



Blueprints for Economic Development

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Internet Use in Rural Oklahoma

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Americans continue to increase their use of the Internet. According to a report released by the U.S. Department of Commerce, 53.9% of the U.S. population (143 million people) was using the Internet in September 2001 – up from 44.4% in August of 2000. Furthermore, Internet use has grown at a rate of 20% per year since 1998.

Nationwide, there is still a disparity in Internet usage between lower versus higher incomes; however, Internet use was actually found to be growing faster in lower family income brackets according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. With regard to age, Internet use has been increasing across the entire age distribution, although children and young adults remain the heaviest users.

How does Oklahoma compare to the rest of the nation with respect to Internet usage? A recent survey of Oklahoma residents conducted by the Bureau for Social Research at Oklahoma State University investigated the question of Internet usage. The 2002 Oklahoma Social Indicator Survey (OSIS) sampled households selected randomly from all Oklahoma telephone exchanges. A total of 1,214 telephone interviews were completed in September and October 2002. Questions concerning the Internet asked about use of the Internet, access to the Internet at home and at work, and purchasing and sales through the Internet. These questions were funded by the Department of Agricultural Economics at Oklahoma State University. (Other, unrelated questions were funded by other state agencies.)

The data from the OSIS are presented for the state of Oklahoma, but were also available separately for the non-metropolitan counties of the state. This created a perfect opportunity to check on Internet activity in rural Oklahoma and compare it to the rest of the state. Table 1 contains an overview of this data.

Table 1. Internet Activity in Non-Metropolitan Oklahoma

	Non-metro OK	State
Have Used Internet	66.5%	75.3%
Have Home Access	52.8%	63.7%
Have Work Access	50.5%	60.4%
Have Purchased Online*	56.6%	61.1%
Have Sold Online*	7.0%	9.8%

* Includes Internet users only.

Editor's Note

This newsletter provides current information on rural economic development issues facing Oklahoma leaders. The audience includes Cooperative Extension Service staff and others such as city or county officials/employees, chamber of commerce staff/members, and business/community leaders.

Published four times per year, *Blueprints* includes brief articles on rural economic development (for example, success stories or informational articles), a list of publications, videotapes and other educational materials, and announcements for future conferences and meetings. Suggestions for articles and announcements are welcome.

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As shown by Table 1, 75.3% of residents statewide reported that they have used the Internet, and 66.5% of rural Oklahomans report that they have used the Internet. This figure seems relatively high when compared to the Department of Commerce's figure of 53.9% for the U.S. just one year ago. Part of the reason for the disparity is that Internet use is growing so quickly that even a one-year lag in data makes a difference. Another reason may be due to the nature of the survey. Telephone surveys are inherently biased because they necessarily sample only those households with telephones. It is reasonable to assume that those households without a telephone would be less likely to use the Internet.

Some of the other findings from the survey include the following.

- Rural Oklahomans with higher annual incomes are more likely to use the Internet. This effect diminishes after an annual income of \$75,000 is reached.
- Young adults aged 18-34 are the heaviest Internet users, while adults over the age of 65 are the least likely to engage in Internet activity.

- Statewide, respondents with children at home were more likely to engage in Internet activity.
- Similar to nationwide trends, rural Oklahomans with higher levels of education attainment have higher rates of Internet activity.

For more information about economic development efforts in rural Oklahoma, visit the Rural Development website of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service at Oklahoma State University: www.rd.okstate.edu.

Please send your comments to Blueprints for Economic Development; 514 Agricultural Hall; Oklahoma State University; Stillwater, OK, 74078-0505. Phone (405) 744-9837. E-mail: mdwoods@okstate.edu.



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