

fitting into their lives

A Survey of Three Studies About Youth Media Usage

By Vivian Vahlberg

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Newspaper Association of America **Foundation**[™]

Introduction

Every time you turn around, someone is studying the media habits of young people. That is because so much is at stake. As The Nielsen Company observed in a recent report, “There are about 33 million teenagers ages 13-19 in the United States. Beyond sheer mass, this demographic wields tremendous influence – on their peers, their parents and the culture at large. As well, the formative nature of their years has implications for everything from consumer packaged goods marketing to the democratic process.”

This report, commissioned by the Newspaper Association of America Foundation as part of its long-standing emphasis on young newspaper readers, reviews three of the most significant recent studies. The goal: to draw out the most salient findings of each study for newspaper publishers and executives, Newspaper In Education (NIE) professionals, youth editors and scholastic journalism advisers.

To avoid mixing apples and oranges, the findings of the three studies – from the Kaiser Family Foundation, Nielsen and the Pew Internet & American Life Project – are reported separately. While they all focus on young people, they do so with different questions and populations, so their conclusions are not interchangeable. For example, Kaiser surveyed 8- to 18-year-olds, while Pew’s data covers ages 12 to 17. Nielsen drew from various studies with different age cohorts.

Nonetheless, some common takeaways emerge:

- ▶ Media consume the lives of teens. But when young people discuss media, they are not talking about newspapers or products produced by newspaper companies. Adopting a strategy of “if you build it, they will come” in large numbers (without substantial marketing) is unrealistic, because they are not in your orbit. You need to go where they are and attract them there with something very relevant to their lives. Much is competing for their attention; you will not win them unless you fight for their time.
- ▶ They are not just doing one thing when they consume media. They split their enormous media time among many activities – social networking, viewing video, exchanging Instant Messages, viewing graphics and photos, listening to music, watching TV, playing games, looking up things, even catching up on the news – often simultaneously.
- ▶ Likewise, they divide their media usage among many platforms: cell phones, MP3 players, gaming devices, televisions, computers and printed materials. They use different devices for different purposes in different places.
- ▶ To reach them, you cannot offer just one thing in one place. You must have multiple offerings in multiple places, tailored to their needs and to the unique attributes of each platform. That is both good and bad news – lots of work, but many ways for you to catch their attention.
- ▶ Teen use of mobile has skyrocketed. It is not all texting and talking. And it is not just rich kids with data plans who can do more than talk and text on their phones.
- ▶ Social networking also has soared in importance. Along with mobile use, it has become indispensable and ubiquitous in most teens’ lives in the last few years, more so for older teens than younger ones.
- ▶ You need to tailor your products for their current habits.

When it comes right down to it, all of these things are true of adults, just not always to the same degree. So thinking about meeting the media needs of teens can help you think more nimbly about how everyone’s lives are changing.

“Generation M²: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds”

*Kaiser Family Foundation
January 2010*

Key findings of interest

Technology has powered an explosion of media usage among young people in the last five years – so much so that young people spend about as much time consuming media every day (7 hours, 38 minutes) as their parents spend working, according to a study of 8- to 18-year-olds by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Even this staggering amount underestimates the media usage of young people. Factoring in the additional media consumed in multitasking, young people pack 10¾ hours’ worth of media content into every day. (That figure does not include time spent talking or texting on cell phones or using computers for schoolwork.)

That is an increase of almost 2¼ hours of daily media exposure in the last five years.

In stark contrast to this media abundance and growth in media consumption, reading of newspapers and magazines (print or online) commands only a tiny sliver of their time – and a declining sliver at that.

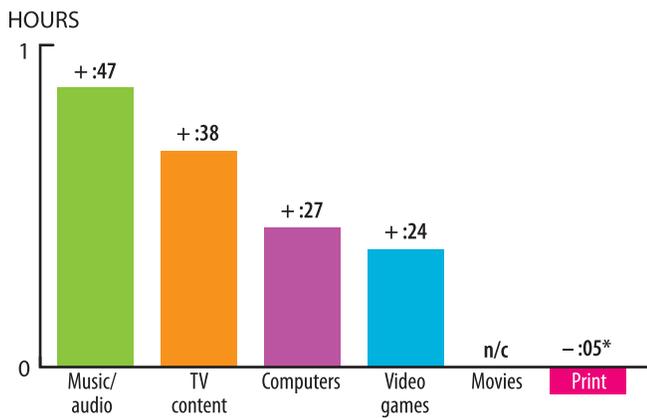
- ▶ Out of the 458 minutes the average young person spends with media every day, only three minutes a day are spent reading newspapers – a drop of three minutes from an average six minutes in 2004. Magazine reading also dropped from an average of 14 minutes a day in 2004 to nine minutes in 2009.

- ▶ Online readership does not make up for the loss in print readership. The young people surveyed reported spending an average of two minutes reading newspapers or magazines online in 2009.
- ▶ Those who said they do read print newspapers spend an average of 14 minutes a day at it, down three minutes from 2004.
- ▶ In fact, print is the only category of media consumption to lose ground among young people in the last five years. Within the print category, just newspapers and magazines declined. Book reading held steady over the last five years, actually increasing from 21 to 25 minutes a day in the last 10.

Feeling pretty small? All this tells you is that you have a tough fight ahead. You must elbow your way into their lives. But you know you have value. Get to know them better so you’ll understand how to adapt and extend what you do and know to what they need and want.

Teen Media Usage Rising Everywhere but Print

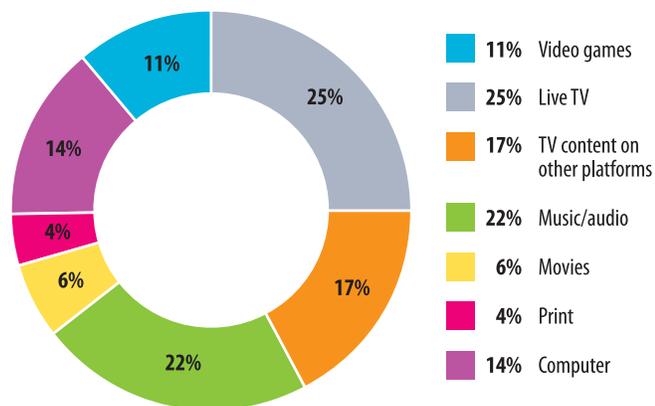
Among all 8- to 18-year-olds, change from 2004 to 2009 in average time spent with each medium in a typical day



*Not statistically significant.
Source: "Generation M²: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds"
Kaiser Family Foundation

Print: Just a Sliver of Youth Media Time

Among all 8- to 18-year-olds, proportion of media time spent by medium



Source: "Generation M²: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds"
Kaiser Family Foundation

Not only has the average amount of time spent with newspapers and magazines declined, but the proportion of teens reading either one has, too:

- ▶ From 42 percent in 1999 to 34 percent in 2004 to 23 percent in 2009 for newspapers;
- ▶ From 55 percent in 1999 to 47 percent in 2004 to 35 percent in 2009 for magazines.

Interestingly, usage of other media does not appear to affect the amount of time spent with print media; light and heavy media users spend about the same amount of time with print.

However, youth without televisions in their bedrooms or who live in houses where the TV is not always turned on spend more time reading.

When you work with educators and parents, might this be a good point to stress?

Developments with mobile media have driven much of the growth in total media consumption. As the Kaiser report noted, "The transformation of the cell phone into a media content delivery platform, and the widespread adoption of the iPod and other MP3 devices, have facilitated an explosion in media consumption among American youth. ... The development of mobile media has allowed – indeed, encouraged – young people to find even more opportunities throughout the day for using media, actually expanding the number of hours when they can consume media, often while on the go."

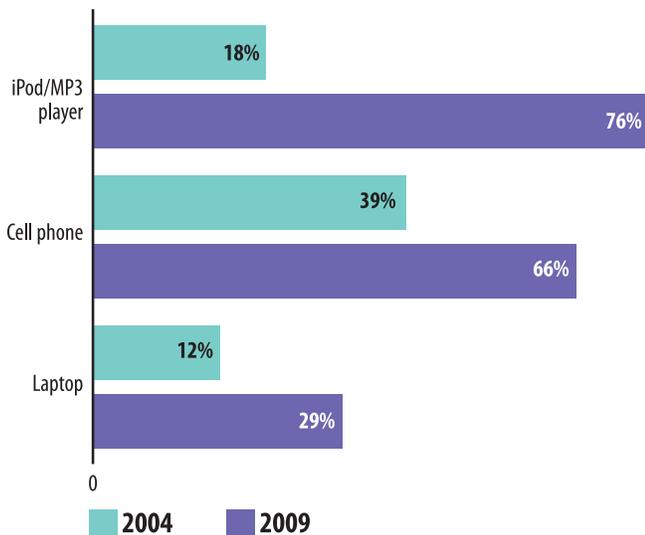
- ▶ Ownership of mobile media by young people skyrocketed, with cell phone ownership rising from 39 percent to 66 percent of 8- to 18-year-olds in the last five years. Ownership of MP3 players grew from 18 percent to 76 percent, while ownership of laptop computers rose from 12 percent to 29 percent.

► The number of ways these mobile media are used skyrocketed, too. Cell phones are not just for talking (an average of 33 minutes a day) or texting (1½ hours). Young people also spend an average 49 minutes a day listening to, playing or watching other media on their phones – time almost equally split between music, games and TV.

If you want to reach them, develop compelling mobile applications (“apps”). Don’t just stop at cell phones. Are there ways you can develop products that could reach them via MP3 players and gaming devices? Not everything has to include information that changes all the time. Think about the “evergreen” content you have that might lend itself to games.

Mobile Media Ownership Has Exploded

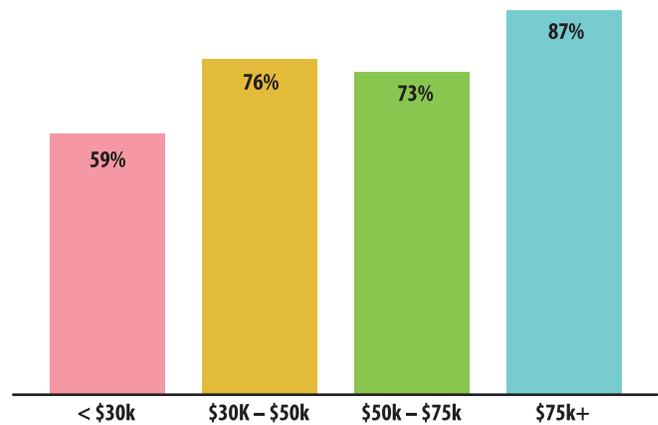
Among all 8- to 18-year-olds, percent who own each platform



Source: “Generation M²: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds” Kaiser Family Foundation

Even Lower-Income Kids Have Cells

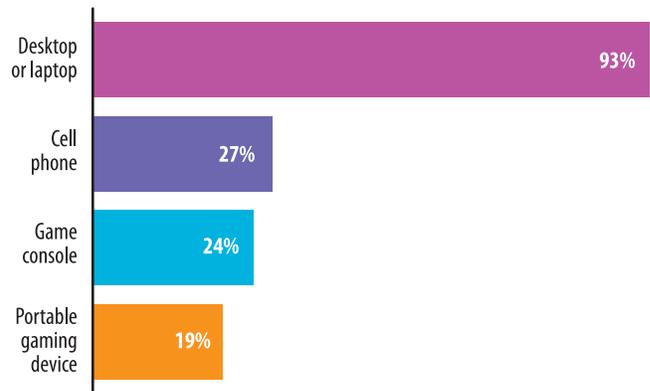
Percent of teens who own a cell phone, by family income



Pew Internet & American Life Project
September 2009 data

So Many Ways to Connect

Percent of teen device owners who use that device to go online (ages 12-17)

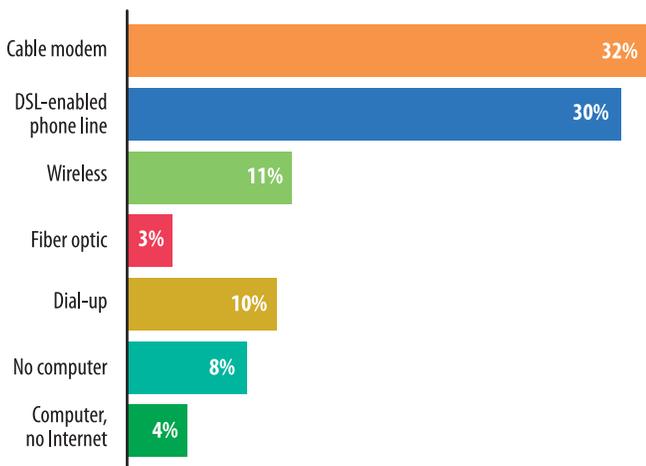


Pew Internet & American Life Project
September 2009 data

Then there is the impact of the growth of high-speed Internet access and new computer applications such as social networking (22 minutes a day) and video Web sites such as YouTube (15 minutes a day), neither of which were widely available five years ago. As a result, young people now spend 1½ hours more using their computers outside of school than five years ago.

Most Teens Have Decent Connections

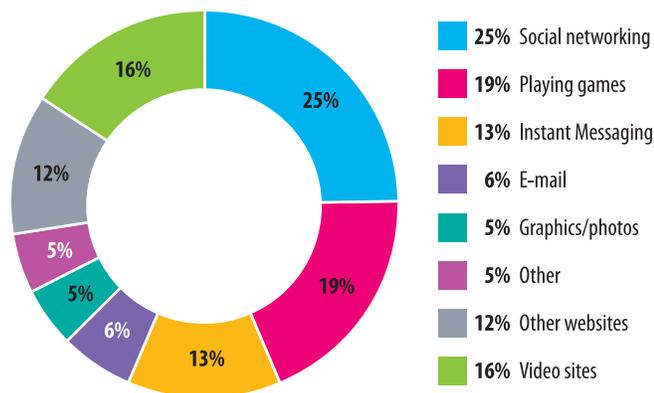
Families with teens by type of Internet access



Pew Internet & American Life Project
September 2009 data

So Many Things to Do on My Computer

Proportion of recreational computer time 8- to 18-year-olds spend in various activities



Source: "Generation M²: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds"
Kaiser Family Foundation

Young people have access to media at more times and in more ways than ever before – in their homes, bedrooms, cars and pockets.

- ▶ **Homes:** More than 90 percent have televisions, DVD or VCR players, radios and computers in the home, while 84 percent have both Internet access and cable or satellite TV.
- ▶ **Mobile:** Two-thirds own a cell phone, three-quarters own an iPod or other MP3 player, almost 60 percent own handheld videogame players and 29 percent own laptops.
- ▶ **Bedroom:** A growing number even have a television (71 percent), computer (36 percent) and Internet access (33 percent) in their bedrooms.
- ▶ **Cars:** Thirty-seven percent have either built-in or portable televisions or DVD players in their cars.

Bring young people in and ask them about their day-to-day lives. Talk to them about what they do in their homes, rooms and cars. Try to envision the kinds of information they might want and need at different times of day and in different places. Talk to them about your ideas and get theirs. No one has more local information than you do, and no one ought to be as good as you are at finding new kinds of information new audiences might want. How might you provide them with what they want when they want it? Don't limit yourself to editorial information; they consider advertising information valuable, too.

While television watching still is by far the most prevalent form of media usage among young people, the way they watch has changed.

- ▶ Time spent watching television the traditional way (on a set at an appointed time) has decreased (from 3 hours to 2²/₃ hours a day).
- ▶ But total consumption of TV has increased 38 minutes a day because of time-shifting and viewing on mobile phones and computers. Almost half said they have watched TV online, while almost a third have watched on a cell phone or MP3 player.
- ▶ While they watch traditional television, they often simultaneously do something else related to the show, such as texting or Instant Messaging a friend, looking up information online or even voting.

Have you ever thought about what kinds of products you might provide that would work well with the other things young people do? Don't scoff at multitasking; make it work for you. What about developing a Jon Stewart mobile app to explain in real time what people are laughing about? It might help demystify the news and make them more interested in following it regularly.

High media usage is associated with a number of negatives. The 21 percent of youth who consume the most media (more than 16 hours a day) have lower grades, get into trouble more and say they are often sad, unhappy or bored. Conversely, young people who spend an hour or more a day with print media are more likely to say they earn high grades than light readers. Which is cause and which is effect? Researchers cannot say.

Isn't there an educational or promotional opportunity here? An opportunity to associate print media usage with success and happiness? Whether it's cause or effect, it's good. If spending time with print media causes good grades, that's good. If spending time with print media is something successful kids like to do, that's good, too.

One final note about heavy media usage: Contrary to popular perception, there is no difference in exercise or physical activity between light and heavy media users.

Large and growing racial disparities exist in media usage (except in print).

- ▶ Hispanic and black youth spend 4¹/₂ hours more each day with media than white youth do – 13 hours a day versus 8¹/₂ hours, 2 to 2¹/₂ hours more watching television, an hour more with music and 30 minutes more with video games.
- ▶ These differences in media usage have grown more pronounced. While white youth spent 38 more minutes with media in 1999 compared to five years before, blacks' media usage grew by 2 hours and 49 minutes. Use by Hispanics grew by 4 hours and 8 minutes. As a result, the disparity between blacks and whites doubled in five years and quadrupled between Hispanics and whites.
- ▶ Minority youth (blacks particularly) are the heaviest users of media content (music, games and videos) on cell phones.

Media usage varies by age as well. It jumps dramatically – more than three hours a day – when young people hit the 11-to-14 age bracket. So does use of social networks. Only 18 percent of 8- to 10-year-olds participate in social networking, far less than the 42 percent of 11- to 14-year-olds and the 53 percent of 15- to 18-year-olds who do. The youngest group also spends far less time on these sites.

The digital divide appears to be narrowing, with most people having computers in the home regardless of race or parent education. Even among students whose parents never went beyond high school, 87 percent own computers. Differences still exist in Internet access and the quality of home Internet. But there are not big differences in the availability of computers at school or in use of computers for schoolwork.

All three studies have interesting statistics about demographic differences in media usage and consumption. If this is a subject of importance in your market, then you might want to read more and see how you could apply the results.

Methodology

From Oct. 20, 2008, through May 7, 2009, Kaiser conducted an in-classroom, anonymous, 40-minute written survey of 2,002 young people ages 8 to 18 from across the country. A subsample of 702 filled out weeklong diaries, recording their media usage in half-hour increments. Kaiser compared the 2009 [results](#) with similar surveys conducted in 1999 and 2004.

“How Teens Use Media”

*The Nielsen Company
June 2009*

Key findings of interest

The overall conclusion of this study is that when it comes to media usage, “... teens are unique, but they are not as bizarre and outlying as some might presume. Sure, they are the digital natives, super-communicators and multitaskers we hear so much about, but they are also the TV viewers, newspaper readers and radio listeners that some assume they are not. What we have found, across a variety of studies, is that teens embrace new media not at the cost of traditional media, but in supplement to it. Taken on whole, teens exhibit media habits that are more similar to the total population than not.”

Research by the NAA Foundation and the Media Management Center at Northwestern University has shown that teens’ attitudes and preferences in online media are very similar to those of adult light readers – i.e., people who are not news junkies. By focusing on teens, you may develop solutions that will also resonate with many adults. Find out more [here](#) and [here](#).

“The notion that teens are too busy texting and Twittering to be engaged with traditional media is exciting, but false. ... Teens can often be reached by the same means as their parents.” Because of this, Nielsen advises those in the media to “discard the

assumption that, as a rule, teens are ‘alien’ and plan for them as you would any demographic segment – with careful attention and calculus, not panic.”

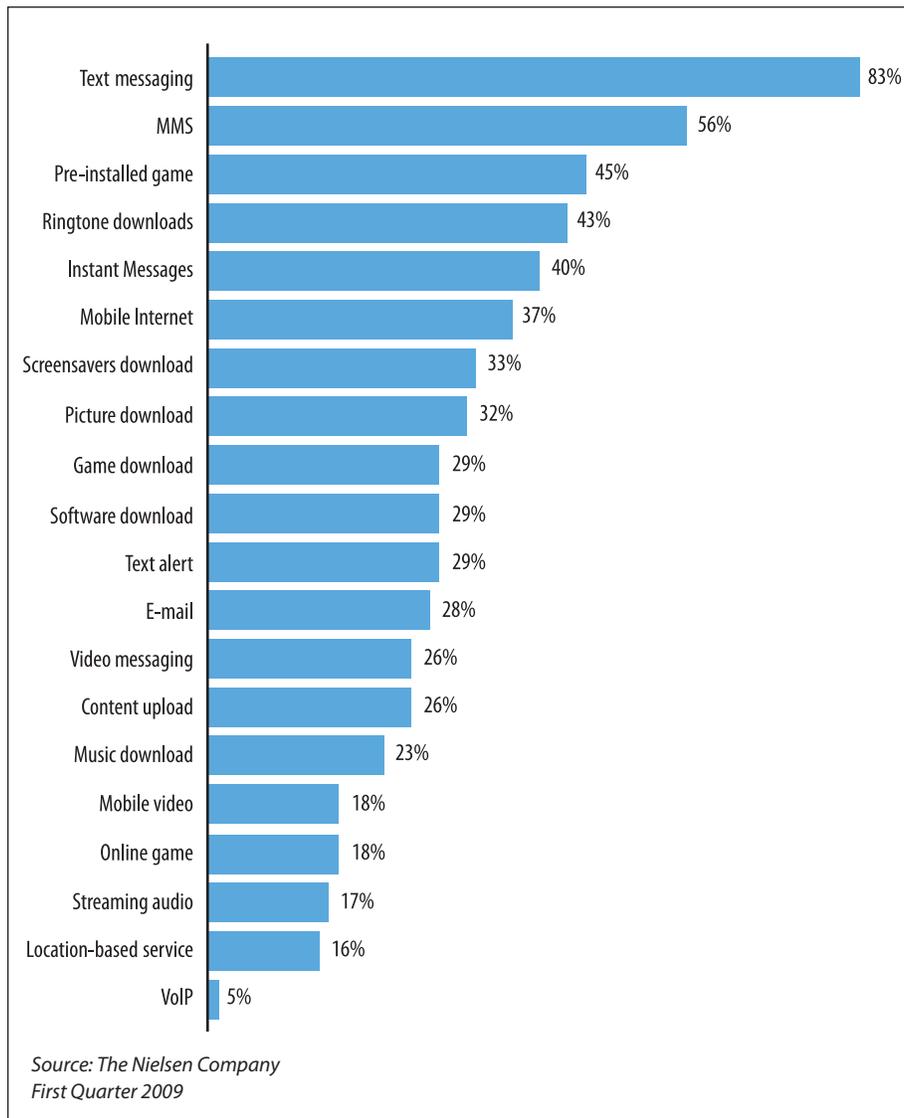
Mobile media are increasingly important to teens; more than three quarters (77 percent) have their own mobile phones and another 11 percent regularly borrow one. Of course, there has been an explosion in text messaging, with a 566 percent increase in the average number of texts sent by teens in just two years.

Teens use mobile devices for many purposes. More than half of mobile teens use Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS)/picture messaging. More than a third access the Internet via mobile, with almost a third downloading pictures and software and subscribing to text alerts. Almost 1 in 5 get video and streaming audio via mobile, while 16 percent use location-based services on their phones.

Do you have products that enable them to do these things? Pay particular attention to the potential of location-based services, which are in their infancy. When the Kaiser Family Foundation releases another survey in five years, expect to see that use of location-based services has skyrocketed. No one should have better location-based information than you do. If they do, you’d better hustle and reverse that advantage.

So Many Things to Do on My Cell

Mobile Media Use by U.S. Teens Ages 13–17



the ads more than adults do, “making them a discerning but winnable advertising audience.”

Teens remember ads in the middle of TV programs better when they see shows online than on TV. They also remember certain types of ads – for hair products and accessories, games and toys, cosmetics, candy and men’s toiletries – better than others.

Might you use these data to garner advertisers for your teen-centered new products?

Compared to adults, teens spend less than half as much time online and less time watching video online, mostly because they lack Internet access during large parts of the day. Surprisingly, they are less likely to consume more than one type of media at a time.

Look at each of these ways that teens use their cells and ask whether there are opportunities to explore.

Nielsen’s findings with respect to advertising and teens show that teen mobile media users are three times as receptive to mobile advertising as the average subscriber. Teens are less attentive to and engaged with both TV programming and TV ads than adults. When they notice ads enough to remember them, however, they tend to like

Teens are watching more TV than ever – 92 percent of it live. However, online video usage is growing rapidly, with a 79 percent increase in the average number of minutes of monthly online video usage to 3 hours, 6 minutes.

Are you on YouTube? Do you produce video that might appeal to teens? If not, might you? Some news outlets have reported success with video about prep sports. Might you expand that to other teen activities?

Nielsen reports that among older youth (ages 18 to 20), more than a quarter said they read a daily newspaper and more than a third said they read a Sunday paper. Four percent said they listen to

news and information radio stations in 2008, far less than the population average of 20 percent. (Nielsen did not have comparable data for younger teens.)

Methodology

Data for this [study](#) were drawn from a range of Nielsen resources, from the biannual global consumer survey and Scarborough Research to Nielsen's Television, Online and Telecom Practices and Nielsen Games.

“Social Media & Mobile Internet Use Among Teens and Young Adults”

By Amanda Lenhart, Kristen Purcell, Aaron Smith and Kathryn Zickuhr
Pew Internet & American Life Project
February 2010

Key findings of interest

The cell phone and the Internet have become “near-ubiquitous” in the lives of teenagers: Three-fourths have cell phones and 93 percent go online. Almost two-thirds (63 percent) go online at least every day and 36 percent go online several times a day.

“More so than for their elders, the Internet is a central and indispensable element in the lives of American teens and young adults,” the report notes.

Teens do not just use their computers to go online. Of those teens who own them, 27 percent use cell phones, 24 percent use game consoles and 19 percent use handheld gaming devices to go online. Eighty percent of teens have a gaming console and 51 percent own portable gaming devices.

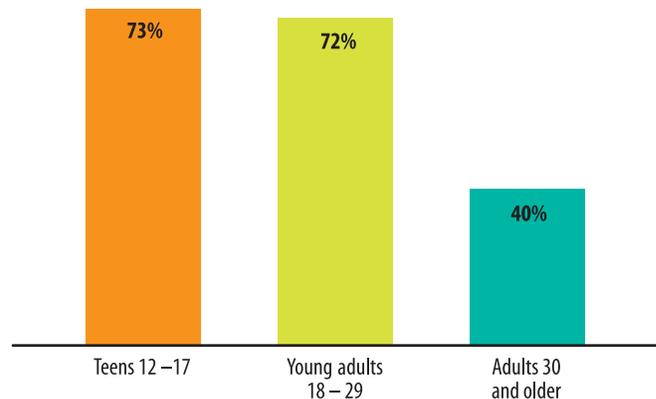
Social networking, cell phones, MP3 players, broadband connectivity and Internet shopping have all been on the rise among teens in recent years. Nearly three-fourths (73 percent) of all wired teens use social networking Web sites, up from 65 percent in 2008 and 55 percent in 2006. Seventy-five percent have a cell phone, up from 45 percent in 2004, with the biggest jump among young teens.

Nearly 80 percent own iPods or MP3 players, up from 51 percent in 2006. Seventy-six percent have broadband Internet access at home, up from 71 percent in 2008 and half in 2004. Almost half (48 percent) buy things online, up from 31 percent in 2000.

If you’re not actively pursuing your presence on Facebook and MySpace, what are you waiting for? If you’re not actively pursuing local e-commerce, why not?

Social Networks Aren’t Important? How Old Are You?

Teens and young adults converge for social networking sites



Pew Internet & American Life Project
September 2009 data

Interestingly, blogging, posting to blogs and sending private messages on social networking sites are on the wane. Fourteen percent of online teens blogged in the latest study, down from 28 percent.

Among social networking teens, 52 percent used their social networks to comment on their friends' blogs, down from 76 percent. The percentage of those who sent messages every day dropped from 42 to 37. Half (50 percent) sent group messages, a decrease from 61 percent, while the percentage of those sending private messages fell from 82 to 66.

It just goes to show that you constantly must keep your finger on the pulse. Things change rapidly. What's hot yesterday isn't hot today. Commit to keeping track of trends and turning on a dime.

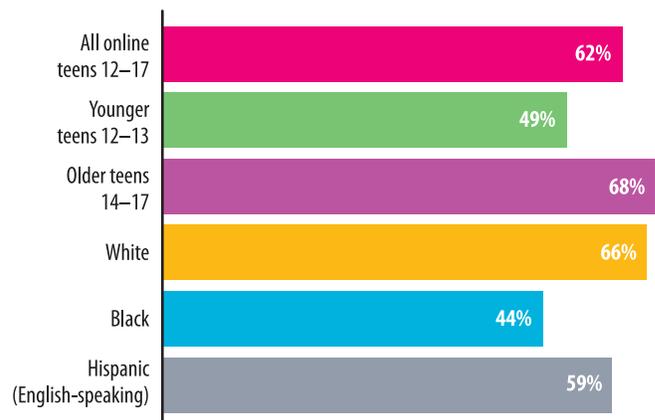
What do teens do online? Unless otherwise noted, what appears here is the percentage of all teens online who reported engaging in an activity. Note that getting news and information stacks up fairly favorably in this study. And despite the buzz surrounding Twitter, it is not much used by teens. Beware, though: This list addresses what people have done, but not how often or how much time they spend doing it:

- ▶ Commenting on friends' pictures on social networks (83 percent of social networking teens);
- ▶ Commenting on friends' pages or walls (86 percent of social networking teens);
- ▶ Sending private messages on social networks (66 percent of social networking teens);
- ▶ Going online to get news about current events and politics (62 percent);
- ▶ Sending Instant Messages or text messages on social networks (58 percent of social networking teens);
- ▶ Buying things online (48 percent);
- ▶ Sharing content (38 percent);

- ▶ Searching for information about health, diet and fitness information (31 percent);
- ▶ Remixing content (21 percent);
- ▶ Blogging (14 percent);
- ▶ Using virtual worlds such as Gaia or Second Life (8 percent);
- ▶ Twittering (8 percent).

Teens Are Getting News Online: Do You Know Where?

Percent of online teens in each group who get news about current events and politics online



*Pew Internet & American Life Project
September 2009 data*

Note the difference between this question and others. This one asks whether they get news online, but doesn't address how much time they spend doing it or where they get their news. Quite often, according to Media Management Center studies, teens get their news from news aggregators, search engines or whatever pops up on the screen when they're doing something else. They don't necessarily go to a particular news provider's site. When they do go someplace specific for news, they often choose the big national sites, not local newspaper sites. How might you reverse this?

Demographic differences and similarities

There was little or no difference in race or ethnicity with respect to ownership of cell phones or MP3 players. White teens are slightly more likely than blacks or Hispanics to go online frequently and to visit Web sites for news and political information.

Younger teens are less likely than older teens to go online, go online frequently, own a computer, use social networks, buy things online and go online for news about current events or Twitter. However, the younger ones are more likely to own

a game console or portable gaming device. Boys are more likely to own a game console or portable gaming devices.

Teens from lower-income families are less likely to own cell phones or computers, buy things online or use Web sites for news or information than teens from wealthier families. Even so, more than half (59 percent) of teens from households with incomes of less than \$30,000 own cell phones. Teens from lower-income households are more likely to use online social networks, keep a blog or go online to seek health information than wealthier teens.

Methodology

The [findings](#) reported here were obtained from a phone survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates International of a representative sampling of 800 teens (ages 12 to 17) and their parents, living in the continental United States. Surveys were conducted in English from June 26 to Sept. 24, 2009. We have not included Pew's findings about research on young adults.

CONCLUSIONS

Reports such as these can help you get into the mindsets and lives of teens, which will help you envision what this very important target audience might need that you might provide.

After you read these findings, ask yourself:

- ▶ What if our company were to decide that it wants to be – even, that it must become – more than a bit player in the lives of young people? That it is not happy to settle for the three to five minutes the average teen now spends on print and online newspapers each day?
- ▶ What if we decided to make a concerted effort to develop new products and campaigns that would give teens more reasons – and more compelling reasons – to fit newspaper-generated products into the eye-popping 458 minutes they spend with various types of media every day?

It will require focusing intently on teens, their lives and their needs while developing multiple products to meet different needs at different times of day on different devices.

To help you envision what you might create that would meet their needs – and even delight them – you will need to get to know them. Bring young people in and talk to them about their day-to-day lives, media habits and needs for news, features, entertainment and commercial information.

- ▶ Watch how they use their phones, social networks and computers, and have them talk with you as they do.
- ▶ Be curious and interested; notice what interests them and what turns them off.
- ▶ Ask for their ideas about what they would love to see; they may not be able to answer this one, but you never know.

Commit yourself to aggressive new product development. The NAA Foundation and NAA have some very helpful publications to assist you with this process, including [“Teens Know What They Want From Online News: Do You?”](#) and [“A New Approach to Product Development.”](#) Keep testing and tweaking and testing and tweaking until you come up with products that really resonate with your teen advisers.

Remember that growth and change bring opportunity. Do not merely look for clues about how to get young people to read what you already do. Look for opportunities in growing areas such as mobile, social networks and online video to develop new products, tailored to their needs and their lives, that build on your newspaper’s strengths. Think about the different times of day they might want news, features or advertising information, and what might make that information the most compelling and convenient for each situation.

You may find that products you develop for teens are also attractive to adult light users, whose media habits and attitudes are similar in many ways to teens – which would be an extra benefit of your work.

fitting into their lives

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About Vivian Vahlberg

Vivian Vahlberg is president of Vahlberg & Associates, a national consulting firm based in the Chicago area. Previously, she was managing director and digital director of the Media Management Center at Northwestern University, and also served as director of journalism programs for the McCormick Tribune Foundation. She is co-author of “Teens Know What They Want From Online News: Do You?” for the NAA Foundation and other major reports on news media as well as on the online habits and preferences of young people.

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