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SOCIAL NETWORKING, BLOGS AND GAMING SITES CLICK WITH CANADIANS: SURVEY

TORONTO, June 11, 2007 – The popularity of social networking and blogging among Canadian Internet users is not limited to teens and young adults, as a new poll by TNS Canadian Facts suggests that a sizeable number of middle-aged surfers are frequenting these types of Web sites.

The poll found that online teens and young adults are the heaviest users of social networking sites, with 83% of 13-17 year olds and 74% of 18-29 year olds having visited at least one such site. Not surprisingly, older people are less likely to have spent any time on sites such as Facebook and MySpace, but the incidence is still quite high among middle-aged and older online Canadians. Six in 10 people in their 30s have visited at least one social networking site and 45% of those in their 40s have done so. Among those 50 years and older, one-third claim to have visited such a site.

“Considering that sites like Facebook and MySpace did not even exist five years ago, the fact that over half of online Canadians (53%) claim to have visited social networking sites is staggering,” said Jennifer Bylok, research director at TNS Canadian Facts and author of the survey.

“Gone are the days of letter-writing and long phone calls. Today, people are posting and broadcasting the minutiae of their their daily lives, keeping friends and colleagues probably more up-to-date than they would like to be.”

The TNS Canadian Facts poll surveyed 1,627 Canadian Internet users 13 years and older about their online behaviours, including social networking, blogging and gaming. The most important reasons for having profiles on social networking sites include: staying in touch/communicating with friends, re-establishing old contacts, and for entertainment purposes.

But some online Canadians are less open to posting profiles on Facebook, MySpace and other similar sites. Approximately four in 10 (44%) claim the reason they do not use social networking sites is because they would rather keep in touch with friends and loved ones by other technological means. Among those 50 years and over, two-thirds (67%) mention this as a reason for not using such “tell-all” sites. Other explanations given by Internet users for avoiding social networking sites include: not feeling safe using them (18%), friends do not use them (17%), and the perception that social networking sites are “stupid” and not worth taking part in (16%).

Although awareness levels for MySpace are higher (86%) than they are for Facebook (71%) among those who visit social networking sites, Facebook has more dedicated users. Four in 10 (42%) who are aware of Facebook have profiles on the site and visit it regularly. By contrast, just 16% who are aware of MySpace have profiles on that site and go there frequently.

While less interactive, blogs also are a key communication tool. Half (50%) of online Canadians use blogs, with teens and young adults between 18 and 29 the most likely to access them (73% and 64%, respectively). The most popular types of blogs are focused on entertainment/gossip, technology, and sites dedicated to specific hobbies. Less popular blogging topics include politics, fashion, and sports.

Despite a keenness to visit blogs, very few people surveyed say that they have their own web log (10%). Not surprisingly, teens are the most likely to post topics in a blog format (31%). Despite most online Canadians not having blogs of their own, they are not hesitant to post comments on the blogs of others: two-thirds claim to have posted a comment, and while this activity does decline with age, the majority of older online Canadians (50 years and over) who read blogs also comment on them (55%).

The poll found that only about one-third (36%) of online Canadians claim to play online games, with online poker and “live” first-person shooter games being the most popular. Second Life, a virtual world game that has received quite a bit of attention by the media, appears to be mostly “hype”: only 2% of online Canadians claim to have created avatars in Second Life and explored the site’s 3-D virtual world.

“Canadians are increasingly using and depending on the Internet not only for information, but also for entertainment and keeping in contact with friends and family. Currently, however, the Internet appears to have its limits, with respondents far less willing to have a fully virtual life, as evidenced by the extremely low usage and interest in sites like Second Life. All this suggests that companies had better be prepared to address the new expectations from consumers, and grandma should probably get a profile on Facebook,” Bylok observed.

The nationally representative online survey of 1,627 Canadian Internet users 13 years and older was conducted between April 30 and May 5, 2007. Respondents were randomly selected from the TNS Canadian Facts Internet access panel comprising 110,000 Canadian adults and teens who have agreed to participate in survey research from time to time.

TNS Canadian Facts (www.tns-cf.com) is one of Canada's most prestigious full-service marketing, opinion and social research organizations.

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