

Research indicates change in internet usage

The South African Advertising Research Foundation ([SAARF](#)) states that a fundamental shift is happening in the usage of internet. Once essentially a business tool, it has now become an indispensable part of millions of South Africans' everyday lives.

The latest figures from SAARF AMPS Jun 11 show that the local weekly internet audience numbers 5.274-million adults aged 15+, or 15.5% of the total adult population are up from 4% in AMPS 2000. On any given day, there are on average 3.581-million users, or 10.5% of the total adult population.

Access shifting

The first evidence of this shift is where people are accessing the web. Not so long ago, work was the predominant place for accessing the internet. Since 2007, workplace access has dropped from 42.4% to 28% on a weekly basis, according to AMPS (AMPS 2007 vs AMPS Jun 11).

One of the reasons for this could be that many of the larger companies have put restrictions on internet usage, blocking social and news sites and forcing people to engage with the web in their personal time. Home access however, has remained relatively stable, but accessing the net 'elsewhere' (at a friend, hotel, gym etc) has risen sharply, from a past-7-day figure of 6.7% in AMPS 2007 to 24.2% currently.

Changing online activities

A look at how online activities have waxed and waned over the past four years shows how the nature of web usage has changed. On the whole, with the exception of online searches and directory enquiries, the weekly activities which have shown growth over the last four years are activities which are social or entertaining in nature: social networking, instant messaging, chatting, music downloads, online gaming, online dating, listening to the radio online, and downloading podcasts.

For many users, it would seem that being online these days is all about being social. The internet has become more of a lifestyle medium than a purely functional medium used for sending emails and doing research. People are still sending emails and doing online searches, but the social activities are growing in importance.

Top online activities

The top five online activities today are running searches, emailing, social networking, online chatting and instant messaging.

Doing searches online remains the biggest online activity and it is getting bigger. In AMPS 2007, 76.2% of weekly internet users did online searches. Now, according to AMPS Jun 11, 80.2% of surfers run searches.

In second position is emailing, which has remained constant: in 2007, 69.4% of adults emailed, and today 72% do.

Just over 57% of all local internet users go online each week to do social networking, making this the third-biggest online activity in South Africa. The rise of social networking may well be a factor in the declining levels of activities that demand the investment of time, such as reading magazines and newspapers online, which has declined from 22.5% in AMPS 2007 to 18.5% currently. Online radio listening however, which can be done in tandem with social networking, has increased in terms of reach. In 2007, 8.3% of the 16+ adult internet audience listened to radio online, with levels currently at 11.5% of all adults aged 15+.

As with online reading, accessing current news has also fallen off since 2007, from 19.4% to 16.4%. People's social networks could be making up for this, with people getting the information they need about events happening in their daily lives, directly from online friends.

In fourth spot is online chatting, which has shown substantial growth over the past four years: up from 17.6% in 2007 to 42.1% currently. Likewise, instant messaging, the fifth top online activity has grown from 24.7% four years ago to 39.5% now.

The availability of cheaper, faster, uncapped bandwidth is possibly behind the healthy growth of the sixth and seventh ranked activities - music downloading, up from 19.5% to 34.9% and online gaming, which has grown from 13.9% in 2007 to 32.7%.

The South African internet usage has a long way to go before it becomes the all-pervasive medium it is in many other foreign markets; however, it is all pervasive in the day-to-day lives of those who do use it and not just from nine to five.

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