

Context Matters More Than Ever for Canadians

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In Canada, almost 70% of the population is online in 2009—a higher percentage than in the US. The country also boasts some of the world’s most active Internet users, who spent 42 hours and more online in one month alone.

A survey by [Microsoft Canada](#) and [OTX Research](#), carried out in June and July 2009, aimed to monitor changes in Canadians’ attitudes and actions online since the first “Context Matters” study, commissioned by Microsoft in 2007.

The results revealed a complex behavioral picture. According to the survey, every device, from desktop PC to MP3 player, was used at some point to go online.

“People are connecting via the Internet using more devices than we would automatically assume,” commented Andrew Assad, senior research manager, consumer and online, at Microsoft Canada. “For example, netbooks are really allowing people ‘Internet everywhere,’ beyond what the laptop offered. Game consoles are also providing online access, which opens up another interesting perspective.”

Yet each type of device was used even more often for non-Internet activities. Communication—both online and offline—played a big role in the activity logs for most devices. But respondents also used the Web for other, noncommunication purposes, such as research or playing games.

Ways that Internet Users in Canada Use* Select Consumer Electronics Devices, June-July 2009 (% of time spent with device)

	Use the Internet (non-communication)	Communicate via the Internet	Communicate via built-in capabilities	Use device applications
Desktop PC	25%	15%	28%	32%
Laptop	23%	14%	28%	34%
Netbook	31%	13%	13%	44%
Smartphone	4%	7%	72%	16%
Mobile phone	2%	2%	90%	6%
MP3/MP4 player	5%	4%	5%	87%
Video game console	20%	1%	5%	74%
Video game handheld console	32%	4%	11%	54%

*Note: ages 16-54; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding; read chart as saying that 25% of time spent on desktop PCs was for non-communication Internet use; *on weekdays
Source: Microsoft Canada, "Context Matters II" conducted by OTX Research, provided to eMarketer, October 1, 2009*

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The survey also reported some significant shifts in Canadians' motivations for using the Web.

As in 2007, communication was the main reason for going online, cited by 51% of all respondents. But this motivation was stronger among women than men—a trend also noted consistently by researchers in the US. Moreover, the number of women who mentioned communication as a key driver of Web use had risen 8% since 2007 (among men, the increase was just 1%). Even greater gains were evident in the 16-to-24 age group, where the number going online to communicate had risen 14% in two years.

Entertainment was a much bigger motivating factor in 2009 than in 2007. Web users ages 16 to 24 were a bellwether here too; 29% of respondents in this group said they went online to be entertained—up almost one-quarter since 2007.

E-commerce fell marginally as a reason to go online, probably because the recession has squeezed consumer budgets. Content creation also dropped slightly in popularity. This is somewhat surprising, given the explosion in social networking and widespread press coverage of user-generated content, but more plausible when we consider that this research was conducted in June and July—the best months to enjoy outdoor activities in most regions of Canada.

But the biggest shift was in the status of information as a reason to access the Internet. Except in the 25-to-34 age group, survey respondents said they were now less likely than in 2007 to go online to inform themselves.

Reasons for Going Online According to Internet Users in Canada, by Age, June-July 2009 (% of respondents)

	16-24	25-34	35-54	Total
Communication	47%	48%	54%	51%
Information	22%	26%	26%	25%
Entertainment	29%	17%	22%	22%
Surfing	17%	19%	16%	17%
Transaction	8%	9%	11%	10%
Creation	5%	3%	2%	3%

Source: Microsoft Canada, "Context Matters II" conducted by OTX Research, provided to eMarketer, October 1, 2009

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The essence of these shifts is that consumer motivations have been overlapping in new ways, according to Mr. Assad. “The lines between communication, information and entertainment are blurring,” he said. “Canadian Web users are seeking information via communication and videos much more than they did in 2007.”

What can marketers take from this? Microsoft’s 2007 survey concluded that Web users’ receptivity to advertising could vary significantly with the time of day, their purpose in being online, access location and other factors. The 2009 data make the same point in more detail. When Canadians use the Web, they have clear aims in mind. Advertisers should be aware of consumers’ typical focus on tasks and goals, and use their knowledge of these behavior patterns to deliver their messages in appropriate contexts.

“The Internet is most certainly a way of life and no longer a novelty,” said Mr. Assad. “We are consciously maximizing the efficiency of the time we spend online, given that total Internet time is not changing drastically. As a result, publishers and advertisers have to work harder to get a slice of that time and gain consumers’ attention *without* disrupting their online journeys.”

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