

# **The Internet Effect: How has it affected you?**

Commonly known as the Internet, the world's largest network is used extensively throughout the world today. Since its creation in 1983, the Internet has continued to grow in popularity and use as a commercial and private communications medium. Millions of people throughout the world use the Internet in a variety of ways, ranging from personal conversations to on-line shopping. According to a survey compiled by Nua Ltd in 1999, the number of Internet users rose from 26 million in 1995 to 205 million in 1999, an increase of almost 700% (Nua Ltd)! With such an explosive increase, how then has the Internet affected us personally, and how has it affected the way we do business? The answers to these questions include changes in the way people obtain information, interact, work, learn and conduct business.

Given the Internet's original purpose is to share information; it is no wonder that the most important asset of the Internet is the wealth of information that can be found on the Internet (Maney 3). Information previously found only in libraries and encyclopaedias is now available on the Internet; in addition, news, weather, and movie listings are also made available on the Internet. Internet users constantly remain informed of the world around them by reading news from the New York Times, USA Today, San Jose Mercury News, Los Angeles Times and many other newspapers found on-line. Even those like me who are far away from home can keep in touch by reading local newspapers published on the Internet.

Along with the vast amount of information, the Internet also provides almost instant sharing and distribution of information. Through the use of electronic mail, people all over the world can "send information to far-away places cheaply, easily and in great

volume – much more than any medium before it” (Maney 3). This form of communication known as email is the most widely used tool of the Internet today.

Another invention of the Internet is the chat room. From within a chat room, people make friends with others throughout the world and share information with one another in real time. Because of email and chat capability, employees can work together without requiring that everyone work in the same place or even at the same time (Maney 4). On a more personal level, email and chat allow families and friends to stay in touch, keeping relationships intact. Being an international student myself, email and chat rooms have greatly benefited me as they enable me to constantly keep in touch with my family and friends in Singapore.

The educational community has also taken advantage of the opportunities the Internet offers. Over the last few years, there has been a tremendous growth in both the number of distance education courses offered by colleges and universities, and in the enrolment in those classes. Internet based classes allow students to watch, listen, and exchange ideas with educators and other students who may be miles away. With on-line education, people learn independently and at their own pace. Such convenience allows learning to take place virtually anywhere and at any time. Busy working adults are now taking classes in the comfort of their home without having to attend regularly scheduled classes on a college campus. Online education also provides people from rural districts the opportunity to have an education without having to travel long distances.

Besides supporting on-line education, the Internet has also made our lives immensely simple by allowing us to do countless tasks even in the middle of the night. Using the Internet, people find jobs, send electronic cards, shop, make airline and hotel reservations, execute stock trades, and even pay bills online! The Internet

is thus a virtual market place where people can, at the click of a button, select products, place orders, and pay using a secure electronic transaction. All of this ability has made conducting personal business convenient and easy, and enables everyone to complete many tasks that previously would take weeks.

With the increasing popularity of people shopping and purchasing goods online, the Internet has created "new ways of doing business" (Maney 4). Realizing the potential of the Internet, many companies have started to advertise their products and services on-line. By marketing their products and services on-line, companies are able to constantly update the site's product catalogue and inform buyers of any changes. Companies, especially new ones, can now allow themselves to be made known to the consumers through advertising over the Internet. Furthermore, there is lesser overhead cost involved, as sales persons and order takers are no longer required. In addition, the Internet has also enabled low budget organizations to reach interested parties across the country or the world. All of these lower costs have resulted in lower costs for the consumer. Many on-line shoppers can find good deals and low prices for desired goods, leading to even more and more on-line business.

However, these reduced costs and benefits for the consumer have had adverse effects on some businesses that have been around for many years. Those businesses which typically are service or data oriented have seen a sharp decline in sales. For example, car dealerships compete with on-line business because some customers prefer finding a vehicle on-line instead of dealing with a nagging car salesman. Car dealerships are not the only ones threatened by the convenience of the Internet. Postal services and phone companies also face new competition from Internet applications such as email and voice chat.

Although the Internet may have some great and significant impact on our lives and the way business is done, there are considerable consequences and drawbacks. Because of the Internet, a new social disorder has been created known as Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD). IAD occurs when a computer dominates rather than serves a person, and when people develop “unhealthy dependencies on the Internet use” (Gard 3). Psychologists have found that there has been a raise in the number of people who “find the virtual reality on computer screens more attractive than everyday reality” (Gard 3). These addicts perceive that surfing the web is more important than doing any other task. They cannot control the amount of time spent on the computer. For these addicts, the Internet serves as an outlet to escape from reality, relieving their feelings of distress (Gard 3). These addicts often feel anxious and uneasy when not on-line, and crave the Internet connection. As a result of such an addiction, Internet addicts tend to neglect their family, friends and work. Ironically, numerous on-line support groups have since been set up to offer advice to people with such a disorder.

Apart from Internet addiction, personal privacy is jeopardized and “doesn’t exist on the Internet” (Gard 2). Being a web surfer myself, I have had to provide my name, email account, interests, and even telephone number during several occasions in order to access a particular web site. In doing this, unscrupulous Internet businesses steal or misuse personal information given to them to “personalize features on their sites to make them more appealing” (Gard 2). They also release information about their customers to their advertisers. These companies use this information to invade one’s personal time with phone calls and newsletters trying to offer their services. Furthermore, the Internet has made it easier than ever before for people to share and sell data, so that “anyone who’s willing to pay can get Social Security numbers and driving records” (Gard 2). Likewise, a person having your credit card number

and its expiration date can now purchase goods online. From the above examples, it can be seen that there is little, if any, privacy left to be found when dealing with the Internet.

The Internet has also given criminals a new media to exploit. While there are many types of Internet criminal activity, child pornography has quickly become a critical issue for the Internet. There has been a widespread increase in the distribution of illegal child pornography on the Internet; child pornographers misuse the Internet to exploit sexually abused and molested children throughout the world. By means of the Internet, sexually explicit material of children has been illegally transmitted and sold.

Despite these abhorrent activities, the Internet provides each of us with extraordinary new possibilities every day.

With the number of people using the Internet growing exponentially, it is easy to see that the Internet has pervaded the life of everyone. Those that use the Internet on a daily basis, or even only a little, can feel the impact of the Internet around them. The ease with which they can communicate, learn, or accomplish simple tasks and chores makes life easier, and hopefully less stressful. Even those that don't use the Internet can feel the impact it has on our society and businesses. Because many businesses today use the Internet to advertise products and to provide support, those not familiar with the Internet may find it difficult to get the information needed. People in this position may not like what is happening around them, but the effect on their lives is also felt. Whether the Internet's effect on someone is good or bad, the fact remains that the Internet has an effect on us all. The only question that remains is how the Internet has affected you...

## **Works Cited**

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