

Utah ranks in top tier for Internet access

Technology » Beehive State residents ride the crest.

By Sheena Mcfarland
And Tony Semerad
The Salt Lake Tribune

Salt Lake Tribune

Updated: 06/04/2009 09:50:12 AM MDT

When Pete Ashdown opened up his Internet service provider business XMission in 1993, it was mainly a tool for computer geeks or serious researchers.

It started taking off in the mid 1990s, and has since exploded.

Only 18 percent of U.S. households had Internet access in 1997, but that jumped to 62 percent by 2007.

Utah has leapt with the best.

The Beehive state ranks sixth in the nation for residents who have access to the Web from home. Three of every four Utahns -- some 1.83 million of them -- live in a household with Internet access.

"As the younger generations get older, we'll see even more usage as they grew up in a world where they always had the Internet," Ashdown said. "It will become a ubiquitous utility."

This new ranking follows a study released in March that showed Utah led the nation in online pornography, with 5.7 of every 1,000 home broadband users subscribing to adult entertainment sites, according to a study published in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*.

The new U.S. Census data looks only at Internet availability and use rates -- not at what content was accessed.

While Utah ranks sixth in the nation for the percentage of the population living in Web-connected homes, it ranks slightly higher -- fifth -- for the percentage of residents accessing the Internet in or outside the home: just under 72 percent.

Only Alaska, New Hampshire, Washington and Minnesota had higher rates of use.

Ashdown says the future is clear.

"As the Internet explodes and expands its reach, it's astounding to me how much it is part of everyone's lives today," he said. "You can't find a high school student without an e-mail address or Facebook page."

Debbie Parry, who telecommutes from home twice a month in her job as accounting technician for the Department of Environmental Quality, has wholeheartedly embraced the Internet.

"When I'm in the office, I get interrupted constantly. I'm able to focus more at home. I think it's one of those intangible benefits," she said.

Nationwide, there's a strong tie between educational background and Internet access. Only 24 percent of households of those with less than a high school degree are wired, compared with 84 percent of those with a bachelor's degree or higher.

Asians beat out whites in Web access across the country, with 67.8 percent of Asians having at-home Internet access compared to 54.9 percent of non-Latio whites. Blacks had a 45.3 percent home access rate while Latinos were at 43.4 percent.

Those numbers don't surprise Sean Reyes, who is part Japanese, Hawaiian, Spanish and Filipino and is the vice president of Somos, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce's outreach arm and sits on the board of the Asian

Chamber of Commerce.

He says the fairly high numbers likely indicate that people use the Internet to talk with relatives in their home countries and that Internet connections seem to pop up in homes with children. He also surmises that the middle- and higher-income ethnic households would have similar access numbers to white households, he said.

"I would guess that older folks or immigrants who are really recent, they would be less likely to have them," Reyes said. "But if they've been here for a while, the Internet becomes such a part of everyday life, like a car, telephone or electricity."

Utah has been among the most wired states in the country for much of the decade. In 2003, the state had the highest percentage of homes with a computer, at 74.1 percent, ahead of Alaska, New Hampshire and Washington. Utah ranked fifth nationally in that survey for the percentage of homes with Internet access, at 62.6 percent.

smcfarland@sltrib.com

tsemerad@sltrib.com

Top 10 stats

Top Ten States with Highest Percentage of Residents Living in Households with Internet Access [2007]

New Hampshire » 82.6

Alaska » 78.5

Massachusetts » 76.3

Washington » 75.7

Vermont » 75.2

Utah » 74.8

Connecticut » 74.5

New Jersey » 74.0

Minnesota » 73.7

Virginia » 73.1

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Census

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