

Technology In Our Lives

Digital Lifestyle Keeps Us In Touch ㊦

(NAPSA)—Not long ago, some experts predicted the Internet would break down communities, as computer users spent more time in their own virtual worlds and less time interacting with real people. Turns out they were wrong, as technologies such as e-mail and instant messaging have in fact helped bring people closer. According to a recent study from UCLA, 44 percent of Americans say the Internet has increased or greatly increased contact with friends and family.

“Instant messaging helps bring people, young and old, together to have fun and communicate in a comfortable social setting,” said Amy Jo Kim, author and an architect of online communities. “Young people especially rely on IM and e-mail to define and reinforce their identities and meet like-minded kids. Services like MSN Messenger allow them to chat and play games, such as Billiards and Chess, with friends across the country.”

Many college students have been using the Internet since elementary school and can't imagine life without computers and cell-phones. “It'd be unthinkable,” said Clint Creasy, a 19-year-old student at New York University. “All my songs and all my digital pictures are stored on my PC. And I'd be totally out of the loop without e-mail and IM.”

“Young people can already claim to be living a digital lifestyle, keeping all their ‘digital memories,’ such as pictures, e-mails and music, stored on their computers,” said Amy Jo Kim. “Technology for them is a major social force. If you're a young person and you're not online regularly, you wind up missing out on a lot of things.” Young people fill much of their downtime in front of a computer screen, spending four more hours online per week than they do watching television.

But it's not just kids that are taking advantage of technology. Baby boomers are now getting in on the act, too. They are among the biggest users of digital cameras, often taking pictures and sharing them online. And free e-mail and IM services, such as MSN Hotmail (hotmail.com), the world's largest e-mail service with 170 million users, and MSN Messenger (messenger.msn.com), which handles 2.5 billion messages a day, have replaced handwritten letters as the boomer's chief way to stay in touch with children and grandchildren across the country.

Young or old, digital technology is an invaluable communication and relationship-building medium that is becoming a bigger and bigger part of people's everyday lives.