

## Poll: 'IM-ing' divides teens, adults

By Will Lester, Associated Press Writer | December 7, 2006

WASHINGTON -- Teenager Michelle Rome can't imagine life without instant messaging. Baby boomer Steve Wilson doesn't care that it even exists. They're part of an "instant messaging gap" between teens and adults. And the division is wide, says an AP-AOL survey on how Americans use or snub those Internet bursts of gossip, happy date-making and teen tragedies that young people exchange by the hour while supposedly doing homework.

Rome, 17, a high school senior in Morristown, N.J., spends more than two hours each day sending and receiving more than 100 instant messages -- or "IM-ing."

"I use it to ask questions about homework, make plans with people, keep up with my best friend in Texas and my sister in Connecticut," she said. "It has all the advantages."

The 51-year-old Wilson, a mechanic in Kutztown, Pa., prefers using e-mail and the telephone.

Instant messaging "is the worst of both worlds," he said. "It manages to combine all the things I don't like about each. I'm more or less a dinosaur. I use the Internet for things like buying car parts, reading celebrity gossip."

Almost half of teens, 48 percent of those ages 13-18, use instant messaging, according to the poll. That's more than twice the percentage of adults who use it.

According to the AP-AOL poll:

-- Almost three-fourths of adults who do use instant messages still communicate with e-mail more often. Almost three-fourths of teens send instant messages more than e-mail.

-- More than half of the teens who use instant messages send more than 25 a day, and one in five send more than 100. Three-fourths of adult users send fewer than 25 instant messages a day.

-- Teen users (30 percent) are almost twice as likely as adults (17 percent) to say they can't imagine life without instant messaging.

-- When keeping up with a friend who is far away, teens are most likely to use instant messaging, while adults turn first to e-mail.

-- About a fifth of teen IM users have used IM to ask for or accept a date. Almost that many, 16 percent, have used it to break up with someone.

The bug can be contagious at any age.

Faith Laichter, a 50-year old elementary school teacher from Las Vegas, says she started using instant messaging after watching her children.

"I do it more now," she said, boasting: "Sometimes I do two conversations at once."

That's nothing for young people who check their e-mail, download music and perform other tasks at the same time.

"It's kind of remarkable to watch," said Steve Jones, a professor of communications at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "They can keep half a dozen conversations or more going at the same time."

But that can be more of a distraction than an accomplishment, says Naomi Baron, a linguistics professor at American University.

"If you have 15 conversations going simultaneously," she said, "sometimes you're just throwing things out there and then dashing off to the next customer."

A bow to the traditional: When sharing serious or confidential news, both teens and adults prefer to use the telephone, the poll said.

The survey of 1,013 adults and 500 teens was conducted online by Knowledge Networks from Nov. 30-Dec. 4. The margin of sampling error for the adults was plus or minus 4 percentage points, 5.5 points for teens.

Technology for instant messaging has been available to the general public for about a decade. Time Warner Inc.'s

AOL, Yahoo Inc. and Microsoft Corp.'s MSN are the major IM operators.

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