

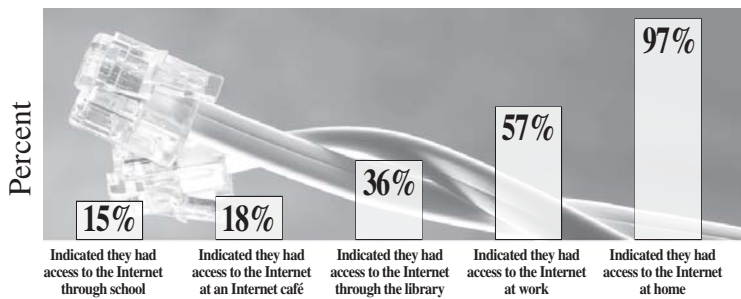
Poll STATION

With Linda Banister

The world of virtual social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, has exploded across the globe as people attempt to keep in touch with family and friends or updated on current events. The Internet has emerged as the primary communication tool of these social networks, allowing individuals from anywhere in the world to simultaneously interact with one another. This month's *Poll Station* focused on Edmontonians' perceptions of the Internet and virtual social networks, including the frequency of use, the benefits of having a network profile, and concerns regarding privacy on sites.



DO YOU HAVE INTERNET ACCESS, AND WHAT DO YOU USE IT FOR?



To begin, respondents were asked if they had access to the Internet. The vast majority (91 percent) indicated they did, while nine percent did not. Of those with Internet access, almost all (97 percent) had access in their homes, while 57 percent had access at work and 36 percent gained access at a library. Smaller proportions accessed the Internet at an Internet café (18 percent) or at a school (15 percent). When asked to identify the top reason for utilizing the Internet, respondents most frequently mentioned checking e-mails (68 percent) and research (62 percent), followed by banking or financial purposes (14 percent), social network sites (nine percent), work related activities (seven percent), and news headlines (seven percent).

DO YOU HAVE A TWITTER PROFILE? IF NOT, WHY NOT?

Respondents with access to the Internet were then asked a series of questions regarding social network sites available on-line. When asked if they currently had a Twitter profile, a free social network site that enables its users to send and read status updates, all respondents (100 percent) indicated they had no such profile. However, nine percent reported that someone in their household had a Twitter account. When asked why they had not created a Twitter profile, 42 percent mentioned lack of interest, followed by lack of awareness (15 percent), and lack of time (eight percent). Seven percent said they were already Facebook users, and another seven percent cited concern over security issues.

IS YOUR PROFILE ON FACEBOOK? HOW OFTEN DO YOU ACCESS THE SITE?

Next, respondents were asked if they had a profile on Facebook, another free social network website. Forty-one percent indicated they had their own personal profile, while 10 percent reported a member of their household subscribed to the site. Interestingly, when this question was asked in a 2007 *Edmontonians Poll Station*, only 26 percent had a Facebook profile. The proportion of respondents interacting on Facebook increased 15 percent over a two year period. Among Facebook users, 30 percent were most likely to access the

site between two and three times per week, followed by one and three times per month (19 percent), once per week (16 percent), and once per day (16 percent). Ten percent accessed their profile multiple times a day, while eight percent visited the site less than once per month. Staying in touch with friends and family was mentioned by 86 percent as the biggest benefit of having a Facebook profile, while 16 percent felt sharing photos and videos was of great value to them.

Of the respondents that did not have a Facebook profile (50 percent), 69 percent were not interested in creating a profile, and 20 percent were concerned about posting their personal information or did not consider the site safe enough.

When asked if they belonged to any other social network sites, excluding Facebook and Twitter, almost all respondents (93 percent) said no, but seven percent were members of network sites such as MSN Messenger (two percent), Classmates.com (one percent), and LinkedIn (one percent).

ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT PRIVACY ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES?

Lastly, respondents were asked to rate their level of concern with privacy issues associated with sharing personal information on social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Sixty percent were very concerned with security issues, down five percent from the 65 percent reported in the 2007 *Edmontonians Poll Station*. Nineteen percent were moderately concerned and 21 percent were not concerned with privacy issues. Respondents that were concerned about privacy felt there was a lack of privacy or disliked the ease of access to personal information (46 percent), while 27 percent were concerned about criminal activity such as fraud and identify theft. Of those who mentioned other concerns related to social networking sites, 13 percent were worried about underage children having access to such sites and being victims to on-line predators. Four percent each mentioned social network sites were a waste of time or were concerned that personal information would be used by others accessing their profile. ✓

Monthly Poll Station Online Question

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