

# Chat Room



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## How Many Are Online?

The mere numbers are staggering. More and more people are turning to the Internet for daily needs. In the past several years, the Internet has seen a boom in usage. This is caused by many factors, which include ease of access, reasonably priced computer systems, and competitive subscription rates to Internet service providers, such as AOL and local Internet companies.

In the last few years, many people have spoken of the Internet being "dead." With all of the downturn in the tech stocks and the vast number of on-line venture disasters, this could easily appear to be true. The number of individuals just beginning to use the Internet, however, is painting a different picture.

### How Many Are On-line?

Just how many people are on-line? Well, before we get too much farther, let's take a global look at the statistics. Although it is extremely hard to get a finite number, the following data, compiled by NUA Internet Surveys give an "educated guess" about how many are on line. This worldwide data was compiled as of August 2001:

- World total—513.41 million
- Africa—4.15 million
- Asia/Pacific—143.99 million
- Europe—154.63 million
- Middle East—4.65 million
- Canada and U.S.—180.68 million
- Latin America—25.33 million

The numbers for the U.S. and Canada have been combined, and although we have a total of 180.68 million, we are closely followed by other parts of the world.

I researched data from several sources, all of which show even more growth ahead for the U.S. marketplace.

### The U.S. On-line Population

A recent study completed by the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) found that nearly three-quarters of the U.S. population is now on line. It found that nearly

72.3 percent of Americans use the Internet, which is a jump from 66.9 percent last year. UCLA also found that the users in the survey spend an average of 9.8 hr on-line per week, up from 9.4 hr per week in 2000. The study points out that the most common reasons for going on line are to find information quickly, for work-related reasons, and to access e-mail.

The Yankee Group released a study showing that 93-percent of PC-owning households in the U.S. have Internet access. Of those 93 percent, 43 percent have been on line for more than three years, 40 percent for between a year and three years, and 83 percent for more a year. Seventy-six percent of home PC owners say their main activity is going on line, 58 percent play games or use other entertainment services, and 30 percent use their computer for organizing personal or household finances.

### What About Small Businesses?

According to CyberAtlas, most small firms in the U.S. are now on line. CyberAtlas reports that two-thirds of all small businesses in the U.S. now have Internet access. This is according to a survey from Dunn & Bradstreet. About 85 percent of small business owners have Internet access. More than half of those also have a website. Of these small firms, 60 percent surveyed planned to use the Internet more in 2001.

These figures can easily translate to our industry. Although we got off to a slow start, the metal finishing industry has shown that it is embracing the Internet for sourcing, research, contacts, purchasing, and communication in the form of e-mail.

### What Does the Future Hold?

We have all seen how slow of a start we had getting on the Internet. But what would we do without it now? Could you live without it? As I am writing this article, there is a struggle over the e-mail services of Excite@Home.com in my hometown of Nashville, TN. There is a courtroom drama brewing over the massive debts of the

company that provides e-mail services to nearly 50,000 Comcast@Home.com customers in middle Tennessee. Ask them if they can go without Internet services. Their complaints have been front-page news lately in local papers.

Another important statistic that shows where we are heading, as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, is that four in five children are now on line. You may be asking, what is the significant factor in this piece of data? Many of you reading this article may not have had access to a computer until your mid-20s or older. I personally know of shops that, until a few years ago, were operating on long-hand ledgers instead of the computer.

The new generation of computer-users is far different than most of us. Many cannot remember a time that a computer was not in their home. In addition, children today are forced, in many ways, to use the Internet for research and communication. Younger generations are much more eager to use the Internet for their daily sourcing and purchasing. This will also effect our industry over time. As more and more young people take positions with established companies in the finishing industry, and as we become a more Internet-friendly community, more effective uses of the Internet will be fine-tuned.

Although many of the ineffective projects and ventures have closed, there are Internet companies that are developing more effective business models to meet the needs of a growing Internet economy. Although the finishing community has been viewed as a little old-fashioned in the way it does business, it is just a matter of time until we completely harness the Internet and what it can do for us. There are Internet companies that understand your needs and are working to help your business grow.

If you have any Internet-related questions or would like to have a particular topic covered in this column, please contact me. **PS&SF**