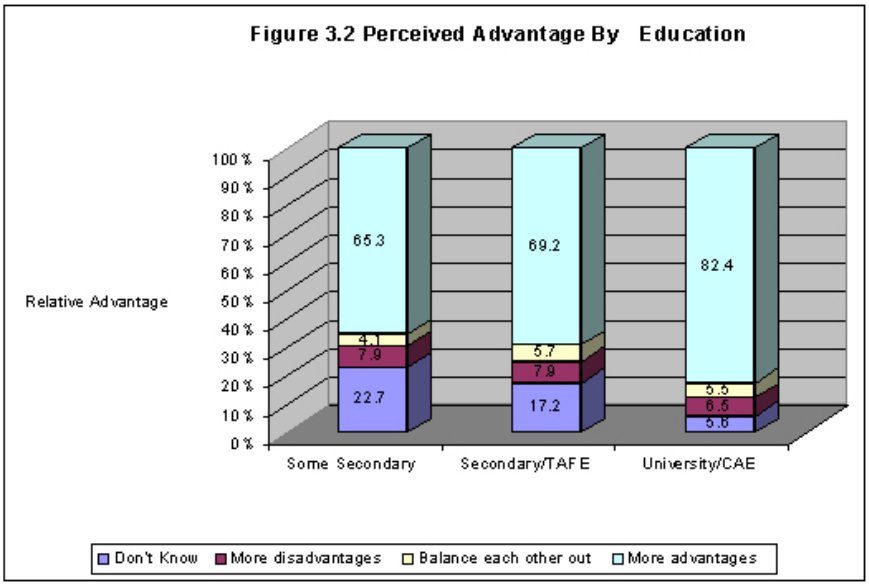
The 1999 survey also found a significant difference in the perceptions of those living within, and those living outside, capital cities (74% compared with 63%). The current survey found no significant difference between these groups (73% within cities compared with 71% outside cities).

The difference between parents and non-parents has also been reduced since the 1999 survey. The proportion of parents/guardians that perceive advantages has remained the same (76%), while the proportion of people without children that perceive more advantages has risen from 66% in 1999 to 71%.

Similarly, while a significant difference is still evident between younger and older respondents on the perceived advantages of the Internet, the degree of disparity has reduced. Younger age groups were still more likely to perceive advantages (86% of 18 to 24-year-olds) and less likely to perceive disadvantages (5% of 18 to 24-year-olds). The proportion of people aged 50 years and older perceiving more advantages to disadvantages has risen (53% in 1999 to 58% in 2000), while the proportion claiming more disadvantages has decreased (13% to 9%).

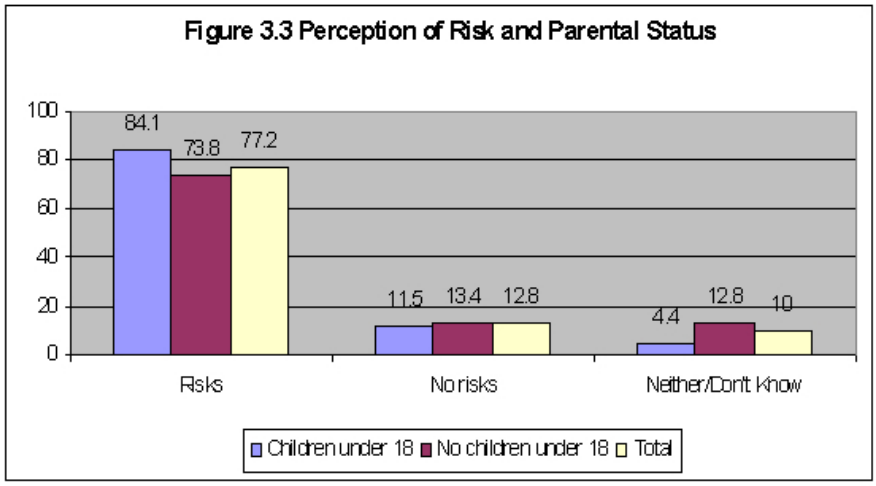
From the 2000 findings, those with a higher level of education were more likely to see the Internet as having more advantages. People who claim to have strong religious beliefs were more likely to perceive the Internet as having disadvantages or to be in balance, and were also more likely not to have an opinion. There were no 1999 study data on these differences to use in comparison.

Figure 3.2 Perceived Advantage By Education



Parents and perceptions of risk

Despite the overwhelming perception in the community that the Internet's advantages outweigh any possible disadvantages, most acknowledge that there are risks associated with its use. In the national survey, 77% of people believed using the Internet involves some risk. Parents were more likely to perceive a risk and to hold an opinion on the type of risk involved. The proportion of parents perceiving a risk rose from 79% in the 1999 survey[9] to 84% in 2000. The proportion of parents without an opinion on perceived risk decreased from 9% in the 1999 survey to 4% in 2000. Therefore, the increase in perceived risk is the result of greater awareness and debate about the Internet, rather than a shift from no perceived risk.



Females were more likely to perceive risk (82%) than males (72%). The 1999 survey showed 82% and 69% respectively.

Differences in perceived risk were observed, depending on people's age and education level. This leads to the conclusion that differences in levels of perceived risk could be attributed to a reduced awareness of the Internet by some groups in the community, rather than a difference of opinion as such (appendix B).

2 ibid.

In other media studies, concern about media risks is higher among those with strong religious beliefs.[10] In this study, perceived risk from the Internet did not appear to be related to the respondents' degree of religious belief. The many facets of the Internet could account for the higher levels of reported risk across the community compared with other media where morality concerns are dominant.

Perceived risks

Despite the wide range of uses and the increasing experience and familiarity with the Internet, concerns were related to only a small set of issues. The top five areas of perceived risks were:

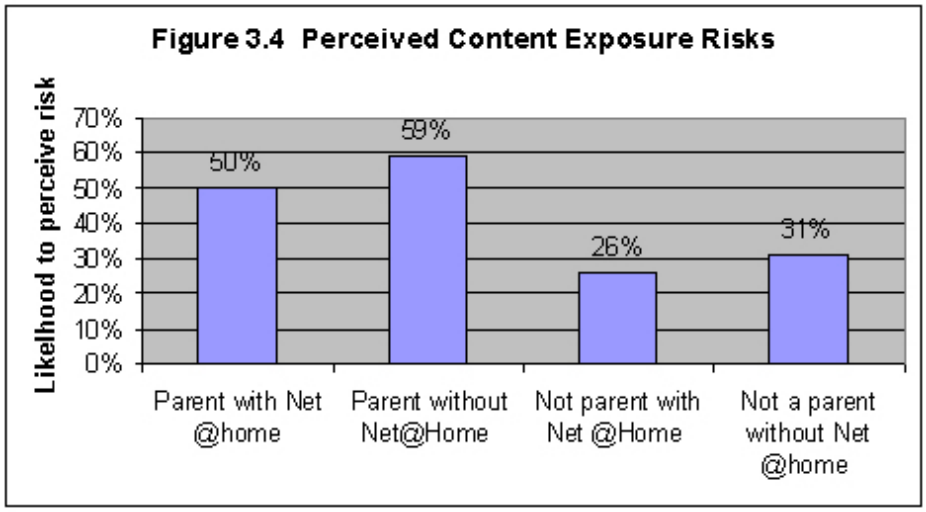
- financial dangers, like fraud and credit card number theft (54%);
- personal data misuse and privacy issues (45%);
- children accessing unfit content (27%);
- viruses (21%); and
- pornography (not mentioned in relation to risk to children) (11%).

Respondents raised a number of concerns regarding unsuitable content. The most common concern was the perceived risk of children accessing this content. Others raised the issue of pornography, without specifically mentioning its risk to children. Some respondents were concerned about racist material or propaganda. Others noted unsolicited emails, with content perceived as distasteful, or accidentally finding such material while searching on the Internet. At least one of these concerns was raised by 39% of those who perceived some risk. These findings suggest that exposure to unwanted content was the third most common area of perceived risk of the Internet.

Perceptions of risk varied among different sectors of the community. Parents were generally more likely to raise concerns regarding content, although content was less of a concern for those with home Internet access (50%) than for parents without home access (59%).

The risks of children accessing unfit content, or of encountering undesirable people through the Internet, were also a concern. Child-related dangers of some form, not just exposure to unfit content, were raised by 31% of respondents who thought the Internet held some risk.

10 Durkin , K and Aisbett K, *Computer Games and Australians Today*, Office of Film and Literature, Sydney, 1999.



Parents were more likely to raise concerns about dangers for children. Again, parents without home Internet access were more likely to raise concerns relating to children than parents with the Internet at home.

Overall, more parents viewed chat rooms as a risk than people without children under 18 years of age. This perception, however, was common among parents without home access. Parents who have the Internet at home were no more likely to perceive chat rooms as a risk than users without children under 18 years.

The results suggest that some parents' perception of risk could deter them from connecting to the Internet. Alternatively, it may be that, once connected, parents come to terms with the potential risks and develop ways of managing those risks.

Content concerns were more likely to be raised by females (47% versus 30% of males) who also more commonly mentioned child-related dangers (38 % of females versus 21% of males) and concern about chat rooms (16% of females versus 6% of males).

Negative experiences

To gauge the frequency with which Internet users have had a negative experience that has prompted their concern, the national survey asked:

> What, if anything, have you yourself experienced on the Internet that you didn't like or were concerned about?

More than half the Internet users (54%) could not recall anything. Of those who did report an experience, exposure to pornography was the most common (14% of Internet users) followed by difficulty searching for content (12%). Receiving unsolicited emails per se, with no mention of the content, was the third most frequent negative experience reported (8%), and advertising the fourth (5%). Most other issues, including fraud and viruses, were only reported by a small number of respondents.

The reported frequency of adverse events varied according to the type of experience. Respondents who reported pornography most often said it occurred on a few occasions and 23% reported it occurring quite often. Those reporting unsolicited emails, without any reference to the nature of the content, more commonly claimed it happened 'quite often'. Qualitative research indicates that unsolicited emails containing pornography tend to raise the most concern.

Table 3.1 Frequency of occurrence of negative experiences

	Never or it wasn't me %	Once only %	A few times %	Quite often %	Don't know %
Pornography n=120	15	16	45	23	1
Searching difficulties n=88		2	55	42	1
Receiving unsolicited emails n=75	4	10	40	45	1

Searching difficulties could refer to problems finding material or unexpected finds during a search that lead to a concern. These incidents had occurred on a few occasions for some and quite often for others. Other content, such as depictions of victims of violence or obscene language, was reported by very few respondents, who generally had only experienced it once or a few times.

Cyberpanel participants were also asked to report on their experiences in the previous month, of content they found distasteful or which raised some concern. Around one-quarter of adults (24%) reported encountering distasteful content. In these incidences, pornography caused the most concern. Some respondents specifically mentioned receiving pornography via email, while others had encountered banner ads for sites with sexual content.

Table 3.2 Type of distasteful content encountered

What kind of content was it?	n=235 %
Pornography/sexual content	15
Pornography sent emails/ICQ	5
People in chat /ICQ	1
Morbid	1
Banner ads for sex sites	1
Other	2
Total	24
None mentioned	76

The second online survey of young people raised the question:

> Have you ever seen or experienced something on the Internet you thought was offensive or disgusting?

The group was fairly evenly divided between those who had (47%), and those who had not (53%), experienced something they perceived as offensive or disgusting.

The types of content young people considered offensive or disgusting included pornography, nudity, 'rude stuff', tasteless jokes, talk in chat rooms and violent imagery. Pornography dominated the list of content reported, but many also reported images of death and accidents and one person wrote:

> *[I saw on a web site] blood pattern made from shooting upwards through a human head*
>
> (Male aged 11 to 17 years, panel participant)

Many of the participants reported finding the content unexpectedly via a search or having the material sent to them by persons unknown.

When asked about how the experience made them feel, the young participants offered a range of descriptive terms, with words like 'sick', 'yuck', 'disgusted', 'repulsed' and 'upset' being the most common. A number reported being annoyed because of the unexpected nature of the experience and because it was difficult to remove from the screen. Others reported feeling 'uncomfortable', 'shocked', 'embarrassed' or 'degraded' by the experience. A few said they were scared that their mothers would catch them with the content on screen.

Access to Internet content compared with other media

In focus groups and in-depth interviews, some common themes emerged in distinguishing between content concerns of the Internet and those of other media. In the final phase of the cyberpanel research, parents were emailed the question:

> In relation to media like TV and videos, do you think the Internet is more or less of a concern in terms of what children have access to and why do you say that?

The majority of parents claimed to be more concerned about content available to their children via the Internet than via other media. A small number of participants (10%) said their level of concern was about the same as for other media. A similar number claimed to be more concerned about the content of other media such as television or video. The spread of concerns in relation to different media was similar across family structure and unrelated to the age of the children.

Table 3.3 Leaning of concern – the Internet compared with other media

	n=273 %
Internet more of a concern	71
Same concern	10
Other media more of a concern	13
No or minimal concern (supervision or benefits considered)	4
Total respondents	98
Missing data	2

The participants held their positions for a variety of reasons, listed in the table below.

Table 3.4 Reason for concerns about access to content - media comparison

	n=273 %
More concern, reasons	
No classification/regulation equivalent	30
Access to everything	30
Access without parents, knowledge	24
Unexpected, unwanted content	16
Pornography/undesirable content	12
Contact with undesirable others	12
One can check beforehand with TV and videos	4
Internet addiction	1
Financial/privacy dangers	2
Less or same concern, reasons	
Sex, violence in other media easier to access	14
Internet requires search, whereas TV just there	6
Can trust family values	5
Internet has more educational value	4
Can check where child's been	3
Filter systems for the Internet	2
Other	4

Note: % sum to more than 100 because of multiple reasons given

The core differences between the Internet and other media, perceived by parents who are more concerned with Internet content, are:

- regulatory differences;
- monitoring difficulty – individual versus group nature of the viewing;
- the unwanted, unexpected nature of access to unsuitable content; and
- the interactive nature of the medium and the human dimension.

Regulatory differences

The difference in the level of regulation of the Internet compared with other media was the most common theme raised by parents when asked why they were more concerned about access on the Internet.

Perceived differences in the nature of regulatory control were:

- lack of limits or control on what is available;
- lack of consumer information to assist in judging the suitability of content, e.g. classifications;
- ease of access – no age restrictions on access to parallel MA and R rated movies at cinemas and video stores; and
- no time constraints on access, unlike television broadcast policy.

Some comments on the regulatory differences between the media included:

> *Other media have watch bodies that control and rate what can be seen and when, the Internet has no such controls.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

> *I think the Internet is more of a concern because children have access to many more unsuitable ideas/visuals than they could possibly get from TV/videos. Although children may get access to parent's videos, they would find it difficult to obtain these themselves, whereas accessing unsuitable sites on the Internet is very easy and it is not necessary for the child to prove his/her age before gaining that access.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

> *At present, Internet content is relatively 'uncontrolled'.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

Differences in regulatory infrastructure are seen as a particular problem for parents, making it more difficult to monitor and supervise the content their children can access. The lack of ratings or labelling was raised by many as making prior content filtering difficult. Parents commented on the role of the classification scheme in video and TV broadcast regulation in assisting parents to manage their children's access to TV and video content.

> *The Internet is more of a concern because I can adjudicate what my children can or can't watch on video or TV. I control accessibility to content. The promoter of that content also informs me (in advance) of the nature of the content. Not so on the 'Net. This makes it hard for me to determine beforehand whether or not a web site is going to be an appropriate e-address to allow my under-age children to view.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

Contrasts with television scheduling practices were made, noting the round-the-clock nature of web access to material and the vast amount of content, compared with the familiar line-up of content that television provides.

> *With television, there are specific hours during which programs with certain ratings are not permitted to be shown. These tend to be the times when younger children are able to watch television (later than that we would like them to be asleep!). In terms of videos, the children do not go to the video shop without an adult and we have the card. With the Internet, there is all hours' access to material and it is difficult to supervise every single minute that a child is logged on.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

> *With TV and video, you tend to be more aware of the suitability of the type of program/film that is to be shown. Whereas with the Internet, you are not aware until you have accessed.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

While, on the one hand, parents called for ratings and assistance in guiding the choice of Internet sites, they often expressed in the same breath a feeling of resignation that little can be done about the Internet.

> *I feel the Internet is more of a concern as there is no real form of censorship applied. With TV, the station will advise of the rating that the program has and with the videos, they will also have a rating displayed on the box and the store attendants should not provide certain rating videos to the under-aged. If the Internet could have some form of classification displayed as you entered the site, this may discourage the kids from entering that site. This would be impossible to police, as those who choose to force this onto the young would very quickly devise ways of getting around the policing.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

Parents appear to feel they don't have the same level of parental control with the Internet as with other media. It is this perceived lack of control that would seem to have lead to greater concerns about the Internet.

While noting the difficulties of supervising children on the Internet in what is perceived as an unregulated environment, a number of parents were quick to defend the Internet's open access. Supervision by parents was seen as the key to children's safe access, rather than content restrictions. A few claimed they did not believe in 'censorship' of the Internet . Others perceived that content restrictions were impossible because of the Internet's structure.

> *Anything and everything is available on the Internet. I don't find that a problem in itself...I think it would be wrong (and nearly impossible) to try and censor it...but that then makes special consideration for children's use essential.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

There needs to be a body which handles complaints about sites - but this could be very difficult, even impossible, due to most 'illegal' sites being hosted overseas.

(Father, panel participant)

Television and videos are governed by rating authorities and the Internet isn't. It isn't really possible to govern and control the Internet realistically.

(Mother, panel participant)

Monitoring the Internet

Another concern raised by parents was that the Internet is more difficult to monitor because of the individual nature of the medium. This issue was raised by 31% of those more concerned about Internet access.

I think the Internet is more of a concern because it is less visible to onlookers. TV and video are in the family room and more public.

(Mother, panel participant)

At least with TV you can hear what is on.

(Father, panel participant)

You know what is on telly or a video, but you have no idea what they are looking at on the Internet unless you stand over them constantly.

(Mother, panel participant)

Intrusion of unsuitable content

In focus groups and in-depth interviews, a number of people expressed resentment at the unexpected, unwanted intrusion of pornographic material into their Internet experience. Many see it as a violation of their privacy and their sensibilities, and for some parents, it represents a potential threat to their children. Focus group participants who had encountered this experience expressed feelings of vulnerability, annoyance, frustration and sometimes fear. This theme also emerged in the cyberpanel participants' responses to the media comparison question. The unexpected, unwanted exposure to perceived unsuitable material appeared to heighten parents' feeling that they have less control of this medium. Twenty-one per cent of those expressing more concern about the Internet mentioned accidental or unsolicited exposure to unsuitable content as an issue. The practice of some Internet businesses of using links and manipulating search indexes to channel visits to their web sites was commented on by a number of participants. This was seen as a particular concern for parents, as children would be the most vulnerable to such practices.

A few participants gave examples of specific experiences:

> *It is easy for the providers of this type of 'information' to trick people into visiting them by using misspelt names of commonly used web sites.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

> *Children are more readily able to travel in tangent areas and periphery advertising allows scope for accidental access to sites.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

> *We went looking for the words to 'Puff the Magic Dragon' for my 6-year-old son. As well as Peter, Paul and Mary sites, we also found an illustrated site with the lyrics but across the top were unsuitable ads for him. In the list of sites were quite a few with drug references ('puff'). I certainly wouldn't want him looking by himself, whereas I can let him watch his favourite TV shows.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

> *[The] Internet is very insidious in that you can be merrily exploring until, BANG, you stumble into a site that is more than you were expecting (be it pornographic or otherwise e.g. how to grow marijuana). With the Internet, you just never know what is going to come up next.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

> *Unfortunately there are those site operators who PUSH their material instead of allowing customers to seek them. Perhaps we should seek to educate them (difficult) to understand that they have the potential to harm children.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

Interaction and the human dimension

The new 'stranger danger' dimension of the Internet has received considerable media attention. Around 16% of those with greater concerns about the Internet were concerned about the potential danger to children from undesirable people contacted through the Internet. This potential physical and psychological danger to their children adds a different type of concern than those raised by the static, one-way, largely anonymous communication of traditional audiovisual forms. The ability of the Internet to 'deceive' young people was a theme in these comments. Chat rooms were singled out as the potential source of this danger.

> *On the Internet,we are unable to control who is 'at the other end'...seemingly innocent chat rooms can be infiltrated by others who are not as they seem.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

The possibility of being approached by undesirables is a concern. My son had one experience while playing a game that shook him up a bit.

(Mother, panel participant)

The Internet is also more of a concern in that it can be a two-way correspondence and such things as stalking can occur.

(Mother, panel participant)

Chat rooms etc allows them to talk with strangers, some of whom mightn't be people you want to have accessing your child. TV and videos are not interactive, the Internet is.

(Mother, panel participant)

Managing the Internet experience

Dealing with unwanted experiences

In the national survey, those Internet users reporting a negative experience (46%) were asked:

> Have you done anything to guard against this occurring?

Thirty-six per cent of those reporting a negative Internet experience have taken action to guard against it happening again. Parents were more likely to take protective action (42% compared with 32% of adults without children).

Of the people in the national sample who took action to prevent or minimise exposure to pornographic content, the most common solution was installation of filter software. Some parents denied their children access to the Internet, and a few restricted access by setting a password for computer access. A few people had lodged a complaint.

Those who had experienced unsolicited emails took the same actions. Filter software was, again, the most common solution to minimise risk of exposure.

Young people's management of exposure to unsuitable content

In focus groups with children and teenagers, children indicated they knew the appropriate response if confronted with distasteful material.

The young panel participants similarly showed a good understanding of the means for avoiding or dealing with exposure to unpleasant content. When asked about how they responded when encountering undesirable content, participants reported taking immediate action. Tactics commonly included exiting the site or deleting the file. A number (44% of those reporting exposure to unwanted

content) said they told one of their parents. The research clearly indicates that young people are aware of the appropriate action to deal with a negative experience.

Telling someone about the experience was common, in particular a friend or parent.

Parenting approaches to the Internet

The Internet presents a new set of challenges for parents. Other media have a long history of debate about potential positive and negative impact on children, and volumes written on appropriate ways to manage children's use. However, the Internet is new to parents, and their knowledge of the medium is often not as comprehensive as with other matters. Parents don't have their own childhood experiences to draw upon as they do in other areas of life. Data on where parents seek parenting advice regarding the Internet is presented in the final chapter. This section looks at how parents deal with their children's access to the medium.

In the national survey, parents with home Internet access were asked to indicate their parenting approach by choosing from a list of parenting practices used in regard to the Internet.

Table 3.5 Parenting approaches to the Internet

	Parents with the Internet at home n=186 %
Used computer software to block certain Internet content from the computer?	17
Basically, trusted your child to use the Internet in a way that is in keeping with the family's values?	86
Used a computer program to check on the Internet sites visited by your child?	24
Set rules on where your child can go and what they can do on the Internet?	58
Monitored what your child is doing by keeping an eye on what is on the screen?	84

The use of technological parenting tools was relatively low compared to general parenting approaches such as setting parental expectations for the child's behaviour on the Internet and trusting the child to abide by those principles. Even though parents generally believed they could trust their children to behave appropriately on the Internet, most parents also kept an eye on what their child was accessing.

Parents of boys were more likely to use audit trails to check on their son's Internet use than parents of girls (31% versus 16%).

Parents were more likely to set rules on suitable sites for children aged 9 to12 years. Parents of children older than 9 years were more likely to rely on trust and the child's understanding of the family's values, than were parents of younger children.

The usage of filter software by parents with home Internet access was unrelated to parents' views on the effectiveness of such software. This could be explained in a number of ways. For example, knowledge of filter software was low. However, 32% of parents with the Internet at home recalled being told about filter software by their ISP[11].

Table 3.6 Interest in information on how to block access to certain content

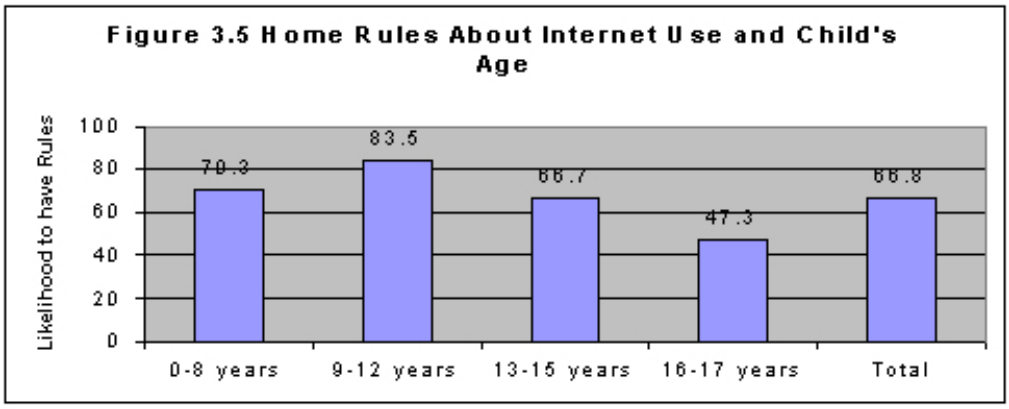
	n=186 %
Very interested	24
Somewhat interested	29
Not interested because you already know how	14
Not interested because you don't need to know	33

Parents who had not installed filter software were more likely to be somewhat interested rather than very interested in information about how to block certain sites. They were also more likely to feel they didn't need to know. This suggests that some parents may not view the blocking of sites as necessary.

Home rules

In the national survey, parents with home access were asked about the Internet usage practices of one of their children[12].

A majority (67%) claimed they have some rules or routines about using the Internet. Children aged 9 to12 years were the most likely to have rules for home Internet use.



11 Notification of filter or blocking software by ISP has been part of the co-regulatory scheme since January 2000. Many respondents had home access prior to this date.

12 Parents were asked to answer the questions in relation to one of their children, chosen at random (child with the most recent birthday).

Male children were more likely to have rules than females (70% versus 63%).

In the national survey, the most commonly reported rules or routines were:

- adult supervision at all times or permission for use, or access protected by parent password (38%);
- access to 'adult' content prohibited (36%);
- restriction on the amount of time spent on the Internet (33%);
- specific times when the Internet can be used (28%); and
- access restricted to specific purposes (20%).

Parental supervision was more commonly reported for children under 9 years of age. Time rules were more commonly set for older children and teenagers.

These findings reflect the clear age differentiation expressed by many parents involved in focus groups. Parents expressed greater concern about the potential impact of unsuitable material on younger children, with whom more care and monitoring was seen as appropriate. Younger children, however, were seen as less likely to want to access unsuitable material. Parents of teenagers were not as concerned about the potential for harm from exposure to material, but rather how it reflected on their moral framework.

> *We have not got to the stage yet (children [aged] 9 and 5 [years] and don't use it much). I think it depends on the age group. If you try to put 'kidznet' over a 14-year-old they will outsmart it. [*When asked - who would you use kidznet with?*] Might use it for under 10 [years]. At this age (under 10 [years]), they are too young to go looking for stuff and then by the time they are 14 [years], it really doesn't matter.*
>
> (Father, Sydney, NSW)

Focus groups also revealed differences in parental attitudes toward male and female children. Male children were perceived to be more likely to access pornography and other unsuitable material than daughters. Mothers reported disappointment at finding their teenage sons had accessed sexual content on the Internet. Fathers, while accepting this interest as part of puberty, did express concern at the ease of access and explicitness of material available on the Internet.

> *In the old days it used to be the 'Playboy' magazine and now they [sons] have a library [on the Internet] that far exceeds the 'Playboy' standards. There are some sites where they've got graphic images of dead famous stars, mortuary pictures, pretty morbid stuff and God knows what damage it does to an 8-year-old or even the real pornographic stuff is beyond the normal 'standards'. Once they go beyond 12 [years], they know more than we ever knew at that age. It is just protection for the young ones that is needed. I think if you have got a 14-year-old they take it in their stride. They have got an inclination towards it or they couldn't be bothered because they have other stuff to think about.*
>
> (Father, Sydney, NSW)

The national survey revealed differences in rule setting for male and female children, with male children more likely to have time-based rules and rules about accessing adult sites than female children.

Online surveys of parents and children explored panel families' routines and practices. Cyberpanel members were asked:

> Your family may have certain ways of organising when, who and how the Internet is used. Below is a list of ways some families use it. Which, if any, of these arrangements do you have in your home?

The list did not specifically target content-related rules so that people's top-of-mind acknowledgment of such rules could only be ascertained in the open-ended question.

Table 3.7 Rules reported by parents and their children

Rules and routines	Youth aged 6-18 years n=228 %	Parents n=310 %
No food at the computer	60	57
Use for study a priority over entertainment purpose	54*	65
Amount of time spent on the Internet	47	30
Adult must be home when it is used	41	37
Volume must be turned down on the computer when others sharing the room	36	51
Certain times of the day when it can be used	30	20
Only to be used for school work	6*	35

* This was not given as an option to the 6 to 10-year-olds.

Most families have some routine or practices for using the Internet at home. The Internet's purpose as a tool for work or study was reflected in these rules and routines, with the majority of parents and children claiming work or study takes precedence over using the Internet for fun or entertainment. Not eating at the computer was commonly observed and reported by both children and their parents.

The amount of time spent on the Internet was a common restriction reported by children, though not as commonly reported by their parents.

The prevalence of certain rules and routines being reported depended on the age and gender of children, the number of children in the household and the gender of the parent reporting the rules.

Prioritising Internet use for study or work was more common in:

- larger families;
- families with older children; and
- families connected for more than one year.

Rules about an adult being at home when the children were on the Internet were most common in families where the eldest child was between 8 and 12 years of age.

Limits on the amount of time spent on the Internet were more common in:

- families with boys;
- larger families; and
- families where the eldest child is over 8 years of age.

Mothers were more likely to nominate rules about food being allowed at the computer than fathers. These rules were more common in:

- families with boys;
- families where the eldest is between 8 and 12 years of age; and
- larger families.

Volume control on the computer was more an issue in larger families, where the sharing of space is more likely.

Cyberpanel members were given the opportunity to list their own house rules and they were asked to email additional details on Internet routines and practices in their house. Fifty-nine cyberpanel members provided additional information on their family.

The most common rules related to sharing the Internet between family members. In the context of the particular online survey that had emphasised the use of the Internet and family dynamics, it may be that few parents thought of content-related rules. In-depth interviews revealed many families did have rules related to Internet content, some of which had resulted from a particular experience within the family. Two of the mothers interviewed had been surprised to find their children receiving an email with pornographic content attached. One mother explained that she deleted the file and deregistered the email address, and told her children to delete such emails should they receive them again.

Again, the theme of age specificity of rules was raised. As one parent explained, while the rule to only allow supervised Internet access was workable when the children were young, it would need to be re-assessed as the children needed greater access for homework.

> *When they are older, we will have to work out other ways of dealing with it. The children need to learn how to use it safely and wisely.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

Only a small number of the panel's 11 to 18-year-olds offered additional rules or routines. Not giving personal details was the most common top-of-mind rule. Restrictions on the sites which could be visited was the next most common. Obtaining permission to download was another rule raised by a few of the participants. Other routines related to sharing with other family members, specific times for using the Internet, and checking for phone messages after finishing.

As younger participants are less likely to have the cognitive ability to offer further rules, 6 to 10-year-olds were asked to respond to an additional set of rules:

- asking permission before getting on to the Internet (81% said that was a rule);
- need to finish homework first (69%);
- not allowed to visit chat rooms (35%);
- not allowed to go to certain sites (54%); and
- not allowed to tell anyone personal details, like your name and address (23%).

Reasons for rules

The national survey found that parents have varying reasons for setting rules for their children about Internet use. Limiting their child's potential exposure to unsuitable content was the most common reason among parents (43% of parents who set rules). Limiting the possibility of the child making contact with undesirable people was the next most frequent reason.

Other reasons were unrelated to content issues. One-quarter set a rule because they feel being on the Internet is a waste of time. Other reasons include:

- interference with homework;
- tying up the telephone line;
- a preference for children to play outdoors; and
- financial concerns at the cost involved.

Concerns about how children spend their time were slightly more common with parents of 13 to 15-year-olds. Concerns about contact with undesirable people were more common in relation to female children.

Trust

Role of trust

A common theme raised by parents and children in the focus groups was the role of trust in parents' management of their children's Internet usage. The national survey also found that most parents trust their children to use the Internet responsibly in combination with supervision of their children's Internet sessions and/or a set of rules for its use. The role of trust was further explored with the cyberpanel parents. They were asked in an email to comment on the statement:

> Some people in this study have spoken about the importance of trusting children to use the Internet appropriately. Is trust enough?

The cyberpanel participants responded via email to allow an opportunity of sharing their views with the researcher with whom they had had regular email contact over a three month period. The method offered a kind of intimacy in the form of communication and allowed time for the respondent to reflect upon their answer. The responses were considered and revealing.

Most participants responded with some form of agreement or disagreement to the statement and provided an argument for their position. A content analysis of the email responses indicated panel participants were fairly evenly split in their tendency to agree or disagree, although answers were not straightforward. Trust was seen as an essential component of the parent-child relationship for most parents. Both those who tended to agree and those who tended to disagree found trust necessary, if not always sufficient.

Parents of older children, and those with one or two children, were more likely to agree with the proposition.

Table 3.8 Agreement with statement 'Is trust enough?'

	n=273 %
Endorsed	14
Rejected	42
Conditional agreement	43
Total	99
Missing data	1
Total	100

The arguments for agreement or disagreement revealed participants' parenting style and how they applied it to the Internet. The degree to which empowerment, protection or control was preferred in parenting for the Internet varied markedly between parents.

The table below lists some key themes revealed in the emails with an indication of commonality of the theme.

Table 3. 9 Parenting the Internet and the place of trust

Issues	n=273 %
Nature of children to test boundaries	29
Needs to be combined with supervision/ monitoring /checking history files	20
Sufficient if combined with rules	19
Can't trust medium - unintentional access	17
Depends on age of child	14
Depends on child	13
Relationship with children/openness key in parenting	9
Own child can be trusted	8
Depends on upbringing/family	8
Don't need trust, just supervision	7
Combined with software	5
Trust developed over time/values learnt	5
Essential for children to develop responsibility	5
Trust may not be enough but no other way to go	4
Don't need trust, just rules	3
Don't need trust, just filter software	1
Other	1

% sum to more than 100 because of multiple reasons given

Kids will be kids

Two key reasons emerged, explaining why people disagreed with the proposition that trust is enough. One was based on the perceived nature of children and teenagers and the view that children should not be trusted. The second reason was based on a mistrust of the medium. In the first instance, many expressed the view that children's natural curiosity would tempt them to access inappropriate content. Some based this belief on their own actions as a child.

> *No, trust isn't enough. I'm a realist. Inquisitive children, with rampaging hormones, will be tempted to look for spicy sites – no matter how much we trust them. .... I think supervision is more important than trust.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

> *Human nature dictates differently. It is our nature to investigate areas of interest or just to see what is over the horizon. Some sort of restrictions should be in place to prevent younger children from going to sites the parents deem unfit for their children.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

A number of parents noted the importance of age when considering the level of trust to extend to a child. The arguments on how trust relates to the age of a child varied. Some parents viewed trust as a process that develops with time as children mature. Trust needs to be earned and demonstrated before it is appropriate to place greater reliance on it. The cognitive development of the child was seen as particularly important in a medium like the Internet, because it is perceived to be essentially an adult environment. It was argued that children don't have the maturity required to discern or understand the appropriate action to take with some content on the Internet.

> *Children don't have a developed sense of right and wrong to the same degree that an adult does. Nor do they have a developed sense of degree and discernment (about moral issues). ...it isn't an issue of trust, it's an issue of understanding. That can't be taught, it has to be developed and that takes time and maturity.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

Others argued that, as their children move from childhood to adolescence, it is more likely they will be tempted by unsuitable material and so trust could not be relied upon. Peer pressure was also seen as influencing children's judgement and, therefore, the degree to which trust can be relied upon.

> *We all hope that we can trust our children to do the right thing but unfortunately there has and always will be 'peer pressure'. Our children can be relied upon, UNTIL they are pressured into something that they wouldn't ordinarily do. This is the point that some form of control comes into play. We have ALL been there and recognise that trust isn't always enough.*
>
> *(Mother, panel participant)*

Trust and rules

Some parents, while endorsing the need to develop a trusting relationship with their child, saw the need for more explicit actions such as rule-setting, monitoring and supervision. Most spoke about the role of trust as one component in parenting and discussed the additional elements they felt were essential, and/or why trust on its own is not enough. These parents place a little more emphasis on the following of rules as an essential component in the development of trust in providing children with definite boundaries and certainty in terms of what is expected of them. Some parents referred to sanctions when rules were not complied with. In the case of the Internet, sanctions generally involved withdrawal of home access to the Internet. Nineteen per cent of parents referred explicitly to rules in their responses.

> *Trust is good, and we give our kids a certain level of trust, but they know that the privilege of using the Internet would disappear the moment they broke that trust, so the responsibility is with them. Do they risk it for a short term thrill, or follow our rules and gain access to entertainment and information? So far we have not had this trust broken, and if inappropriate items have found their way to our computer, they have told us so that we know, furthering the bond of trust in the family.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

> *Children need to have space to move and learn within. However, they will need very definite boundaries and rules. You could ask the Internet authorities to create those rules and enforce them somehow. But I think that parental involvement is the key issue. If my son wants access to porn then he can find it all over the place other than the Internet. As a parent, I see my role in setting standards and overseeing that they are kept.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

Trust and monitoring and supervision

Some parents placed more emphasis on the monitoring and supervision aspects of responsible parenting, with 20% referring to monitoring and supervision of their children's use of the Internet. Forms of monitoring include active involvement with their child's Internet sessions, watching which sites were accessed during Internet sessions or checking history files for sites visited. Some parents explained that they checked history files to ensure their children's safety, rather than as an act of mistrust. Ensuring the child's safe use of the Internet was a common theme with parents who emphasised the importance of supervision.

> *I do sometimes check the history, some may say this shows a lack of trust. I do not think it is about whether I trust my children, but I am responsible for them as their parent and if somehow they end up in the wrong place, I want to be able to talk to them about it. The truth is I believe they would tell me about it before I found it. My daughter told me that there was someone trying to arrange a meeting with her and we talked about this, lucky for me she was aware of the dangers. These issues have also been discussed at school, which I think is great. 'Stranger danger' can now be in the cyber world as well as the streets.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

I feel it is important to supervise and check what they are doing. I think trusting too much could be unsafe.

(Mother, panel Participant)

Unexpected and unwanted experiences

A sizeable number of those who strongly felt that trust was not enough expressed concern about unwanted and unexpected exposure to content. Internet businesses that use pop-up advertising or 'spam' were perceived to be creating an unsafe environment. Children could innocently be exposed to unsuitable content through these marketing practices. Similarly, the manipulation of search engine processes to maximise traffic to adult sites was also condemned and given as the main reason why trust was not perceived to be enough. Personal experiences were often cited in these parents' responses.

I trust my kids to be responsible Internet users, BUT when they only have to type in 'death', as they are after information regarding mummification for a school assignment, and they get photographs shoved in their faces of babies and musicians immediately post-mortem, I don't think that trust has much to do with what they are exposed to!

(Mother, panel participant)

I have been 'hijacked' onto pornography sites I could not escape from and had to re-boot the computer to get out, it was most disturbing. Therefore, trust is not enough, I trust my child but do not trust smut pushers.

(Mother, panel participant)

Trust and family values

Many of those who agreed with the proposition that trust is enough see their parental role as one of teacher. They argue that, by empowering their child with principles and a moral framework for decision-making, trust can be enough. This was sometimes referred to as a 'good upbringing'. Those with this parenting style often emphasised the importance of openness, communication and education as the other essential ingredients, if trust was to be enough. For these parents, the Internet was not a unique environment, but one requiring the same principles of parenting that were used in other parts of life.

Ultimately, trust has to be enough. As with everything in life, as parents, you can only pass on your principles and values to your children and hope that they use them wisely. However, there is a process to be followed before that trust is earned. I view the use of the Internet [as] no different to any other information resource, be it video store, public library or the household dictionary.

(Father, panel participant)

Some who placed the strongest emphasis on the role of trust argued its use was a matter of pragmatism. The general availability of access to the Internet outside the home was one argument for the need for trust, because parents simply couldn't be watching children all the time.

> *You have to be able to trust them. If they don't do it at home, they can always go somewhere else and do it. I would rather know what they are seeing and discuss it.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

Of the minority of parents who lacked confidence with the technology, some conveyed a sense of powerlessness in the computing world where they saw their children as more knowledgeable than themselves.

> *Our kids are brighter and more at home on the 'Net and computers than what we will ever be.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

Tools

Perceived effectiveness of content restriction mechanisms

The perceived effectiveness of technological tools was compared in the national survey with other forms of content control.

Table 3.10 Effectiveness ratings of content restriction mechanisms

How effective do you think the following approaches are for people to avoid Internet content they don't like for themselves or those in their care?	Very effective %	Quite effective %	Not effective %	Don't know %
Using software to block certain kinds of content or Internet sites	20.6	39.2	14.5	25.8
Internet sites showing a rating like the ones used for film and TV programs to indicate whether they are suitable for children and young people	19.9	33.7	35.4	11.0
Providing a hotline for people to ring when they find sites they object to	33.7	33.2	23.5	9.6
Governments setting limits on some forms of content like sexual content	30.1	28.7	32.4	8.8

The majority of respondents viewed the range of mechanisms for limiting exposure to Internet content as effective. In terms of overall effectiveness (very effective and quite effective), hotlines received the strongest support (67%) followed by filter software tools (61%), government-set limits (59%) and rating schemes (54%).

Rating or labelling of Internet sites, in terms of their suitability for children and young people, similar to the video and television classification systems, was seen as effective by just over half (54%),

however, 36% view such a system as ineffective. Similarly, while a majority (59% of adults) felt government limits on some forms of content, like sexual content, was an effective approach for people to avoid unwanted Internet content, a sizeable minority (32%) felt it would be ineffective.

Technology tools

Technological tools, like filter software to block certain kinds of Internet content or sites, were perceived as effective by the majority of adults (60%). Only a minority rated these tools as ineffective (15%). A sizeable minority (26%), however, have insufficient knowledge to judge their effectiveness. This level of knowledge of filter software should be considered when comparing its effectiveness rating. People who rate themselves as not at all comfortable with computers were more likely to say they don't know whether filter software, as described to them, was effective or not.

Among those with home Internet access, the perceived effectiveness varied among different segments. For instance, women were more likely to rate filter software as effective (69% compared with 63% males). Time since connecting to the Internet at home was also related to filter software's perceived effectiveness. While the proportion of people rating filter software as effective did not vary substantially, people connected for more than two years were more likely to perceive such tools as ineffective, while those connected less for than two years were less sure of their effectiveness.

Table 3.11 Perceived effectiveness of filter software, by time connected

	Time connected at home		
	1 year or less n=213 %	1 to 2 years n=164 %	More than 2 years n=204 %
Effective	65	67	65
Not effective	13	16	24
Don't know	21	17	11

Labelling or rating of sites, using a classification scheme similar to that devised for film and videos, was perceived as effective by more than half. A substantial minority felt such a scheme would be ineffective. One explanation for the high perception of ineffectiveness could be that rating schemes support a considered choice, however, users often perceive that they were not given a choice when confronted by unwanted material.

Women with home access were more likely to rate a labelling scheme as an effective mechanism for blocking unwanted content or sites (56% of females versus 49% of males). Parents with the Internet at home were also more likely to rate such a scheme as effective (54% of parents versus 51% of non-parents).

Parents in the cyberpanel suggested various forms of technological solutions for protecting their children. The possible combining of a labelling system with filter software was suggested by one participant.

> *There is no feasible way to rate all content on the Internet, but regulators could provide a voluntary code whereby web publishers can submit material to be classified, and then the classification awarded gives them access to a 'channel' on the Internet. That way you can have 'G', 'PG', 'M', 'R', 'X' and unclassified channels that form subsets of the web. Parents could then set these controls as part of the browser application - only allow 'G' and 'PG' web sites for this child, etc.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

Other tools

Hotlines were the most popular regulatory tool. A clear majority saw a hotline as effective and one-third rated a hotline as very effective. A hotline was more likely to be viewed as an effective mechanism by:

- female users or non-users rather than their male counterparts, irrespective of their level of usage or access to the Internet (73% of females versus 60% of males);
- Internet users without home access (71% versus 57% home Internet users);
- Internet users living in regional areas outside mainland capital cities (68% versus 63%); and
- less frequent users of the Internet (69% versus 60% for daily users).

Government-set limits on some forms of content were more likely to be considered an effective solution by:

- females (67% of females versus 50% of males);
- those without home Internet access (60% compared with 50% of home Internet users);
- people living outside mainland capital cities (67% versus 62%); and
- less frequent users of the Internet (63% versus 50% for daily users).

Summary

Overall, the Internet was perceived to have more advantages than disadvantages by nearly three-quarters of Australian adults. However, many also believed using the Internet involves some risk. Parents were more likely to perceive a risk and to hold an opinion on the type of risk involved. Perceived risk was not always based on people's actual experience online. People's recall of a negative experience on the Internet was at a much lower level than that of their perception of risks. Among those that reported negative Internet experiences, encountering unwanted sexual content was the most common complaint. These occurrences, however, were infrequent. Unsolicited emails were reported as happening more frequently.

Parents claim to be more concerned about access to content on the Internet than access to other media content. Parents feel they don't have the same level of parental control with the Internet as with other media. It is this perceived lack of control that has lead to greater concerns about the Internet. The core differences between the Internet and other media perceived by parents are regulatory differences, monitoring difficulty because of the individual versus group nature of the viewing and the unwanted, unexpected nature of access to unsuitable content. The interactive nature of the medium and the human dimension is seen by some as more reason for concern.

Most parents with home Internet access (84%) say they monitor their child's Internet sessions and felt they could trust their child to use the Internet in a way that was in keeping with the family's values. Most parents with the Internet at home (67%) have also set rules about using the Internet. Children between the ages of 9 and 12 years were the most likely to have rules for home Internet use. Reasons for setting rules vary. Limiting their child's potential exposure to unsuitable content was the most common reason among parents (43% of parents who set rules). Limiting the possibility of the child making contact with undesirable people was the next most frequent reason. Other reasons were unrelated to content issues and often related to the perceived value of being on the Internet compared with activities like homework or playing outdoors. Interference with the household's telephone line and financial concerns about the cost of time online were also reasons for rules.

The majority of respondents viewed a range of mechanisms for limiting exposure to Internet content as effective. Hotlines received the strongest support followed by filter software tools, government-set limits and rating schemes.

4 Information needs

Background

An improved consumer information environment about the Internet and, in particular, information about children using the Internet, has been identified by policy makers as an important component in Australia's Internet content regulatory scheme. One of the research goals was to identify ways of improving the information utility by considering the consumer's perspective, and, in particular, parents' views on the content and style of information that is needed and the appropriate distribution means.

What the community knows about the regulatory system

One of the first steps in assessing the community's information needs was to gauge what information they currently hold. To this end, in the national survey, the community's awareness of Australia's new complaint process for Internet content was explored. Internet users and non-users were asked:

> Who would they contact to express concern if they saw something on the Internet they objected to?

A range of institutions were nominated. ISPs were the institution most frequently mentioned by a minority (12%), whilst 9% suggested some government department or agency, although they did not name the ABA explicitly. Three per cent mentioned the ABA as the organisation they would contact.

Some people said they wouldn't bother to complain, however, the largest number said they didn't know. More than half of non-users and around one-third of Internet users said they 'don't know'.

When those with the Internet at home were asked whether the company that provides their Internet service had told them about how to lodge a complaint about Internet content, 17% recalled being informed by their ISP. The majority (61%), however, claimed they had not been told and the

remainder (21%) were not sure. More home Internet users recalled being informed of software that can be used to block certain types of content. Thirty-four per cent of home Internet users claimed to have been informed, half said they had not heard, while the remainder was unsure.

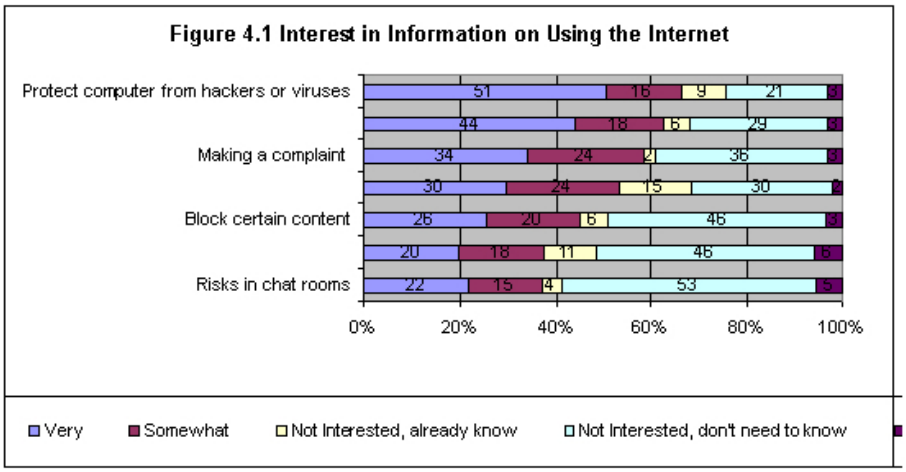
One explanation for these results could be that the respondent to the survey was not the household member that handles communication with the ISP. This suggests that a broader communication strategy is required to ensure all household members are better informed of the mechanisms available for managing exposure to unwanted Internet content.

Community information needs

The public's information requirements for using the Internet were canvassed at each stage of the research program. In the national survey, respondents were asked to indicate their level of interest from a list of subjects related to using the Internet.

The greatest interest was shown in learning how to protect the computer from hackers and viruses (51% very interested) and dealing with unsolicited emails and ads (44%). Information on how to complain was the next most sought after, with around one-third indicating strong interest. Only 2% said they already knew where to lodge a complaint.

Figure 4.1 Interest in Information on Using the Internet

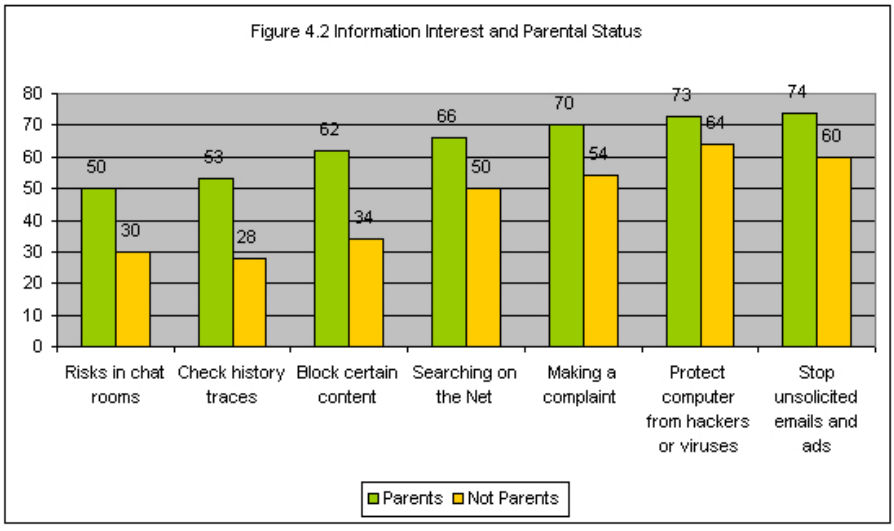


One-quarter of respondents were very interested in knowing more about blocking access to certain content. A large proportion (45%) said they don't need to know. A similar pattern of interest was observed for information on audit trail tracking and information on minimising risk in chat rooms.

Very few people claimed not to need information on any topic because they already knew. When people were asked about additional information needs, most (70%) could not name any. Additional information needs that were raised were generally unrelated to content regulation issues. People sought more information on Internet searches, use of various services on the Internet like trading shares or downloading music. There was a wide range of interests, with none receiving a high demand.

Parents' information needs

Parents of young people under 18 years, were more likely to be interested in knowing more on all the topics canvassed in the national survey (figure 4.2). This suggests parents as a group find the Internet a topic of high relevance to them. Parents were particularly keen to learn more about how to stop unsolicited emails and ads. Parents were twice as likely to want information on blocking certain content or how to check history trails, than non-parents. Parents demand for information on chat rooms and making a complaint was also substantially greater. This pattern of information interests was in keeping with the findings discussed in the previous chapter, that parents desire more control over the occurrence of unwanted, unexpected content and contact with others over the Internet.



During each phase of the cyberpanel research process, parents were asked about their information needs. The questions were asked differently, and in a slightly different context, at each point to fully canvas information issues with the cyberpanel participants.

In the first online survey, cyberpanel parents were asked:

> What aspects of the Internet would you like to know more about?

A large minority could not name any information need and the most frequently listed interest was Internet searches. Information on protecting privacy and security on the Internet was a distant second and information on creating web pages had similar demand. Information on protecting children or stopping unwanted and unexpected content was raised by a few, and some were interested in chat rooms and ICQ. Other information needs varied over a wide range of Internet applications, like trading shares and banking. The type of response given by the participants suggested their own education needs drove the need for better utilising the Internet (see appendix B, table 10).

The second cyberpanel survey focused the participants on parental issues. It involved an educational element, where participants were given short information pages from the ABA's *Australian Families' Guide to the Internet'* web site, providing advice for parents on children's use of the Internet (reproduced at www.aba.gov.au/internet/research/index.htm). Respondents were given a choice of topics to read. The list contained the following:

- tips for parents (general guidelines for the family's Internet use);
- dealing with risk (information on potential risks for children and ways to deal with them);
- house rules (sample set of rules for children using the Internet); and
- filters and labels (information about technological tools to block access to certain Internet content).

All topics received interest from parents. The most popular topic was 'tips for parents'. This is not surprising as the title implies relevance to a parent. The spread of choice of topics was similar for both male and female parents (see appendix B, table 11).

Panel participants reviewed the information page and provided feedback on the positive aspects of the information and suggestions for improvement. The topics that received the greatest interest, and where more information was sought, were:

- filter software details, such as what is available and where to get it;
- details on the ABA complaints process, including the online-hotline; and
- ways of managing contact with people on the Internet.

All pages were seen as containing relevant and useful information and the language was generally seen as appropriate. Most parents said the pages contained new information. Those that read 'house rules' were more likely to say the information was useful but not new (table 4.2). This is consistent

with the earlier chapter's findings, that most households with the Internet at home already have rules and routines about its use.

Table 4.2 Review of information pages

	Dealing with risks n=73	Filters and labelling n=70	House rules n=48	Tips for parents n=97
It contained some new information that I intend to use	41%	50%	27%	51%
It contained new information, but it is not appropriate for our family	10%	9%	2%	3%
It is useful information, but I already knew it	29%	23%	58%	31%
I disagree with some of the information, but found some useful	4%	1%	-	2%
I disagree with most of the advice given	3%	1%	-	1%
No answer	14%	14%	13%	12%

Parental advice

A parent's perspective on the kinds of information about Internet usage that is most relevant, was further explored in the final phase of the cyberpanel research. Parents were asked:

> What advice would you give a friend, who is a parent and who is about to get the Internet connected?

The advice was generally encouraging and positive, yet responsible in tone. The range of topics covered is listed in the table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Advice for parents getting connected to the Internet

Category of advice	n=273 %
Supervise/monitor	39
Discuss appropriate use with children	24
Set rules	23
Encourage, enjoy it/ many benefits	22
Use blocking software/parental lock	21
Learn yourself/develop own skills	18
Dangers advice	16
Be interested in child's use/share experience	12
Restrict time/access	11
Check history files	8
Locate computer in general family area	7
Advice on packages and technical requirements	6
Put password on the computer	6
Trust your child	3
Require child to ask permission first	2
Other	9

% sum to more than 100 because of multiple advice points

Supervision and monitoring

Parents most commonly suggested the need for supervision and monitoring their children's use of the Internet. Advice on the technological tools that are available to assist in the monitoring function was offered by some of the parents (8%). Comments included:

> *Do not be afraid of the Internet as it has become an important tool of knowledge and communication. But parents must never forget supervision of the children while using the Internet. At the same time, parents can use other control tools/products available on the market such as safe zone, filter and label tools.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

> *Check the history of where they have been searching on the Internet. These settings are available and may be adjusted. Secondly, segregate the child's access account from your own. Different password access from your own, but selected by the parent. Trust with some checks.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

> *Make sure that the computer is positioned in a position in the house that is passed regularly, so there should always be passing traffic.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

Discussing appropriate and safe use with children

Discussion and education in the appropriate use of the Internet was a theme in many of the parents' advice. Directing children to sites designed for children, and sharing the experience with them, were two specific elements of this strategy.

> *They [parents connecting to the Internet] should compile a list of sites that their children will enjoy and that will comprise their list of favourites and they may never have need or time to stray outside these great sites!*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

> *I think it's good for parents and children to sit down and explore the Internet together. Just like it is good to watch TV with your kids and see what they're into. Children love computers and love to explore what they can do. There are plenty of safe sites for kids to discover.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

> *[Parents should] talk to their child/children about what is and is not appropriate behaviour on the Internet. Encourage their usage by assisting them with their searches; generally keep an eye on what they're doing and provide a good example in regard to 'Net use.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

Learn with your children because this is an opportunity to spend time with them and to teach values on what is appropriate and what is not.

(Father, panel participant)

Do as much with your children as possible in the early days to shape their behaviour and use of the 'Net.

(Mother, panel participant)

Surf as a family and explore together.

(Mother, panel participant)

Other parents placed greater emphasis on the perceived risks of Internet usage in their advice.

Make sure children understand that the Internet can be a big friendly community, but like any community, there are some people you don't talk to, and some information you don't give out.

(Mother, panel participant)

Sit down and talk to your kids about the dangers of what can be on the Internet etc. and make it similar to that of a sex talk.

(Mother, panel participant)

Enjoying the experience

The pleasure and enjoyment many parents have derived from the Internet was evident in the enthusiasm with which some recommended getting connected. For these parents, the positive benefits of the Internet in terms of information, communication, education and the joy of sharing this rich resource as a family, outweighs its potential risks.

Go for it. It has given our family a lot of enjoyment and is something that we all like. Its potential seems to be unlimited and we all share new things we have found. It has created more things to talk about as well. It's like a book that never ends. However, the advice I would give is to have the computer placed in the central hub of the house. It has given me more peace of mind. No parent can sit and watch everything that their children do, but you can keep an eye on them.

(Mother, panel participant)

Just to enjoy themselves, as there is a wealth of information out there.

(Mother, panel participant)

Have fun and enjoy this exciting media.

(Mother, panel participant)

Do it, the benefits are great, the risks are relatively low and the learning that can be achieved is unbelievable.

(Father, panel participant)

Go for it. The benefits far outweigh the disadvantages. Some of the assignments my children have completed this year would have been almost impossible without the Internet. I think a lot of scare-mongering goes on with regard to the Internet. Keep an eye on things but don't get too carried away by all the horror stories.

(Mother, panel participant)

Do it! It's great for school projects. I also have a friend I write to in Canada (I know her personally) and my girls write to her children (who they have never met) and they get a little look at how another country is and how children from other countries are. They see that there are other lifestyles.

(Mother, panel participant)

Rules and safeguards

Many parents shared a positive assessment of the online experience, however, rules and safeguards were seen as essential elements in ensuring a positive experience. The most commonly stated rules were time-based rules.

Depending on the age of the child, I would be inclined to suggest that young children should be supervised with explanations of why, and where etc. Older children should have family rules reiterated, and boundaries delineated.

(Mother, panel participant)

I would advise [for parents] to set up ground rules up-front, such as time limits, time of day when allowed, type of web sites allowed and if child unsure, ask parent first. Also, make sure your deal with Internet provider is appropriate to your family needs and if after a while your needs change, then shop around or tailor a package to suit needs. [The] Internet can open up a whole new world but does need boundaries for the child. Also [parents should] reinforce if rules not followed, then no Internet for a period of time! [I have] found that to be a good deterrent.

(Father, panel participant)

Revise your rules as circumstance change and trust is developed.

(Father, panel participant)

Set ground rules about when, where, how much time on [the Internet]. Be involved as a family and talk to one another about what you are doing on the Internet. Instead of just "don'ts", give some positive suggestions about uses of the Internet for the children (i.e. do some homework).

(Mother, panel participant)

I would suggest strict access times and rosters for access and have a good size download limit.

(Mother, panel participant)

In addition to rules, technological tools were recommended by a number of the parents. Parental locks, security functions and filter software featured in these parents' advice.

Set the rules as soon as possible. Set the Internet barriers up, such as a 'net nanny', if they think it wise and then let them have fun!

(Mother, panel participant)

If they have small children, supervise them on the Internet or get a good censoring program to block unwanted sites. But definitely get the Internet, as it is becoming an essential part of the education system and a great research tool.

(Father, panel participant)

I'd say go for it, but don't let the kids use it unless you are there every minute of the time they are online. Don't give them the password and make sure there is a 'net nanny' or such connected if you have teenage children.

(Mother, panel participant)

Parents' education

An important distinction between the Internet and traditional media is the difference in the level of skill required to access content. Parents' skill in managing content access on the Internet was viewed as central by a number of the panel parents. This was reflected in the advice they provided for those planning to connect to the Internet. These parents suggested parents' education, where necessary, is an important prerequisite to becoming connected. For these parents, competence and confidence with using the Internet and managing access to content was seen as an important part of being a responsible parent with the Internet in the home.

Be prepared and know how to use your computer adequately enough to restrict the sites that are not suitable for children. If parents/guardians do not have the knowledge to do this, talk to the child's school/principal, ask and find out. [It's] your child, your responsibility.

(Mother, panel participant)

Make sure you [the parent] find out about the Internet yourself. You need to be a competent user in order to teach and monitor your child. Do an Internet course somewhere so that you have at least a bit of an idea, get advice from your ISP re children's safety.

(Mother, panel participant)

Have it connected but do some courses to learn about how to restrict the access to certain areas - the more you know about it, the better you will be able to control access to certain information.

(Mother, panel participant)

The issue of parents' technical skills, relative to their children, is a recurring theme raised in debates about new technology in the home. This research has shown that most parents are more skilled in using the Internet than their children.[13] Some parents see keeping up-to-date with technology as it evolves, and their children's increasing knowledge, as an ongoing challenge for parents. Not all parents, however, felt confident about meeting this challenge.

> *Adults are afraid to take risks, so they are slower to learn - they are afraid of doing something wrong. Parents need to develop their skills so they can know what their children are doing.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

> *I think these days, it is the other way around. The kids today know more about the 'Net than we do.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

Information channels

Knowing the appropriate communication channels to effectively reach parents was another key goal of the research. This was explored with parents in the cyberpanel by assessing:

- where they seek advice on parenting issues;
- where they have found information on the Internet; and
- suggestions for distribution of information about the Internet to parents.

Sources of advice for parents

Parents on the cyberpanel were asked to choose from a list of information sources they normally use for general parenting advice. Family and friends were the main resource people drew on for general parenting matters. Resources, such as newspapers and magazines, books, the Internet or other media, were generally used as additional resources in combination with personal advice from someone they trusted. Only a minority of parents said they used the Internet for general parenting advice.

Table 4.4 Source of general parenting advice

Where do you normally seek parenting advice?	n=280 %
Friends	64
Own parents	51
Articles in newspapers or magazines	35
Favourite book on parenting	28
Television or radio programs	25
School	20
Internet	12
None of these sources	10
Don't know	3

% sum to more than 100% because some people listed more than one source

13 See chapter 2, Family Internet Expert.

Parents were then asked where they would seek parenting advice about their children using the Internet. Family and friends were still an important resource, however, articles in newspapers and magazines were the most common resources. Just over one-quarter of the parents nominated the Internet as a source. The number turning to the Internet for advice on these parenting issues was much higher than as a resource for general parenting advice. The ISP was seen as a potential resource for this information by a minority of parents, behind school or TV and radio programs.

Table 4.5 Sources of advice on children using the Internet

Where would you seek parenting advice about your children using the Internet?	n=283 %
Articles in newspapers or magazines	43
Family and friends	39
Television or radio programs	30
Internet	27
School	27
ISP	17
Own parents	7
Favourite book on parenting	6
None of these sources	15
Don't know	7

% sum to more than 100 as multiple answers were selected

The majority of parents (60%) recalled previously reading parental advice about children using the Internet. The most common resource cited was newspaper or magazine articles on the subject. Just over one-quarter of the parents had read about it on the Internet. This was more frequent among people connected for more than one year. A small minority named their ISP as the source of that information. People who have been connected for less than one year were more likely to name an ISP as the source of this information (24% versus 10%). Generally, the places where people have read information correspond with people's perception of where they would seek such material.

Table 4.6 Where advice on the Internet has been found

Where have you read information on children's use of the Internet?	n=173 %
Articles in newspapers or magazines	68
Television or radio programs	34
School	28
Internet	27
Other family and friends	20
ISP	15
Own parents	1
Favourite book on parenting	5
None of these sources	2
Don't know	1

% sum to more than 100 as multiple answers were selected

Parents also provided suggestions for appropriate information distribution channels in response to the question**:**

> Where do you think information for parents about the Internet should be available?

Most respondents answered with a list of information channels. Clearly, most felt a range of channels should be used to ensure the widest possible reach. As one participant stated:

> *There will be a need for ongoing education for all things in life, whether it be about the Internet, drugs, smoking, safe sex or guns, for example. How this is managed will change over time and circumstances and cultures. There is no one correct way, or ways, that will reach all people as people choose the messages they want to hear and know about.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

The range of channels people suggested is set out in the table below. The three most frequently suggested information distribution points were schools, a web site or Internet service providers (ISPs).

Table 4.7 Suggested distribution channels for Internet information

	n=283 %
School/preschool/daycare	41
Web page on the Internet/FAQ	39
ISP	37
Other media	32
Libraries	26
Other public places, e.g. shopping centres, newsagents	23
Point of purchase	17
Government agency/department	12
Leaflets	9
Knowledge gained by doing	2
Hotline/1800 number	2

Many people suggested a dedicated web page. One person elaborated by suggesting the site be automatically bookmarked in 'favourites' within the browser software. About one-third of the parents specifically mentioned ISPs as having a role in communication of information to parents.

> *The best place for Internet information for parents is from the Internet provider. I also think the provider should be required by law to inform customers of the dangers of the Internet to children and advise on ways of overcoming this (i.e. software available, use of passwords, general tips, etc.). Many parents who connect to the Internet are not computer savvy and are not aware of any dangers to children. These people are entitled to this information and shouldn't have to wonder where to look for it.*
>
> (Mother, panel participant)

It should probably be made a part of the ISP sign-up process. A problem for many parents will be that their kids are more computer literate than they are so when families join up with an ISP, that would be the time to provide education material for the parents.

(Father, panel participant)

Large Internet service providers should supply a certain amount of information. Other than that, I cannot really see that it's the Australian (or any other) government's problem.

(Father, panel participant)

On the Internet, on the home pages of Internet service provider's and bookmarked for quick reference.

(Mother, panel participant)

A sizeable proportion of families suggested schools. For many parents, the motivation for becoming connected was to support their child/children's education. Some parents' strong perception of the Internet's educational role, suggests that schools have a role in informing parents about their children's use of the Internet. Similarly, local libraries were seen as a place where people would seek information and would be considered a credible source.

Schools would certainly be a good place. For a lot of children, this will be their first look at the Internet and so would be a good place to send information home to the parents. Equally, the local library may also be a first contact and could educate parents.

(Father, panel participant)

Newspapers, magazines, television, radio and books were also recommended by around one-third of the participants as an appropriate communication channel. A sizeable minority recommended point-of-purchase for computer hardware and others listed public places like shopping centers, as appropriate locations for information about the Internet.

Twelve per cent of parents specifically mentioned a role for government in providing information for parents. Some perceive the government's role as the sponsor of leaflets to be distributed through public places, like schools and libraries, and others suggested a government web site.

I think it is a Federal Government responsibility to provide leadership in the Internet debate. Like smoking and gambling campaigns, the government should provide literature about the Internet to householders through either the written media or through other mediums such as TV. It should also be the responsibility of the ISP to provide advice to new customers about the Internet and perhaps a booklet should be given out as part of the sign-up procedure. Library services would also be a good place for information to be maintained.

(Father, panel participant)

Perhaps the Federal Government should have a web site which parents could be guided to.

(Father, panel participant)

> *[Information should come] from a government-appointed body, so that controls and checks can be placed on the people giving out the information. Give them the power to compile a list of bad sites for kids and if the site owner objects to this, they have to submit a request along with their reasons for having their site removed from the hit list.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

> *I think that a school education program **for parents** through the local primary schools would be a good idea. Some Federal Government funding would be appropriate. If the education is sponsored by the local school, then parents might take the issue more seriously.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

Not all participants, however, were supportive of a role for government.

> *People should find out for themselves, don't need their hands held by 'big brother'.*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

A small proportion of the parents suggested that people should learn by doing. These respondents viewed experience as essential in adequately understanding the medium and fulfilling their parental responsibility. Parents' competency and confidence with the medium were perceived to be necessary. These parents saw information in the absence of Internet experience as insufficient.

> *Parents must go on the Internet and learn themselves, no amount of information will make sense to them until they do. Then they should know the dangers for themselves. Just like crossing the road - if they have been a pedestrian, a car driver, a cyclist [or] a truck driver, they may have adequate knowledge to teach a child to cross the road. If they have never seen a road, how do you teach them to teach a child to cross the road?*
>
> (Father, panel participant)

Stakeholders

The above discussion of information needs suggests a range of views on the role of government, industry and technology in assisting parents who wish to manage their child's access to Internet content. To ascertain the broader community's perception of the role various stakeholders have in managing access to Internet content, the national survey asked all respondents (Internet users and non-users):

> Who are the people or organisations that should play a part in regulating the content that is available on the Internet?

Nearly half the respondents suggested an agency or organisation of some kind, government or independent. This form of regulatory involvement was suggested by users and non-users of the

Internet and more commonly recommended by those who access the Internet outside the home. The perceived need for a regulating agency is in keeping with concerns raised about the perceived lack of regulatory structures.

Table 4.8 Those with a role in regulating Internet content

	Home Internet access n= 581 %	Access outside the home n=285 %	No access n=337 %	Total n=1,203 %
Independent agency	43	57	44	48
Internet users themselves	15	15	6	12
ISP	12	10	5	8
Web producers	4	9	3	5
Politicians	3	5	3	4
Someone else	16	16	13	15
No-one	14	5	3	7
Don't know	19	16	42	27

A minority (12%) felt Internet users themselves should play a part in regulating the content that is available on the Internet. Parents were more likely to see the users themselves as having a role (21% of parents compared with 8% of non-parents). The central role of the parent in managing their children's access to Internet content has been supported by comments of parents throughout this chapter and previous chapters. Most parents see their role in teaching, supervising, and setting limits and rules for their children's use of the Internet.

Summary

Parents are keen to learn more about the Internet. They want to enhance their own competencies using the medium and learn ways to better manage their children's access to content. The type of information in most demand includes ways of preventing unsolicited emails, protection from viruses and hackers, how to make a complaint about Internet content and effective Internet search skills. The majority of parents are also interested in information about filter software, including critical analysis of available products and where they can be obtained.

Most parents are keen users of the Internet and so a style of communication, that is positive in tone and aimed at empowering users' control and choice, appears most desirable.

The community was receptive to an independent agency playing a role in regulating Internet content, along with users themselves and Internet service providers (ISPs). Parents, in particular, see a role for the users themselves in managing access to Internet content.

Parents gain their parental advice from a variety of channels. The most common sources of information on the Internet are the media, schools and the Internet itself. Schools, a dedicated web page and Internet service providers (ISPs) figure significantly in the range of communication channels parents recommend for a community education campaign about the Internet.

Appendix A
Profile of cyberpanel homes

State profile

Table 1 State profile

State	n	%
ACT	15	5
NSW	85	27
NT	12	4
Qld	62	20
SA	35	11
Tas	10	3
Vic	57	18
WA	34	11

Time connected

The recruitment process specifically called for newly-connected families. Thirty per cent of the panel families had been connected for less than 12 months and the majority (58%) for less than two years.

Table 2 Time connected to the Internet

	n	%
Less than 1 month	7	2
1 - 3 months	16	5
4 - 6 months	20	7
7 - 12 months (1 year)	49	16
13 months - 18 months	41	13
19 months - 2 years	46	15
More than 2 years, up to 3 years	51	16
More than 3 years	75	24
Not answered	5	2
Total	310	100

Family structure

The majority of families (83%) have male and female guardians at home. Whether the guardian was the biological parent of the child was not ascertained, only whether the adult saw themselves as a parent to the child. One of these families had two male guardians and two families had two female guardians.

Seventeen per cent of families had only one parent at home. Of these single parent families, 12 families had a male parent and 41 had a female parent.

Family size varied from single-child households to families of six children. Seventy per cent of families had at least one male child and 72% had at least one female child.

Table 3 Number of children in family

Number of children	n	%
1	65	21
2	157	51
3	62	20
4	18	6
5	5	2
6	2	1
Not reported	1	*
Total	310	100

The profile of the households according to the type of school attended by the children in the household is presented in table 3.

Table 4 Type of school attended

Type of school	n	%
Government	174	56
Non-government	97	31
Both	20	7
Not answered	19	6

Profile of parent participants

Only one parent per household was asked to complete the survey. It was left to the families to nominate the active participant in the study. The parents sample was heavily weighted towards females.

Table 5 Gender breakdown of adult participants

	n	%
Males	117	38
Females	193	62
Total	310	100

Most of the parents that took part in the study were regular users of the Internet.

More than half used it daily and most used it at least once a week. In the national survey, a similar profile of use was obtained for home Internet users indicating the panel is not biased in terms of regularity of Internet usage.

Table 6 Frequency of using the Internet

	n	%
Every day	165	53
Several times a week	116	37
Once a week	20	7
2 - 3 times a month	7	2
Once a month	1	.3
Less than once a month	1	.3
Total	310	100

A few participating parents felt they were 'not at all comfortable with using the Internet'. Most claimed to be largely comfortable (31%) or very comfortable (48%). Female parents, while mostly feeling a high degree of confidence with their proficiency on the Internet, were less likely to say they were very confident than the male parents.

Table 7 Parent participants rating of Internet proficiency

How comfortable do you feel about using the Internet?	Females n=173 %	Males n=117 %	Total n=310 %
Very	40	62	48
Largely/usually	38	20	31
Somewhat	18	10	15
Not at all	2	1	2
Can't say	1	7	3

Profile of child participants

The total number of children in the panel was 674. Children between 6 and 17 years were asked to complete interviews or online surveys. Only one child per household was an active participant.[14] Two hundred and twenty eight children and teenagers provided information for the study. The age profile of the participants is presented below.

14 Not all households had a child participant in the surveys, as not all households had a child aged between 11 and 17 years. In some households with a child aged between 6 to 10 years, the parent did not volunteer their child for telephone interviews.

Table 8 Age profile of young panel participants

	n	%
6 - 10 years	36	16
11 - 12 years	39	17
13 - 14 years	70	31
15 - 18 years	83	36
Total	228	100

Similar numbers of male and female children and teenagers participated in the study.

Table 9 Gender profile of young panel participants

	n	%
Males	118	52
Females	110	48
Total	228	100

Appendix B
Additional tables

Table 1 Internet access by gender and age

	Total n=1203 %	Males n=549 %	Females n=654 %	18-24 years n=155 %	25-34 years n=250 %	35-49 years n=423 %	50+ years n=375 %
At home	29.5	34.1	25.1	41.0	28.8	36.6	19.0
Some other place	29.5	30.5	31.6	47.0	39.3	32.3	19.0
No access	39.4	35.4	43.3	12.0	31.9	31.1	61.9

Table 2 Internet access by location and education

	Total n=1,203 %	Mainland capitals n=725 %	Other state n=478 %	Some secondary n=237 %	Completed secondary/ TAFE n=515 %	University/ CAE n=451 %
At home	29.5	32.5	24.6	16.7	23.8	46.0
Some other place	29.5	32.9	28.1	16.8	32.6	38.5
No access	39.4	34.6	47.3	66.5	43.6	15.6

Table 3 Internet access by parental status

	Total n=1,203 %	Children n=453 %	No children n=747 %
At home	29.5	36.0	26.2
Some other place	29.5	30.4	31.3
No access	39.4	33.6	42.5

Table 4 Internet access by income

	Total n=1,203 %	Less than $30,000 p.a. n=325 %	$30-50,000 p.a. n=288 %	$50,000+ p.a. n=475 %	Refused/ not stated n=115 %
At home	29.5	14.6	23.7	49.9	23.3
Some other place	29.5	24.4	37.7	34.1	26.2
No access	39.4	61.0	38.6	16.0	50.5

Table 5 Frequency of use by education

	Total n=1,203 %	Some secondary n=237 %	Completed secondary/ TAFE n=515 %	University/ CAE n=451 %
Daily or almost daily	23.1	6.5	17.8	41.7
2 - 3 times a week	11.5	4.7	12.0	15.3
Once a week	5.3	4.6	4.7	6.6
Once every 2 weeks	3.2	2.0	3.3	3.9
Once every month	5.2	5.2	6.2	3.9
Less than once a month	7.4	4.7	6.1	11.0
Never	43.9	72.2	49.8	16.9
Don't know	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.8

Table 6 Frequency of use by location

	Total n=1,203 %	Mainland capitals n=725 %	Other state n=478 %
Daily or almost daily	23.1	26.5	17.7
2 - 3 times a week	11.5	13.0	9.1
Once a week	5.3	5.4	5.1
Once every 2 weeks	3.2	3.3	3.0
Once every month	5.2	5.1	5.4
Less than once a month	7.4	7.9	6.7
Never	43.9	38.6	52.6
Don't know	0.3	0.3	0.5

Table 7 Frequency of use by income

	Total n=1,203 %	Less than $30,000 p.a. n=325 %	$30-45,000 p.a. n=288 %	$50,000+ p.a. n=475 %
Daily or almost daily	23.1	9.1	19.1	40.4
2 - 3 times a week	11.5	6.9	12.7	16.2
Once a week	5.3	4.4	6.1	6.6
Once every 2 weeks	3.2	1.6	4.5	4.5
Once every month	5.2	2.7	8.6	4.7
Less than once a month	7.4	6.7	6.4	8.3
Never	43.9	68.0	42.4	19.2
Don't know	0.3	0.6	0.1	-

Table 8 Perceived risk by education

	Total n=1,203 %	Some secondary n=237 %	Completed secondary/ n=515 %	University/ CAE TAFE n=451 %
Risks	77.2	71.3	77.8	80.3
No risks	12.8	11.2	12.6	14.3
Neither/don't know	10.0	17.5	9.6	5.4

Table 9 Perceived risk by age

	Total n=1,203 %	18-24 years n=155 %	25-34 years n=250 %	35-49 years n=423 %	50+ years n=375 %
Risks	77.2	82.0	78.3	85.2	67.7
No risks	12.8	13.7	15.9	11.2	12.1
Neither/don't know	10.0	4.3	5.8	3.7	20.2

Table 10 Adult panel participants' top-of-mind information needs

	n=310 %
Nothing	36
Searching	21
Privacy/security/safety	6
Creating web pages	6
Technical, computer	3
Protecting children	3
How to get the most for work or study	3
Chat or ICQ	2
How to stop unsolicited emails/ads	2
Surfing	1
Everything	3
Other	17

Table 11 Choice of page to review from ABA web page

	n=288 %
Tips for parents	33
Dealing with risks	25
Filters and labelling	24
House rules	16