

# Executive Summary

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Media Awareness Network (MNet) conducted the initial *Young Canadians in a Wired World* – Phase I study in 2001 to provide educators, parents and policy makers with a factual framework for understanding how children approach the new electronic media. Phase II of *Young Canadians in a Wired World*, conducted by ERIN Research for MNet, explores new areas and revisits some of the initial benchmarks.

More than 5,000 students in Grades 4 to 11 participated in the survey. They represented each province and territory, English and French-language schools, and urban and rural environments. The majority of schools in the 2005 research also participated in the 2001 study.

| <b>Correspondence between age and grade</b><br>YCWW II, 2005 |                        |            |
|--|------------------------|------------|
| <b>Grade Outside Quebec</b>                                  | <b>Grade In Quebec</b> | <b>Age</b> |
| 4  | 4                      | 9-10       |
| 5  | 5                      | 10-11      |
| 6  | 6                      | 11-12      |
| 7  | Secondary 1            | 12-13      |
| 8  | Secondary 2            | 13-14      |
| 9  | Secondary 3            | 14-15      |
| 10   | Secondary 4            | 15-16      |
| 11   | Secondary 5            | 16-17      |

## Kids' electronic landscape

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Convenient access to the Internet is almost universal among Canadian students: 94 percent of respondents now have Internet in the home, compared to 79 percent in 2001. Most of these (61 percent) have high-speed Internet service.

Children's use of email has also increased. In 2001, *Young Canadians in a Wired World* reported that 71 percent of kids had email accounts. In 2005, 86 percent have email accounts, most being free accounts such as Hotmail.

The 2005 results show that, for the Grade 4 to 11 population:

- 41 percent have an MP3 player.
- 37 percent have their own computer with Internet access (as opposed to sharing a family computer). By Grade 11, 51 percent have their own computer.
- 23 percent have their own cell phone (six percent in Grade 4, rising to 46 percent in Grade 11).
- 22 percent have a Webcam for personal use (31 percent by Grade 11).

Kids who have their own Internet-connected computer report spending twice as much time online as those who share a machine.

## A spectrum of online activities

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What do kids choose to do online, given an hour or so of free time? Kids picked the two activities that they would like the best.

- Instant messaging ranks first, a choice of 62 percent of girls and 43 percent of boys.
- Playing games is the top choice in the younger grades (chosen by 54 percent of Grade 4 girls and 78 percent of Grade 4 boys), but the popularity of games declines steadily so that by Grade 11, nine percent of girls and 38 percent of boys make this choice.
- Listening to or downloading music is the third major activity of choice, selected by 41 percent of girls and 37 percent of boys.

Not all time is free time, so it is important to examine how kids actually spend their time. The survey asked, "What activities do you do on an average school day?" While the "free-time" choices of instant messaging, games and music are represented, a number of others are also important. Across all grades, a majority of students report engaging in these activities:

- 77 percent play games.
- 72 percent do schoolwork.
- 66 percent talk to friends on instant messaging.
- 65 percent download or listen to music.
- 64 percent use email.
- 55 percent look up information on a topic of interest other than school work.

## Favourite sites

Survey participants wrote down their three favourite Internet sites. They were asked not to mention search engines or email sites: there is little doubt that these are popular, and the intention of the research was to get past these obvious choices to the next level of Internet content.

The top favourite sites are, without exception, those that deliver fun and entertainment.

In the younger grades, many of the “favourite site” choices are from the very popular sites below. As kids get older, their favourite sites become more diverse and individual:

- In Grade 4, two-thirds of participants list one or more of their favourite sites from among the top 20 overall.
- In Grade 11, only one-third of respondents list a top-20 choice.

The table below shows how a large amount of interest is concentrated on a few sites, but this is just half the story. Kids are also wide-ranging in their interests. The complete “favourite sites” list of approximately 5,000 survey participants includes more than 2,800 different sites.

| Top ten favourite sites<br>YCWV II, 2005 |                                  |   |
|--|----------------------------------|---|
| Site                                     | Primary content                  | Percent who chose the site as one of their 3 favourites |
| Addicting Games                          | games                            | 18.2  |
| Miniclip                                 | games                            | 16.3  |
| Neopets                                  | virtual pet site                 | 9.8   |
| eBaumsworld                              | humour: jokes, photos, animation | 5.7   |
| Newgrounds                               | flash animation, jokes           | 4.2   |
| Runescape                                | an online game                   | 4.2   |
| Candystand                               | games                            | 3.7   |
| Funnyjunk                                | humour: jokes, photos, animation | 3.7   |
| YTV                                      | TV channel info, games           | 3.3   |
| Launch                                   | streaming radio                  | 3.3   |

## A memorable experience

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Kids were asked to describe one recent experience that they considered memorable or important in some way. The choice was open-ended, and the results therefore show the full range of online events that kids register as important. Major findings are:

1. The majority of the online experiences that kids chose as memorable were good ones: 56 percent were good, 27 percent bad and 17 percent neutral.
2. Connecting with friends, playing games, experiences related to homework, and other information-seeking experiences are the largest groups of positive online experiences.
3. Computer crashes, viruses, annoying pop-ups and landing unexpectedly on offensive sites constitute the majority of bad experiences.
4. Good experiences are generally high on an “engaging” factor (i.e. funny, exciting, make you feel good). Good experiences can also be “challenging” (difficult, you learn something), but they are not offensive (risky, scary, sexist, pornographic).
5. Bad experiences tend to be the opposite; they are generally offensive, sometimes difficult, and not engaging.

## Privacy

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Protection of online privacy is a genuine issue of concern. Two-thirds of respondents say that they would like schools to teach them about protecting their privacy, and paired with this is a visible reluctance to give out personal information online.

A few examples:

- To sign up for a free email account, 30 percent would give their real name and address, 37 percent only an email address, and 24 percent would hesitate to give any real information.
- To register on a game site, 12 percent would give their real name and address, 50 percent only an email address, and 39 percent would give no real information.
- To create a profile on a dating site, seven percent would give their real name and address, 18 percent only an email address, and 73 percent would give no real information.

## Online identities

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The Internet offers young people an environment where they feel anonymous and invisible. In this environment, the majority of kids, 59 percent, report that they have assumed some different online identity. Among this group:

- 52 percent have pretended to be of a different age.
- 26 percent have pretended to have different personality characteristics.
- 24 percent have pretended to have abilities they do not really have.
- 23 percent have pretended to have an appearance different from their real one.

The pattern of results is very similar across grades, for boys and girls, and for students in Quebec and in the rest of Canada.

## School assignments on the Internet

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From Grade 6 through Grade 11, three-quarters of kids report doing school work online on a “daily or almost-daily” basis. A majority (56 percent) say they enjoy using the Internet for homework, compared to 15 percent who dislike the Internet and 30 percent who are neutral. One-half say that online resources improve the quality of their school work; 47 percent say it makes no difference.

Respondents were asked whether they would prefer to get information for school assignments from books in a library or from the Internet. The Internet is the clear winner, and it is not hard to imagine reasons for the choice. The Net is convenient and fast.

- In Grade 4, 62 percent prefer the Internet and 38 percent the library.
- By Grade 11, 91 percent prefer the Internet and nine percent the library.

The survey asked “What Internet-related topics would you like to learn more about in school?”. Subjects chosen by more than half the sample are:

- Learning how to tell if online information is true (68 percent checked this option)
- Protecting your privacy online (66 percent)
- Internet technology (56 percent)

## Personal skills and Internet use

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Kids rated their skills in a number of activities, both online and in the larger world.

- Not surprisingly, heavy Internet users see

themselves as better than the norm at using the Internet and playing computer games.

- Heavy users see themselves as better at making friends, making people laugh, and shopping.
- Heavy users see themselves as about the same as others at sports, math and science, reading and arts.

What this implies is that shopping, making friends and being funny are skills that, for today’s youth, are embedded in electronic communications. The Internet is an extension of everyday social life and an integral part of these skill sets. Most kids do not rely on the Internet to advance their activities in math, sports and the arts, and so these skills are not associated with Internet use.

## Offensive sites

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Students in Grades 7 to 11 were asked whether they had visited certain “offensive” sites on purpose during the current school year. Overall:

- 16 percent had visited porn sites.
- 18 percent had visited violence or gore sites.
- 12 percent had visited gambling sites.
- 9 percent had visited adult chat rooms.
- 5 percent had visited hate sites (e.g. those dealing in racial or religious hatred).
- 34 percent had visited at least one of the above types of site.

More boys than girls visited this set of sites, and more older than younger kids visited them.

A majority of respondents believe that schools and parents should protect kids younger than themselves from sites of this nature. For example, 90 percent of respondents in Grades 7 to 9 and 80 percent of those in Grades 10 and 11 advise protecting kids who are two years younger than they are from online porn. Fewer respondents see a need to protect their peers. Seventy-seven percent of respondents in Grades 7 to 9 and 62 percent of those in Grades 10 and 11 advise protecting kids their own age from online porn.

## Rules and supervision

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In 2005, more students than in 2001 report that their household has rules about four specific Internet activities:

- Meeting someone in person whom you got to know online (74 percent)
- Sites that you are not supposed to visit (70 percent)
- Giving out personal information online (69 percent)
- Telling your parents if something makes you feel uncomfortable (69 percent)

Consistent with this, a larger proportion of kids report that their use of the Internet is supervised by a parent. In 2001, seven percent said they were mostly with a parent or adult when using the Net. This has risen to 13 percent in 2005.

More kids in 2005 also report that they use the Net in the company of other people. This is not necessarily supervised use, but social use – with friends or brothers and sisters. In 2001, slightly more than half said that their home Internet use

was mostly solitary; in 2005 just one-third report mainly solitary use.

The existence of rules suggests adult supervision, and in fact there is a strong link between the number of rules that the household has and the amount of hands-on supervision of Internet use. In households with no rules, 74 percent of kids report that an adult is never present when they use the Net; at the other extreme where many rules are in force, just 22 percent report that they are never supervised.

## Does parental involvement make a difference?

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Parental interest in children's Internet use can take many forms including discussion of online sites and activities, supervision and setting rules. The 2005 research examined the effect of four specific rules on kids' online behaviour.

The four rules are:

- Sites you should not visit
- Meeting people whom you got to know online
- Giving personal information online
- How much time you can spend online

In each case the existence of a rule makes a considerable difference in kids' online behaviour. For example, in households where there is a rule about "sites you should not visit", 14 percent of kids in Grades 6 and 7 have purposefully visited sites dealing in porn, gore, hate and related topics. In households that have no such rule, 43 percent of kids have purposefully visited these sites.

## Discussions in the home

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For an activity that accounts for a large proportion of children's time, Internet use is largely absent from family conversations.

Participants in Grades 7 to 11 were asked whether they had discussed various topics with adults in their house during the school year. A majority (55 percent) state that they had discussed "music or videos that you found on the Net", but fewer than half had discussed any of the other topics, e.g., science information found on the Net (43 percent), protecting your privacy online (39 percent), online porn sites (22 percent), and sexual harassment online (18 percent).

## Meeting people you got to know online

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The Internet becomes more important as a meeting place with age, and it is hardly surprising that young people meet some of their new acquaintances in person. Still, only 21 percent of students overall report that they have met a person in real life with whom they became acquainted on the Net. These meetings increase steadily with age: 12 percent of Grade 7 students report meeting an online acquaintance in real life, rising to 33 percent in Grade 11.

Kids were asked to write a brief description of the best and worst experience they had had meeting an online acquaintance. The majority of these encounters were positive: 29 percent describe a "worst" experience and 72 percent report a "best" one (a few report both types).

The most common descriptions of bad experiences are:

- The person's age, appearance or other characteristics were not as expected.
- The person was freaky or mean or stupid.
- Their interests did not match.

Descriptions of good experiences are the opposite – they formed a new friendship and had much in common.

## Bullying and sexual harassment

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Thirty-four percent of students in Grades 7 to 11 report that they had been bullied within the current school year and 12 percent report that they had been sexually harassed.

- Among those who report bullying, school was the most common location; 74 percent report being bullied at school and 27 percent state that they had been bullied over the Internet.
- Among those who report sexual harassment the situation is reversed; 47 percent report being harassed at school and 70 percent state that they had been harassed over the Internet.

Reports of bullying are less common in Quebec (where 24 percent of kids report being bullied) than in the rest of Canada, where 36 percent of kids report being bullied.

Bullying and sexual harassment are associated:

- Among kids who were *not* bullied, seven percent report being sexually harassed.
- Among kids who have been bullied, 26 percent also report being sexually harassed.