



THE METRO POLL

A Poll Conducted for the Virginia Center for Urban Development
By the Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory

Center for Public Policy

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WEDNESDAY, JULY 7, 1999

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COMPUTER USE AND ONLINE ACCESS CONTINUE TO GROW IN REGION

Richmond, VA – Nearly three-quarters (73%) of area residents contacted in the recent Metro Poll reported using a computer on at least an occasional basis. Fifty-six percent of the poll's respondents have access to the Internet or a commercial online service. Of those respondents with access to the Internet, 77% go online more than once a week and, following a national trend, 38% report having made an online purchase in the last year. As indicated in the table below, since May 1997, computer use has steadily increased in the area with Internet access growing at a more rapid pace.

Table 1. Percent of respondents using a computer on at least an occasional basis and percent of respondents with Internet or commercial online access

	<i>May 1997</i>	<i>May 1998</i>	<i>May 1999</i>
Computer Use	<i>63</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>73</i>
Internet Access	<i>38</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>56</i>

The Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory conducted the Metro Poll for Virginia Commonwealth University's Virginia Center for Urban Development. Interviewing for the Metro Poll was conducted by telephone May 20 – June 23 with 1,131 randomly-selected adult residents of the Richmond metropolitan area (the City of Richmond and the Counties of Chesterfield, Hanover and Henrico). The poll has a sampling error of plus or minus approximately 3%.

“The growth in computer use and Internet access are positive indicators of a well-prepared workforce in the Greater Richmond Region. Computer literacy is a primary tool of the new economy and having a knowledgeable workforce is extremely important to the economic development potential of our region,” says Michael D. Pratt, Professor of Economics and Director of the Virginia Center for Urban Development at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Differences in computer use and Internet access continue to be correlated to education, income and age. The greater the level of income, the more likely that an individual uses a computer and has access to the Internet. While the same pattern is present with respect to higher levels of education, the older the person, the less likely they are to use a computer and have access to the Internet.

Again this year, there is no apparent gender gap in computer use. However, this year men (59%)

are more likely to have Internet access than are women (53%). Men and women with access to the Internet use it at about the same rate per week, however men (40%) are somewhat more likely than women (35%) to have made a purchase using the Internet.

As seen in the table below, the racial gap in computer use and Internet access first reported in 1997 continues to exist. This year, 75% of white respondents and 64% of African American respondents reported using a computer on at least an occasional basis. The racial gap in Internet access is even greater. Sixty-four percent of white respondents and 48% of African American respondents reported that they had Internet access. "While much of this difference in access is due to the racial gap in computer use, even for those individuals who use a computer, there is a reasonably large difference in access to the Internet. However, there is reason for optimism. The racial gap in Internet access has diminished since May 1998," says Pratt.

Table 2. Percent of respondents using a computer on at least an occasional basis and percent of respondents with Internet or commercial online access by race

Computer Use	May 1997	May 1998	May 1999
White	66	70	75
African American	58	60	64

Internet Access	May 1997	May 1998	May 1999
White	41	51	60
African American	28	29	44

The racial gap in computer use and Internet access is correlated with income and education. At incomes below \$35,000, whites are more likely than are African Americans to use a computer and to have Internet access. These differences diminish at incomes above \$35,000. A similar pattern exists with respect to education. African Americans at education levels at high school graduate and below are less likely than whites to use a computer and to have Internet access. These differences diminish for persons with at least some college education.

"The racial gap in computer use and Internet access is a national phenomena. However, it is an issue that must be addressed at the local level through education and creative programs to provide access," says Pratt.

METHODOLOGY OF THE METRO POLL

Interviewing for the Metro Poll was conducted from the facilities of the Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond from May 20 – June 23, 1999 with a randomly-selected sample of 1,131 Richmond area residents age 18 and older. The sample of telephone numbers was designed so that all residential telephones, including new and unlisted numbers, had a known chance of inclusion. Interviews were obtained with respondents in 41.5% of the known or assumed residential households in the sample. The data were weighted on sex, race, and education. Percentages reported in the text and tables are weighted, while the number of cases shown

in the tables for various subgroups is the actual number of respondents. Questions answered by the sample of 1,131 respondents are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus approximately 3 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. This means that in 95 out of 100 samples like the one used here, the results obtained should be no more than 3 percentage points above or below the figure that would be obtained by interviewing all adult residents with telephones. Where the answers of subgroups are reported, the sampling error would be higher. Because of nonresponse (refusals to participate, etc.), standard calculations of sampling error are apt to understate the actual extent to which survey results are at variance with the true population values. Surveys are also subject to errors from sources other than sampling. While every effort is made to identify such errors, they are often difficult or impossible to measure. Readers making use of the results are urged to be mindful of the limitations inherent in survey research.