



## Wired Generations

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Prepared for AARP  
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## Introduction

WirthlinWorldwide is pleased to present the findings of the Wired Generations study, conducted for AARP. This study focuses on how the younger generation enables their parents to access the Internet and how having them online has affected their relationship.

## Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to understand how Americans ages 25-44 have helped their parents (older adults) access the Internet. The survey explored the following areas that are important in understanding the role of children in helping older adults access the Internet and other variables that influence this process:

- ◆ Demographics about the respondent and their parents
- ◆ If and how respondents play a role in helping their parents access the Internet
- ◆ How respondents and their parents use the Internet

## Methodology

WirthlinWorldwide conducted a web-based survey from June 13-16, 2003, in conjunction with Greenfield Online, among 534 Americans ages 25-44. All participants were required to have one or more parent or relative, 50 years or older, contacting them for help with the computer or Internet, in order to participate in the study. Additionally, all participants must have a parent or relative, 50 years or older, who accesses the Internet at least every three months.

## Key Findings

The older generation of parents of Americans ages 25-44 are using their computers and going online — and their children are helping them to do so. Moreover, the older generation is turning to their children as the first source for help when they have questions. By having both older and younger generations online, communication and relationships are improving, as parents and children each use the Internet as a way to keep in touch despite busy schedules and long distances.

- ◆ Almost three quarters (71%) of those contacted who reported having a parent with a computer say they provide their parents with computer and technology assistance.
- ◆ Eight out of 10 (78%) of respondents who are contacted by their parents for help report that they are the first place their parents or older relatives turn — with nearly 50% saying they are contacted more than twice a month.
- ◆ Nearly nine out of 10 (87%) respondents aid their parents in finding information on the Internet.
- ◆ Four out of 10 (43%) of the respondent's parents use instant messaging to keep in touch with their children.
- ◆ The majority (84%) of respondents believe that having two generations online has made a positive difference in their lives.
- ◆ Older grandchildren (52% of respondents with kids 18-24 years old and 48% of respondents with kids 11-17 years old) help their grandparents with the computer or Internet

## Detailed Findings

### Two generations use technology to keep in touch

Technology is very well integrated into how respondents and their parents keep in touch with each other. Nearly all respondents and their parents use a computer to keep in touch (97%), most frequently via email (96%). The next highest mentioned methods of keeping in touch through the computer are sending online cards (60%), sharing family pictures (57%), and instant messaging (43%). The two generations are least likely to keep in touch through a family member's Web site (13%), cell phone text messaging (7%), or Web phone/cam (5%).

Younger respondents ages 25-34 are, however, more likely than respondents ages 35-44 to stay connected with their parents through the less frequently mentioned online channels. Specifically, they are more likely to use a family member's Web site (16% vs. 10%), cell phone text messaging (9% vs. 4%), or Web phone/cam (7% vs. 3%).

Not surprisingly, respondents with kids have a greater propensity to keep in touch with their parents by sending family pictures and instant messaging.

As expected, families separated by geographical distance are more likely to keep in touch with each other through the computer. In fact, all of the respondents and parents who live far from each other use a computer to stay connected compared to 95% of families who live in closer proximity. Email, particularly, is more frequently used as a method to stay in touch for families who live far from each other (99% vs. 94%), as are sending online cards (64% vs. 59%) and sharing family pictures (62% vs. 55%).

### Having two generations online makes a positive difference

Eight out of 10 (84%) respondents believe that having two generations online has made a positive difference in their lives. Half (50%) of respondents say that it has been either significantly or somewhat helpful to their relationship. One-third of respondents (34%) say "it has been nice, but has only made a small difference in our lives." The remaining 16% of respondents do not believe that having two generations online has made a positive difference in their lives.

Respondents who indicate that having two generations online has made a positive difference in their lives were asked to explain how the online relationship has made a positive difference. Half (50%) of respondents mention that being online is a convenient way to communicate — specifically that it is an easy and fast way to communicate and share things (21%). As mentioned above, respondents with kids 10 years and younger tend to attribute the positive difference that an online relationship has created to the convenience in sharing pictures — both a time saver and a way to virtually watch grandchildren grow before your eyes.

Additionally, respondents who have parents of retirement age or older are more likely to say that having their parents online creates a more convenient way to communicate compared to those with parents younger than 65 (58% vs. 47%). This might be due to a combination of the older generation being less mobile and able to travel with ease, and the younger generation having busy schedule that do not allow them to visit their parents frequently.

The same notion that a cross-generational online relationship creates convenient communication is true of respondents who live far from their parents compared to respondents who live closer to their parents (57% vs. 46%). More specifically, and not surprisingly, respondents who live far from their parents describe the online relationship as an easy way to keep in touch over long distances (16% vs. 4%), and allows for better and more frequent communications (35% vs. 23%). Respondents who live closer to their parents emphasize an online relationship's ability to not only improve communication between them and their parents, but also bring them together physically over mutual activities. Specifically, respondents who live in closer proximity to their parents tend to believe to a greater extent than those who live further away, that having their parents also online gives them shared experiences and activities (10% vs. 1%) and improves their relationship (7% vs. 3%).

### **Respondents aid parents with computer and technical assistance**

Nearly three-quarters (71%) of respondents say they have assisted their parents specifically in shopping for a computer, giving or buying a computer, setting up a computer, teaching how to use a computer or software, or teaching how to use email or the Web. Most respondents help their parents with more technically advanced requests.

In particular, more respondents who have assisted their parents the aforementioned ways have helped their parents use a computer rather than the initial setup or buying of a computer. Most of the help given to parents involves teaching them how to use a computer or software (78%) or teaching them how to use email or the Web (74%). Slightly fewer respondents (64%) have helped set up their parents' computer. Even fewer respondents (40%) have helped their parents shop for a computer and one-fifth (21%) have given or bought their parents a computer.

Overall, younger respondents ages 25-34 (98%) tend to help their parents with their computer compared to respondents ages 35-44 (93%). Specifically, 25-34 year old respondents are more likely than 35-44 year old respondents to teach their parents how to use a computer or software (82% vs. 74%) or help them set up a computer (69% vs. 58%).

### **Parents contact their children for computer help at least twice a month**

Nearly half (47%) of parents contact respondents for computer help at least twice a month. Approximately one-quarter (28%) of respondents have parents who contact them for help with their computer more than twice a month, 19% are contacted twice a month, 35% are contacted once a month, and 17% are contacted twice a year or less. 85% of 25-34 year olds' parents contact them for help at least once a year compared to 78% of 35-44 year olds' parents.

A greater percentage of respondents without children are generally contacted by their parents for computer help than respondents who have younger children. Specifically, 20% of respondents without children have parents that call them for help twice a year versus 11% of those with children 10 years or younger.

More than half (55%) of parents who live near their children contact them for help at least twice a month compared to less than one-third (30%) of parents who live further away from their children.

### **Parents turn to their children first for computer and Internet-related questions**

Parents regard their children as the first contact in the chain of help when it comes to questions about their computer or the Internet. More than three-quarters (78%) of respondents are the first person that their parents turn to for help about computers or the Internet.

Additionally, a greater proportion of younger respondents ages 25-34 (82%) have parents who first defer to them compared to older respondents ages 35-44 (73%). This might be explained by a greater number of younger parents who use the computer or Internet relative to parents who are of retirement age.

### **Parents get computer and Internet-related help from their older grandchildren**

Given the fact that many grandchildren may be the resident computer expert, older kids play a role in helping their grandparents with their computers or the Internet as well. Half (52%) of respondents with 18-24 year olds and half (48%) of respondents with 11-17 years say their children help their parents compared with one-quarter (26%) of respondents with children under 10.

Because the kids are older, the respondents with kids who help their parents are older. Forty percent of the respondents were 35 years old or older while 21% were 34 years old or younger. Likewise the respondents' parents were older with 46% of respondents with parents 65 years old or older receiving help from the respondents' children compared with 25% for respondents with parents 64 years old or younger.

Proximity is also a driver of the third generations (the respondents' children) helping out. Almost four in 10 (38%) respondents living near their parents compared to 18% of respondents living far from their parents say their kids help their grandchildren.

### **Respondents help their parents find information online**

Nearly nine out of 10 (87%) of respondents help their parents find information on the Internet. Almost half (47%) of parents have had help searching for information related to travel and entertainment (45%). The next group of information respondents' help their parents search for includes healthcare and (36%), books/movies/music (36%), technology/computer hardware or software (32%), and financial information/bills/banking (31%).

The proximity of respondents to their parents appears to determine the type of information they help their parents find. Compared to respondents who live far from their parents, respondents who live closer to their parents tend to help them look for topics related to entertainment (48% vs. 39%), financial information (36% vs. 8%), and housing (8% vs. 3%) — all of which are specific to the parents' location.

Not unlikely, respondents whose parents are 65 years and older (43%) are more likely to receive their child's assistance in searching for information on healthcare and wellness compared to respondents whose parents are younger than 65 (33%).

### **Respondents search the Internet for computer and Internet-related questions**

If faced with a question from their parents about computers or the Internet, more than half (55%) of respondents say they would look to the Internet for the answer. Younger respondents (32%) are also more likely to mention the Internet in general as a source of information than are respondents who are older (23%).

The portion of respondents who would more likely specifically solicit help from their friends are younger respondents ages 25-34 (20%) compared older respondents ages 35-44 (20%). One-fifth of respondents say they would look to a computer manufacturer or store, and 15% mention referring to printed literature, such as books, magazines, and manuals.

### **Parents use popular electronic devices**

All parents use at least one electronic device among a list of 10 that were presented in the survey. Respondents were asked to indicate which of the following devices their parents use: computer, VCR, answering machine, cell phone, scanner, fax machine, digital camera, PDA, Web phone/cam, and MP3 player.

There appears to be a clear distinction between technologies that a greater proportion of parents use versus technologies that a smaller percentage of parents use. The first tier of more popular mass-market devices includes computers (97%), VCRs (93%), answering machines (85%), and cell phones (70%). The second tier of mature technologies decreases dramatically in usage and are used by approximately three out of ten parents — including scanners (34%), fax machines (32%), and digital cameras (29%). A much smaller proportion of parents tend to use the electronic devices that fall into the third tier — PDAs (5%), Web phones/cams (4%), and MP3 players (3%).

There are no significant differences in the proportion of parents that use electronic devices in each of the three tiers who are younger than 65 and those are of retirement age. More technically savvy parents, defined as those who use at least three devices, however, tend to use most of the devices mentioned, except Web phones/cams and MP3 players. Interestingly, there is no significant difference in the proportion of moderate users (use 2 or fewer devices) and the technically savvy parents who use the devices that fall into the third tier (Web phones/cams and MP3 players).

## **Demographics**

### **Length of time using a computer**

Most of the older generation (38%) has been using a personal computer between 3-5 years. Four out of 10 (41%) parents have been using a computer for two years or less and one-fifth of (21%) respondents have been a computer user for six years or longer.

### Frequency of accessing the Internet

Respondents were required to have parents who access the Internet at least every three months. Overall, parents in this study are extremely web-savvy – the majority (81%) of respondents' parents go online at least once a week. Sixteen percent of parents go online at least once a month, and only 4% access the Internet less frequently at least every three months.

### Location/living environment

Two-thirds (67%) of respondents live near their parents – either very near to them (39%) or somewhat near to them (29%). One-third of respondents say they live far from their parents – either somewhat far from them (20%) or very far from them (13%).

### Gender

The majority of respondents are skewed towards women (73%) compared to men (27%). This can be explained by the typically higher proportion of women who are members of an online panel compared to men. Due to specific screening criteria integrated into the study, weighting the data by standard demographics to be representative of the US population was not realistic and would have made the data meaningless.

### Age

Respondents are equally represented across age groups. The average respondent is 34 years old.

Total	
27%	25-29 years old
27%	30-34 years old
23%	35-39 years old
24%	40-44 years old

34 years old Mean

Almost half (49%) of respondents' parents are mostly between 55-64 years old.

Total	
19%	50-54 years old
26%	55-59 years old
23%	60-64 years old
17%	65-69 years old
10%	70-74 years old
6%	75-89 years old

### Ethnicity

The majority (91%) of respondents are Caucasian.

Total	
91%	Caucasian
4%	Asian American/Pacific Islander
2%	Hispanic
1%	African American
1%	American Indian
1%	Other

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