

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **PPIC STATEWIDE SURVEY: CALIFORNIANS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

## **Californians Expand Use of Computers, Internet, Broadband —But Digital Divide Leaves Many Behind**

MORE USE WEB FOR NEWS, SOCIAL NETWORKING, GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

SAN FRANCISCO, California, June 24, 2009—The percentage of Californians with Internet access and a broadband connection at home has grown since last year despite tough economic times. A survey released today by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) finds that broadband adoption increased 7 points from last year (62% today, 55% 2008) and the share of Californians with Internet access at home is up 4 points (67% today, 63% 2008). Overall Internet use rose 6 points (76% today, 70% 2008). Computer ownership is up 3 points (75% today, 72% 2008).

Residents have increased their use of social networking sites 11 points from last year (37% today, 26% 2008). They are also more likely to turn to the Internet to get government resources (51% today, 43% 2008) and news (63% today, 55% 2008), go shopping (58% today, 52% 2008), and find information about health (55% today, 50% 2008), their communities (53% today, 47% 2008), and housing (44% today, 40% 2008).

“Californians increasingly see their computers and the Internet as necessities, not luxuries,” says Mark Baldassare, PPIC president and CEO. “At a time when most economic indicators are going down, these technology indicators are going up.”

Although most demographic groups report increases in computer ownership, Internet connectivity, and broadband adoption, a digital divide persists. Just over half of Latinos (52%) say they have home computers, far lower than the percentage of Asians (89%), whites (87%), and blacks (75%) who do. Only 39 percent of Latinos have a home broadband connection, compared to 75 percent of whites, 74 percent of Asians, and 62 percent of blacks.

There is no divide when it comes to Californians’ views about the importance of Internet access: Nearly all residents (93%) say it is very (72%) or somewhat (21%) important. Across demographic groups, Californians place a high value on access, with 75 percent of Latinos—the least likely to have an Internet connection—saying it is very important. Most non-Internet users (84%) also say access is important.

Asked about the use of federal stimulus dollars to improve access, more than half say it is very (22%) or somewhat important (34%) to use this money to improve the availability of broadband technology and to teach people to use it (25% very important, 31% somewhat important).

“Californians perceive that the digital divide is an important and persistent societal trend,” Baldassare says. “And a majority are saying that the government has a role to play in addressing this challenge.”

Where does California, known as a technology leader, stand compared to the rest of the nation? State residents are somewhat less likely than their counterparts nationwide to have an Internet connection at home (67% vs. 72%) and just as likely to have broadband at home (62% vs. 63%), according to a 2009 Pew Internet & American Life Project survey.

### COMPUTER, INTERNET USE INCREASES OVERALL

In addition to the 6-point increase in overall Internet use, computer use rose 5 points in the last year (80% today, 75% 2008). There are differences across demographic groups that are similar to the digital divide in computer ownership and home Internet access. Specifically:

- **The digital divide persists between Latinos and other groups.** While Latinos increased their Internet use (53% today, 48% 2008), the growth among whites was greater (88% today, 81% 2008). Whites' computer use (89% today, 85% 2008) increased by about the same amount as Latinos' (61% today, 58% 2008). Latinos today are far less likely to use computers and the Internet than Asians (87% computers, 85% Internet) and blacks (89%, 81%).
- **Nearly all high-income Californians use a computer and the Internet.** Ninety-seven percent of Californians with household incomes of \$80,000 or more use computers and the same percentage use the Internet. Those with household incomes of less than \$40,000 are far less likely to report doing either (65% use computers, 58% use the Internet).
- **The rural/urban divide has closed, but regional differences persist.** Similar percentages of rural (82%) and urban (80%) residents use a computer, in contrast to last year's findings (66% rural, 76% urban). The gap has also closed between rural (77%) and urban (76%) residents who use the Internet (63% rural, 70% urban in 2008). Computer and Internet use grew in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, Orange/San Diego Counties, and the Inland Empire. But computer use in the Central Valley is unchanged (74% today, 74% 2008) and Internet use has declined slightly (67% today, 71% 2008).
- **Younger Californians are far more likely to use computers, the Internet.** Although majorities of adults over 55 use computers (71%) and the Internet (68%), residents between 18 and 34 are much more likely to do so (86% computers, 83% Internet).
- **Residents with disabilities are much less likely to go online.** Sixty percent of Californians who report having a disability use the Internet, compared to 79 percent of those without a disability.

### WHY SOME AREN'T WIRED: COST, LACK OF INTEREST

When Californians without computers are asked the open-ended question of why they don't own one, 45 percent cite cost. Fewer say they are not interested (23%) or don't know how to use one (16%). Among those who don't use the Internet, 30 percent say they simply aren't interested in doing so, 15 percent say they don't have a computer, and 15 percent say it is too expensive. Residents under age 55 and Latinos are more likely to mention cost, while older residents and whites are more likely to cite lack of interest.

Among the 24 percent of Californians who don't use the Internet, just 21 percent are interested in starting to use it or in using email. Of these non-Internet users, 13 percent say they used it sometime in the past year but stopped for some reason.

### WHO'S DOING THE TWEETING?

Age, race and ethnicity, income, and region play a role not just in who is going online but what Californians do when they log on.

- Relatively few (18%) adults use Twitter, but nearly a third (31%) of those 18–34 years old are tweeting on the micro-blogging service. Californians in this age group are also more likely (63%) to use a social networking site than others (31% ages 35–54, 16% age 55 or older) or to work on their own blogs (24%) than others (11% ages 35–54, 7% age 55 or older).
- Blacks are more likely (53%) than others (44% Asians, 39% whites, 28% Latinos) to use a social networking site. Asians are most likely (22%) to blog (14% whites, 13% blacks, 11% Latinos).
- San Francisco Bay Area residents are among the most likely to go online to visit a government website, access government resources, use a social networking site, use Twitter, or blog. Residents of Orange County/San Diego Counties are among the most likely to contact an elected official online.

## THE CELL PHONE CONNECTION

Californians with cell phones (84%) are more likely than last year to use them for sending and receiving text messages, accessing the Internet, and getting email. Among cell phone owners, 65 percent are using the mobile devices to text (up 7 points from last year), 30 percent are accessing the Internet (up 5 points), and 29 percent are getting email (up 3 points).

Although residents across all income groups are more likely than last year to use their mobile phones for these activities, upper-income Californians have shown sizeable increases (an increase of 12 points for email, 10 points for Internet access). As a result, the gap has widened between lower- and upper-income mobile phone owners.

## MORE KEY FINDINGS

### ■ **How Californians stay connected**—page 14

More than half of California Internet users (56%) use a laptop and wireless connection to go online. Fewer use a cell phone or other handheld device such as an iPhone or Blackberry (32%), or a computer at a public library (22%). Lower-income adults are less likely (50%) than more affluent Californians to access the Internet through a laptop and handheld device but more likely (33%) to use a computer at a public library.

### ■ **More parents use school websites**—page 16

Parents of high school students are more likely than last year to use the school website (61% today, 53% 2008). Parents of elementary school students (24% today, 18% 2008) and middle school students (36% today, 28% 2008) are more likely to get their children's homework assignments from email or the Internet.

### ■ **Is government doing enough to ensure access?**—page 19

Half (50%) believe the government is doing just enough (39%) or more than enough (11%) to improve the availability of broadband. Just under a third (29%) believe the government is not doing enough.

### ■ **Most perceive digital divide**—pages 22, 23

Majorities of residents think that Californians in lower-income and rural areas have less access to broadband than others, and at least half are very or somewhat concerned about it.

### ■ **Californians' mood about the state of their state**—page 27

Strong majorities of residents say California is going in the wrong direction (70% vs. 19% right direction, 11% don't know) and expect the next year to bring bad times financially (69% vs. 24% good times, 7% don't know). These levels of pessimism are similar to Californians' views in May about the direction of the state (68% wrong direction, 24% right direction, 8% don't know) and expectations for the year ahead (67% bad times, 25% good times, 8% don't know).

## **ABOUT THE SURVEY**

This is the second survey in an annual series focusing on information technology and is supported with funding from the California Emerging Technology Fund and ZeroDivide. It seeks to inform state policy-makers, encourage discussion, and raise public awareness. This is the 99th PPIC Statewide Survey in a series that has generated a database that includes the responses of more than 210,000 Californians. Findings are based on a telephone survey of 2,502 California adult residents, including 2,252 interviewed on landline telephones and 250 interviewed on cell phones. Interviews took place from June 2–16, 2009, and were conducted in English, Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), Vietnamese, and Korean. The sampling error for all adults is  $\pm 2$  percent. For subgroups it is larger. For more information on methodology, see page 25.

Mark Baldassare is president and CEO of PPIC, where he holds the Arjay and Frances Fearing Miller Chair in Public Policy. He is founder of the PPIC Statewide Survey, which he has directed since 1998.

PPIC is dedicated to informing and improving public policy in California through independent, objective, nonpartisan research on major economic, social, and political issues. The institute was established in 1994 with an endowment from William R. Hewlett. As a private operating foundation, PPIC does not take or support positions on any ballot measure or on any local, state, or federal legislation, nor does it endorse, support, or oppose any political parties or candidates for public office.

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