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Generations Online in 2009

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Contrary to the image of Generation Y as the "Net Generation," internet users in their twenties do not dominate every aspect of online life. Generation X is the most likely group to bank, shop and look for health information online. Boomers are just as likely as Generation Y to make travel reservations online. And even Silent Generation internet users are competitive when it comes to email (although teens might point out that this is proof that email is for old people).

Generations Explained			
Generation Name*	Birth Years, Ages in 2009	% of total adult population	% of internet-using population
Gen Y (Millennials)	Bom 1977-1990, Ages 18-32	26%	30%
Gen X	Bom 1965-1976, Ages 33-44	20%	23%
Younger Boomers	Bom 1955-1964, Ages 45-54	20%	22%
Older Boomers	Bom 1946-1954, Ages 55-63	13%	13%
Silent Generation	Bom 1937-1945, Ages 64-72	9%	7%
G.I. Generation	Bom -1936, Age 73+	9%	4%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project December 2008 survey. N=2,253 total adults, and margin of error is ±2%. N=1,650 total internet users, and margin of error is ±3%.

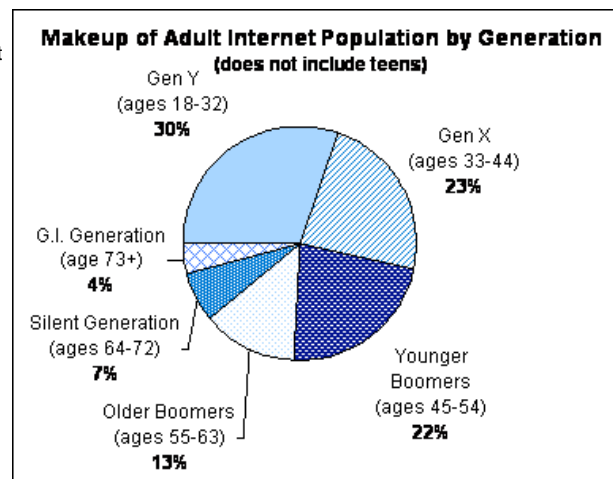
*All generation labels used in this report, with the exception of "Younger-" and "Older-" Boomers, are the names conventionalized by Howe and Strauss's book, *Generations: Strauss, William & Howe, Neil. Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* (Perennial, 1992). As for "Younger Boomers" and "Older Boomers", enough research has been done to suggest that the two decades of Baby Boomers are different enough to merit being divided into distinct generational groups.

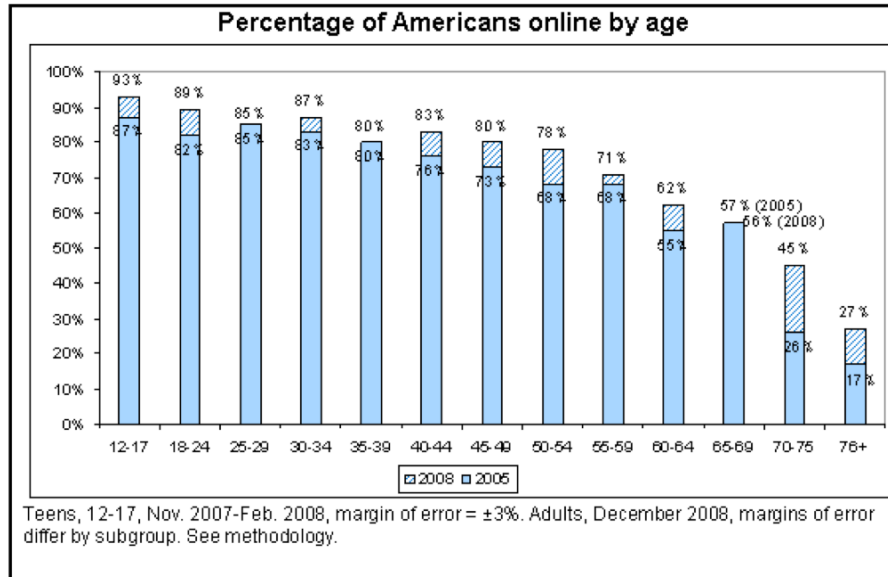
Internet use and email

The web continues to be populated largely by younger generations, as more than half of the adult internet population is between 18 and 44 years old. But larger percentages of older generations are online now than in the past and they are doing more activities online, according to the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project surveys taken from 2006-2008.

The biggest increase in internet use since 2005 can be seen in the 70-75 year-old age group. While just over one-fourth (26%) of 70-75 year olds were online in 2005, 45% of that age group is currently online. Much as we watch demographic and age groups move up in "degrees of access" on our "thermometers,"¹ we can probably expect to see these bars become more level as time goes on. For now, though, young people dominate the online population.

Instant messaging, social networking, and blogging have gained ground as communications tools, but email remains the most popular online activity, particularly among older internet users. Fully 74% of internet users age 64 and older send and receive email, making email the most popular online activity for this age group. At the same time, email has lost some ground among teens; whereas 89% of teens said they used email in 2004, just 73% currently say they do.





Teens and Generation Y find entertainment and social networks online

Teens and Generation Y (internet users age 18-32) are the most likely groups to use the internet for entertainment and for communicating with friends and family. These younger generations are significantly more likely than their older counterparts to seek entertainment through online videos, online games and virtual worlds, and they are also more likely to download music to listen to later. Internet users ages 12-32 are more likely than older users to read other people's blogs and to write their own; they are also considerably more likely than older generations to use social networking sites and to create profiles on those sites.² Younger internet users often use personal blogs to update friends on their lives, and they use social networking sites to keep track of and communicate with friends.³ Teen and Generation Y users are also significantly more likely than older generations to send instant messages to friends.

By a large margin, teen internet users' favorite online activity is game playing; 78% of 12-17 year-old internet users play games online,⁴ compared with 73% of online teens who email, the second most popular activity for this age group. Online teens are also significantly more likely to play games than any other generation, including Generation Y, only half (50%) of whom play online games.

Older generations use the internet as a tool for research, shopping and banking

Compared with teens and Generation Y, older generations use the internet less for socializing and entertainment and more as a tool for information searches, emailing, and buying products. In particular, older internet users are significantly more likely than younger generations to look online for health information. Health questions drive internet users age 73 and older to the internet just as frequently as they drive Generation Y users, outpacing teens by a significant margin. Researching health information is the third most popular online activity with the most senior age group, after email and online search.

Internet users ages 33-72 are also significantly more likely than younger users to look online for religious information and they are more likely to visit government websites in search of information.

Generation X (internet users ages 33-44) continues to lead in online shopping. Fully 80% of Generation X internet users buy products online, compared with 71% of internet users ages 18-32. Interest in online shopping is significantly lower among the youngest and oldest groups; 38% of online teens buy products online, as do 56% of internet users ages 64-72 and 47% of internet users age 73 and older.

Generation X internet users have also maintained their edge in online banking, as they are significantly more likely than any other generation to do their banking online (67%). As Generation Y users grow older, however, they have become much more likely to bank online as well: The percentage of online Generation Y who do banking online rose from 38% in 2005 to 57% in 2008. There has been no significant growth among older generations when it comes to banking online.

Video downloads, online travel reservations and work-related research are now pursued more equally by young and old

A few online activities previously dominated by either older generations or younger generations are now being done more equally across all generations under 73 years old. One such activity is downloading videos, an activity that in 2005 was significantly more popular with teens and Generation Y than with any other generation. Generation X is catching up, as 31% of that generation claim to download videos as of 2007, compared with 38% of Generation Y. Generations on the oldest end of the spectrum also became significantly more likely than they had been two years before to download videos. Some 13% of G.I. Generation internet users (age 73+) reported downloading videos, up from 1% in 2005, and another 13% of the online Silent Generation (ages 64-72) say they download videos, up from 8% in 2005.

Perhaps less surprisingly, Generation Y is also gaining significant ground in some activities previously dominated by Generation X and older. In addition to becoming more likely to do banking online, Generation Y has also grown more likely to make travel reservations online. In 2005, half (50%) of Generation Y

internet users had booked travel arrangements online and in 2008 that number rose to 65%. During the same period, the percentages of Generation X and older generations to make online travel reservations remained about the same.

The workplace online network is expanding to include more Generation Y users.⁵ Internet users 18-32 are going online more than ever to do research for their jobs. In 2007, 51% said they used the internet for their jobs other than for email, compared with 44% of the same group in 2005.

Generational Differences in Online Activities								
	Online Teens ^a (12-17)	Gen Y (18-32)	Gen X (33-44)	Younger Boomers (45-54)	Older Boomers (55-64)	Silent Generation (65-72)	G.I. Generation (73+)	All Online Adults ^b
Go online	93%	87%	82%	79%	70%	56%	31%	74%
<i>Teens and Gen Y are more likely to engage in the following activities compared with older users:</i>								
Play games online	78	50	38	26	28	25	18	35
Watch videos online	57	72	57	49	30	24	14	52
Get info about a job	30*	64	55	43	36	11	10	47
Send instant messages	68	59	38	28	23	25	18	38
Use social networking sites	65	67	36	20	9	11	4	35
Download music	59	58	46	22	21	16	5	37
Create an SNS profile	55	60	29	16	9	5	4	29
Read blogs	49	43	34	27	25	23	15	32
Create a blog	28	20	10	6	7	6	6	11
Visit a virtual world	10	2	3	1	1	1	0	2
<i>Activities where Gen X users or older generations dominate:</i>								
Get health info	28	68	82	74	81	70	67	75
Buy something online	38	71	80	68	72	56	47	71
Bank online	*	57	65	53	49	45	24	55
Visit gov't sites	*	55	64	62	63	60	31	59
Get religious info	26*	31	38	42	30	30	26	35
<i>And for some activities, the youngest and oldest cohorts may differ, but there is less variation overall:</i>								
Use email	73	94	93	90	90	91	79	91
Use search engines	*	90	93	90	89	85	70	89
Research products	*	84	84	82	79	73	60	81
Get news	63	74	76	70	69	56	37	70
Make travel reservations	*	65	70	69	66	69	65	68
Research for job	*	51	59	57	48	33	9	51
Rate a person or product	*	37	35	29	30	25	16	32
Download videos	31*	38	31	21	16	13	13	27
Participate in an online auction	*	28	31	27	26	16	6	26
Download podcasts	19	25	21	19	12	10	10	19

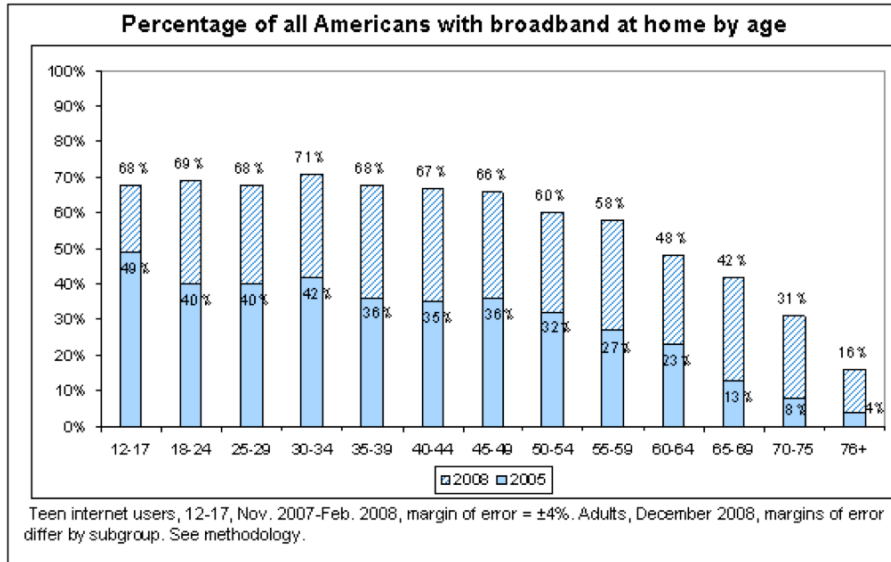
^a Source for online teens data: Pew Internet & American Life Project Surveys conducted Oct.-Nov. 2006 and Nov. 2007-Feb. 2008. Margin of error for online teens is ± 4% for Oct.-Nov. 2006 and ± 3% for Nov. 2007-Feb. 2008.

^b Source for online adult data: Pew Internet Project Surveys conducted August 2006, Feb.-March 2007, Aug.-Sept. 2007, Oct.-Dec. 2007, May 2008, August 2008, November 2008, and December 2008. Margin of error for all online adults is ± 3% for these surveys. The average margin of error for each age group can be considerably higher than ± 3%, particularly for the "Matures" and "After Work" age groups. See Methodology for average margins of error for each generational group.

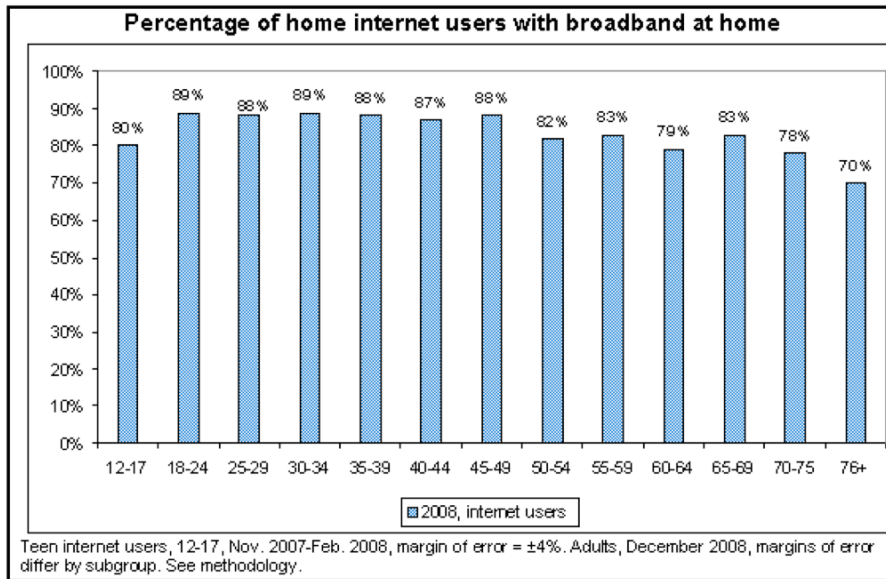
* Most recent teen data for these activities are from the Pew Internet Project Teens and Parents Survey conducted Oct.-Nov.

Broadband access has doubled for many age groups, tripled in oldest groups

Since 2005, broadband access has increased dramatically in the United States across all age groups, but older groups are still largely unconnected to high-speed internet. For Americans ages 12-24, broadband access has increased by about half; for 25-64 year olds, it has about doubled; and for seniors 65 and older, broadband access has more than tripled. The percentage of the oldest age group to have broadband at home is still very low, however, at just 16%.



Always-on, high-speed connections make it more convenient for internet users to participate in online activities, and broadband users are significantly more likely than dial-up users to do almost all major online activities.⁶ When looking at *internet users* who go online from home in 2008, broadband is more equally accessed by all age groups; 70% of home internet users older than 75 years old have high-speed access. As broadband access continues to increase for all age groups, perhaps we will see increased internet activity, particularly among the trailing older generations.



View a series of charts for more analysis at pewinternet.org.

Notes

1. "[Degrees of Access](#)," Pew Internet & American Life Project, May 2008.
2. "[Adults and Social Network Websites](#)," Pew Internet & American Life Project, Jan. 2008.
3. "[Teens and Social Media](#)," Pew Internet & American Life Project, Dec. 2007.
4. "[Teens, Video Games and Civics](#)," Pew Internet & American Life Project, Sept. 2008.
5. "[Networked Workers](#)," Pew Internet & American Life Project, Sept. 2008.
6. "[Home Broadband 2008](#)," Pew Internet & American Life Project, July 2008.