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How Americans use instant messaging

53 million adults trade instant messages and 24% of them swap IMs more frequently than email. IM also gains a following in U.S. workplaces

September 1, 2004

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Including new data about instant messaging from comScore Media Metrix

Summary of Findings

53 million American adults use instant messaging and its appeal is especially apparent among young adults and technology enthusiasts.

Recent Pew Internet & American Life surveys reveal that more than four in ten online Americans instant message (IM). About 11 million of them IM at work and they are becoming fond of its capacity to encourage productivity and interoffice cooperation. At the same time, IM usage varies widely across different age groups. Instant messengers utilize IM not only as a way to expand and remain connected their social circle, but also as a form of self-expression.

■ 42% of internet users—more than 53 million American adults—report using instant messaging. There has been modest growth in the overall IM population since the Project first started tracking it in April 2000. At that point, about 41 million adults used IM, so the growth rate of the IM population is around 29%.

■ On a typical day, 12% of internet users (or 29% of those who use IM) instant message with others. That translates into just under 13 million people using IM on any given day and constitutes a growth rate of about 9% since April 2000.

Note: These figures were obtained from the Pew Internet & American Life Project's May-June 2004 Tracking Survey. The remaining figures contained in this report come from the February 2004 Tracking Survey.

Although most IM users still use email more frequently than IM, a significant number are turning to IM more often than they do email.

Although most internet users favor email over IM as a form of communication, nearly a quarter of IM users say they instant message more than they email:

■ 24% of those 54 million IM users report using IM more frequently than email and 6% of IM users say they use IM as much as they use email.

■ 70% report using email more than instant messaging.

■ 36% of IM users say they use IM every day and 63% say they use IM at least several times a week.

IM is moving into the American workplace.

Some 21% of IM users, or approximately 11 million American adults, use instant messaging at work. At the same time, 77% of IM users use their instant messaging programs at home.

- 32% of college graduates who instant message use IM at work.

- 34% of Americans who IM and make more than $75,000 per year instant message from their offices.

- 28% of IM-ers who have more than six years of internet experience report using IM in the workplace.

- A quarter of daily internet users log onto IM at work.

Is IM a distraction at work that keeps people away from their tasks? When asked who they contact most often during IM sessions at work, 40% of at-work IM users indicated they generally instant message coworkers, 33% reported friends and family, and 21% interact with both groups equally.

At-work IM users report feeling positively about how instant messaging improves workflow and the quality of the work-day. But some think that the use of IM encourages gossip, distracts them, or even adds stress to the workplace.

Asked their overall judgment about the role of IM at work, 11% of IM-at-work users say they couldn't live without it, 68% say it is a mixed blessing, but mostly positive, 4% say it is a mixed blessed, but mostly negative, and 10% say they wish they could do away with it.

- 40% of those who use IM at work think it has improved teamwork. Of the remaining users, 15% think IM has contributed minimally to teamwork, while 41% feel it hasn't at all.

- 50% of those who use IM at work believe it helps them save time on tasks. About a quarter (26%) claim IM has made no impact on saving time.

- 47% of those who use IM at work report that IM has regularly provided moments of relief from the daily work grind.

- 32% say IM at work encourages gossip; 29% say is has been distracting, and 11% say it has added stress to their lives.

comScore Media Metrix data from July shows that AOL instant message service leads among users.

In July, this is how the IM universe broke down, according to comScore Media Metrix measurements:

■ AOL Instant Message (the proprietary service to AOL subscribers) was used by 37% of those who traded IMs during the month. On a typical day during the month more than 5.7 million IM-ers were using this application.

■ Yahoo! Messenger was used by 33% of those who traded IMs during the month. This was the single most popular service used at work and the average user of the application spent 423 minutes using the application during the month – the highest total among the applications.

■ AOL Instant Messenger (AIM Service) was used by 31% of those who traded IMs during the month. This application had the greatest reach among college students and on any given day there were nearly 6 million people using the application, making it the most popular application on a typical day.

■ MSN Messenger Applications were used by 25% of those who traded IMs during the month.

■ ICQ was used by 6% of those who traded IMs during the month.

■ PalTalk was used by 1% of those who traded IMs during the month.

■ Trillian was used by 1% of those who traded IMs during the month.

IM use differs markedly among age groups. Most notably, younger Internet users employ IM in greater numbers and more ardently than older generations.

Within the instant messaging Gen Y (18-27 years) age group, 46% report using IM more frequently than email. In contrast, only 18% of Gen X-ers (28-39 years) instant message more often than emailing. In older generations the percentage is even smaller.

■ 21% of IM-ers in each of the Gen Y and Gen X age groups log onto IM several times a day, followed by 17% of Trailing Boomers (40-49), 15% of Leading Boomers (50-59), 10% of Matures (60-68), and a mere 9% of the After Work (69 and older) age group.

■ 35%, or the largest portion of those who IM for about an hour are Gen Y-ers. In contrast, the greatest percentage of instant messengers who IM for less than 15 minutes consist of Trailing Boomers (26%).

The July figures from comScore also show that women as a group spend significantly more time online than men. During the month, the average woman IM user spent 433 minutes trading instant messages and the average man spent 366 minutes. In addition, the figures indicated that those living in lower income households were more ardent users of

IM than those in upscale homes. That was also the case for households with children in them. They were more active users of IM than those that had no children.

IM-ers are multi-taskers.

A majority of IM users say they do other things on their computer and online at the same time they are participating in IM sessions.

- 32% of IM users say they do something else on their computer such as browsing the web or playing games *virtually every time* they are instant messaging and another 29% are doing something else some of the time they are IM-ing.

- 20% of IM users say they do something else off their computer such as talk on the phone or watch television *virtually every time* they are instant messaging and another 30% say they do other things offline at least some of the time they are IM-ing.

Instant messengers often utilize special features to enhance their ability to communicate and stay connected with other IM users. Yet, they do not spend a great deal of time using the exclusionary features, such as blocking and removing buddies.

About 45% of IM users – close to 24 million people – post "away" messages on their IM programs that allow those who access their accounts to get information about where they are, what they are doing, or read a message of some kind, such as an amusing quotation. In addition, 34% of IM users have created profiles that others can see.

- Of those IM users who post away messages, 63% have used the standard messages provided by their IM program, while 45% of away message users post a specific message about what they are doing or why they are away.

- 54% of IM users say they remove people from their buddy list from time to time, but that does not happen very often. Some 37% do it less often than "once every few months" and many IM users (44%) say they never remove anyone from their buddy list.

- In contrast, 74% of IM users say they add someone to their buddy list at least every once in a while. Some 34% of IM users say they add a buddy less often than "once every few months."

- Of those who have created IM profiles, 42% have posted inspirational or funny quotes, 33% have posted their contact information such as phone numbers or email addresses, 18% link to interesting or funny web sites, 12% link to personal photos, and 9% post important personal news.

In addition to chatter, IM users are becoming fond of the other features IM programs offer.

- 31% of IM users report using IM to send links to friends and colleagues about articles or web sites.

- 30% of IM users pass along photos or documents to other IM buddies.

- 14% use IM to link buddies to streamed web content or videos.

- 5% use IM to share music or video files.

Below are some other key findings.

- The IM universe of most users is very modest: 66% of IM users say they regularly IM between one and five people. Only 9% of IM users say they regularly IM more than 10 people.

- 15% of IM users say they use a wireless device such as a phone or wireless laptop to send and receive IM messages.

- 17% of IM users use different screen names to contact different groups of friends or colleagues.

- 24% of IM users say they have IM-ed a person who was in the same location as they were – such as their home, an office, or a classroom.

- 51% of IM users say they have received an unsolicited IM from someone they didn't know.

How Americans Use Instant Messaging: Summary of Findings at a Glance
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IM is moving into the American workplace.
At-work IM users report feeling positively about how instant messaging improves workflow and the quality of the work-day. But some think use of IM encourages gossip, distracts them, or even adds stress to the workplace.
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Instant messengers often utilize IM programs' special features to enhance their ability to communicate and stay connected with other IM users. Yet, they do not spend a great deal of time using the exclusionary features, such as blocking and removing buddies.
In addition to chatter, IM users are becoming fond of the other features IM programs offer.
The IM universe of most users is modest; some use wireless connections for IM-ing; notable numbers have IM-ed people in the same location as they are (such as their home or classroom); and half have received unsolicited IMs.
Source: Shiu, Eulynn, and Amanda Lenhart. *How Americans Use Internet Messaging.* Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project, August 31, 2004.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Part 1: Introduction

The basics of instant messaging

How IM works.

Generally, instant messaging is a text-based tool that allows users to conduct conversations online by exchanging short messages in near synchronicity over the internet. Instant messaging, often abbreviated IM, allows users to know which other users are online and connected via a particular instant messaging program, (a feature known as presence), and depending on the system in use, gives details about others buddies' availability.

IM software programs offer a number of features for users. Buddy lists, or contact lists, and away messages are the most common functions provided by all programs. Other special features include customizable backgrounds, environments, emoticons (symbols that convey the mood of an IM sender), and avatars (images created by the user as a representation of himself that are displayed while the user instant messages with others).
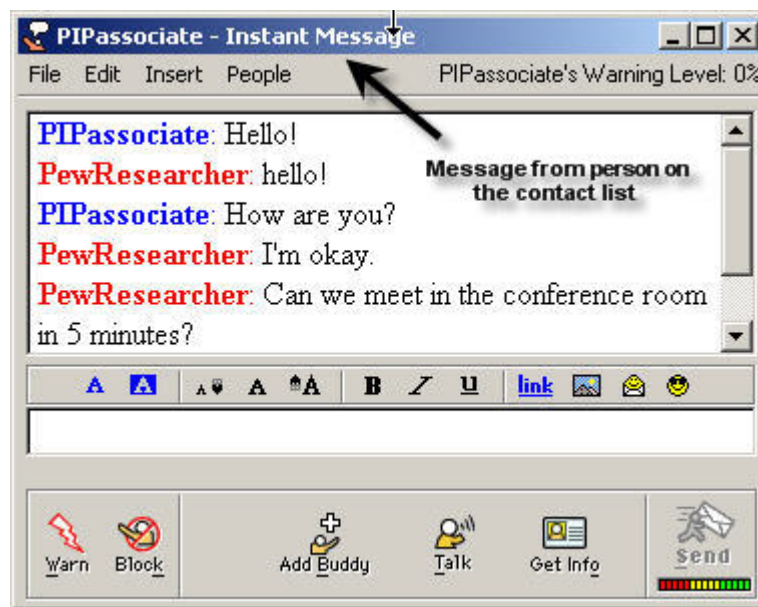
The most popular IM software programs such as AIM, Yahoo! Messenger, and MSN Messenger are mutually exclusive, meaning that users subscribing to a particular IM program can communicate only with instant messengers who use the same software. Contact lists, therefore, are limited to only those users who IM on the same network. In recent years, software developers have created IM programs, such as Trillian, Odigo, and Omni, that facilitate open instant messaging. Subscribers to open instant messaging programs can combine contact lists from different IM programs and communicate with all users.
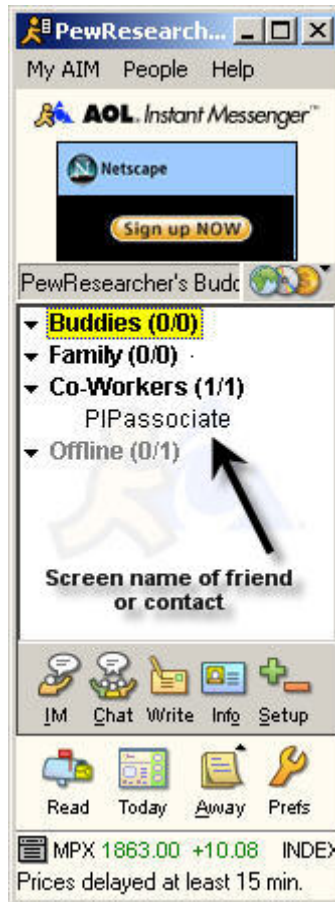
Originally devised as a way for users to hold real-time conversations online, instant messaging software programs have expanded their repertoire to include file-sharing, playing games, streaming audio and video, avatar management, and sending text messages to cell phones.

Who uses IM.

The Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking Survey of May-June 2004 finds that 42% of internet users have ever instant messaged. Of these 53 million American adults, 12% use IM on a typical day.[1]

Online men and women use IM in equal proportion. Just over a third of each group have IM-ed. This is consistent with previous readings of IM use among genders.

In general, younger Americans tend to be the biggest IM-ers. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of Generation Y (18-27 year olds) internet users have sent instant messages, and 20% do it on a typical day. This reading is confirmed by other patterns found in a survey the Project conducted in February 2004. Americans with less than a high school degree compared to those with more education use IM in greatest proportion (64%). Although this pattern is directly opposite typical readings about internet application adoption and education, it confirms the findings that more young Americans, including students still in college, are using instant messaging.

While employment status and salary level are factors influencing whether people use the internet or not, the February 2004 survey data reveals that among internet users, people from households with modest incomes find IM appealing. Nearly half (49%) of the internet users with a household income of less than $30,000 use IM. Again, this is probably tied to age, as young adults starting their work lives do not necessarily earn high incomes.

Frequent internet users are likely IM-ers. Forty-three percent of internet users who go online daily have instant messaged. At the same time, years of internet experience seems to have little bearing on likelihood of IM-ing. This is a break with the pattern that Project surveys show in many other internet activities. Usually, experience is a strong predictor of whether someone does something online – including buying goods, listening to music, seeking information from government web sites, and banking online.

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[1] These figures were obtained from the May-June 2004 Tracking Survey. The remaining figures contained in this report come from the February 2004 Tracking Survey.

Who uses instant messaging

The IM population is dominated by young adults and suburbanites. High percentages of minorities and those living in households with modest incomes also trade instant messages. The percentages in the right column do not at times add up to 100 because of rounding

	The percent of internet users in each group who are IM users (e.g. 42% of online men are IM users)	The proportion of the IM population each group makes up (e.g. 50% of all IM-ers are men)
Men	42%	50%
Women	42%	50
Race/ethnicity		
Whites	41%	73%
Blacks	44	8
Hispanics	52	9
Other	40	10
Age		
Gen Y (ages 18-27)	62%	31%
Gen X (ages 28-39)	37	28
Trailing Boomers (ages 40-49)	33	20
Leading Boomers (ages 50-58)	29	12
Matures (ages 59-68)	25	7
After Work (age 69+)	29	3
Household income		
Less than $30,000	53%	31%
$30,000-$50,000	42	24
$50,000-$75,000	36	19
$75,000 +	39	27
Educational attainment		
Did not graduate from HS	49%	8%
High school grad	44	31
Some college	48	32
College degree +	34	29
Community type		
Urban	45%	30%
Suburban	42	49
Rural	40	21
Type of internet connection at home		
Broadband	46%	41%
Dialup	39	59

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking Survey, May-June 2004. N=1399. Margin of error is ±3%.

comScore Media Metrix data show the most popular applications.

AOL is a strong presence in the IM world, with its instant message service for subscribers and its free AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) and ICQ programs adding up to a dominant market presence, according to the most recent comScore data. At work places, Yahoo! Messenger is the single most popular application.

During a summer month, when most students are not at school, half of college students used IM applications.

July data on IM users and the most popular applications								
	All Locations		Home		Work		University	
	Unique Visitors (000)	% reach among internet users	Unique Visitors (000)	% reach	Unique Visitors (000)	% reach	Unique Visitors (000)	% reach
Unduplicated Total	**67,921**	**43.3**	**53,360**	**38.8**	**14,391**	**28.9**	**5,754**	**49.2**
AOL Instant Message (proprietary service)	25,090	16.0	21,236	15.5	3,171	6.4	1,888	16.1
Yahoo! Messenger	22,135	14.1	17,564	12.8	4,582	9.2	1,338	11.4
AOL Instant Messenger (AiM service)	21,363	13.6	16,600	12.1	4,234	8.5	2,491	21.3
MSN Messenger Applications	17,167	10.9	13,307	9.7	4,132	8.3	1,361	11.6
ICQ	3,956	2.5	2,311	1.7	1,449	2.9	658	5.6
PalTalk	624	0.4	490	0.4	142	0.3	21	0.2
Trillian	404	0.3	239	0.2	133	0.3	52	0.4
Source: comScore Media Metrix measurements in July 2004.								

There is notable variance among the users of different IM applications about the amount of time they spend online and the volume of IM-ers who use the applications on a typical day. Those who use Yahoo! Messenger spent more time during the month on IM – 423.7 minutes – than those who use other services. This might be the case because these IM users are the most likely to have an instant message application running while they are at work.

The people who use MSN Messenger are the least likely to be online and the spent the least amount of time with the application running on their computers during the month.

Use of instant messenger applications				
	Total Unique Users (000)	% reach among Internet users	Average minutes per visitor per month	Average Daily Users (000)
AOL Instant Message (proprietary service)	25,090	16.0	279.8	5,715
Yahoo! Messenger	22,135	14.1	423.7	5,218
AOL Instant Messenger (AiM service)	21,363	13.6	388.7	5,956
MSN Messenger Applications	17,167	10.9	217.1	3,865
Source: comScore Media Metrix measurements in July 2004.				

Part 2. Patterns of IM use

What IM users do online

Americans use IM and its many special features for a variety of purposes in their lives. In addition to conducting conversations, IM users post profiles and add people to buddy lists to expand their social circles. IM users also take advantage of features such away messages to not only make themselves perpetually accessible to their buddies, but as a form of personal expression as well. The following discussion is based on analysis of the 511 adult internet users in our sample who use instant messaging.

Frequent short-lived home use dominates IM sessions.

Home use of IM dominates the adult internet user experience. Seventy-seven percent of IM users in our February 2004 survey reported using instant messaging at home. In contrast, 21% of Instant Message users report using IM at work, and 7% report using it at school. Wireless is also becoming more of a factor in location of IM use—15% of instant message users report using IM on a wireless device like a web-connected phone or laptop computer.

Let's Keep In Touch *Most instant messengers report IM-ing with between 1 and 5 other instant message users on a regular bases*	
IMs with. . . .	Percentage
1-2 people	32%
3-5	34
6-10	10
More than 10	9

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking Survey, February 2004. Margin of error is ±5%.

In response to the question, how often do you log onto instant messaging, 36% of IM users said they login once a day or more frequently. Twenty-seven percent login a few times a week and 37% use IM less often.

In a typical session, IM users generally spend just a few minutes instant messaging. Forty-seven percent of IM users say they actively IM for 15 minutes or less during their usual IM sessions; another 26% IM between 15 minutes to an hour on an average session. The remaining IM users (22%) are the hardcore users who actively send and receive IMs for more than an hour during their sessions on a typical day.

Many create online identities through IM.

IM users also take advantage of the features in some IM programs, most notably AIM and ICQ (owned by AOL), to reach out to others beyond their immediate acquaintance. A third of IM users (34%) have posted a profile for their IM screen name that others not on their buddy list can see. Other instant messengers using the same IM program can conduct random searches, locate an individual, and contact them.

These profiles have included information like contact information (such as email addresses or phone numbers), important personal news, inspirational quotes or funny sayings, links to interesting or compelling web sites, and links to personal photos at online photo web sites.

Funny quotes or other sayings are the most popular form of profile content, with 42% of profile creators including them in their online space. Contact information is also included by a third of profile holders. Fewer profile creators have links to interesting or funny web sites (18%) or links to personal photos hosted on other public sites (12%). An even smaller number (9%) of profiles include important personal news.

In addition to establishing an online persona through a personal profile associated with a particular IM user name, other IM users simply create multiple screen names used to communicate with different people from different parts of their lives. 17% of instant messaging users use different instant messaging handles for school, work and personal use.

How people use contact lists.

A contact list, a.k.a. buddy list, is an instant messaging feature that allows the IM user to see who among his self-selected set of "buddies" is online and who is not. The list owner creates a file of other IM users with whom he or she would like to communicate. Unless other privacy features are installed, a user will always be able to track his buddy's presence, and vice versa.

Buddy list management doesn't generally take much of a user's time. Most users add or remove someone from their list only once every few months, or less often. 22% of IM users add someone to their buddy list every few months, and 34% do it less often.

Only 9% of instant messengers remove someone from their contact list every few months—more (37%) do it less often and most users (44%) say they never remove anyone from their contact list.

The blocking feature available on most IM software programs allows an IM user to control who can see and communicate with them. The user can "block" other buddies or any other unrecognized members from detecting their presence online.

Most IM users do not take advantage of the blocking feature. 78% of instant messengers report that they block someone less than every few months or never.

IM-ers embrace new uses for away messages.

Instant message buddy lists allows other users in your IM network to know when you are on the network or not. But because many users may remain logged into the network, but not actually physically in front of their computers (or able to answer their wireless devices), many users have begun to take advantage of the "away" message function available on some instant messaging programs. The away message function allows users to post either a pre-set or customized message to tell other contacts where they are, something about themselves, or any other short message. Around 18% of adult IM-ers post away messages every day or almost everyday. More than a third of this group are full-time or part-time students.

Among these fervent users of away messages, the messages they post don't always contain information about their whereabouts. Research by Naomi Baron at American University outlined a number of categories of overt purposes for away message use by college students. In some cases, the messages are simply conveying "I'm Away," but other messages are intend to initiate contact or help plan a social event, to send messages to particular other people, to convey personal information about the message poster or to entertain others who might be reading them. [2]

Recent Pew Internet Project data supports Baron's findings. Of those IM users who post away messages, 63% have used the standard messages provided by their IM program, while 45% of away message users post a specific message about what they are doing or why they are away. It is important to note that some programs do not allow for customization of away messages, confining their users to 6 or 7 options.

Twenty-one percent of IM users post a quote or a thought for the day in their away message, and 12 percent use it to switch communication media by posting a phone number where they can be reached.

It should be noted that a little more than half (53%) of all instant message users never use the away message function. Most users of the away message feature generally almost never or never use it (14% use less than every few months, 53% say they never use it), or they use it all the time (18% say everyday or almost everyday.)

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[2] Baron, N. et al. (2003) "Tethered or Mobile?: Use of Away Messages in Instant messaging by American College Students"

Other uses of IM

IM is more than a forum for dialogue. Users enhance the interactive experience of IM by transmitting files in real-time, allowing others to experience "instant" gratification.

Not just for chatting anymore	
Based on IM Users	*Percentage*
Include links to interesting or funny articles or web sites	31%
Send photos or documents	30
Use streaming audio or video to hear or see people you IM	14
Send music or video files	5

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking Survey, February 2004. Margin of error is ±5%.

How users experience unsolicited IMs and SPIM, and the protective measures they take.

Half of all IM users (51%) have received an unsolicited instant message from someone they did not know. A little bit less than half (47%) of IM users have used the IM program to block someone from sending them instant messages. And just over half of IM users (54%) have ever removed a buddy from their buddy list. Users have tools they can employ to protect themselves. Most instant messaging programs allow users to set up different levels of security from allowing any Instant message through, to pop up windows announcing the IM of someone not on a buddy list, to exclusive, or "white list" settings, that only allow instant messages from people already loaded into the buddy list of recipient.

Part 3. The IM gap

How different people use IM

Generation Y is the leading edge.

February 2004 survey results indicate that 62% of Gen Y internet users have ever used IM. This figure is significantly higher than any proportion of internet users in other generations. By contrast, the next largest group of instant messengers fall within the Gen X category at 37%. However, older Americans log on to IM in substantial numbers, too.

Percent of each age group that IMs	
Based on internet users	
Gen Y (ages 18-27, born 1977 or later)	62%
Gen X (ages 28-39, born 1965-1976)	37
Trailing Boomers (ages 40-49, born 1946-1964)	33
Leading Boomers (ages 50-58, born 1946-1963)	29
Matures (ages 59-68, born 1936-1945)	25
After Work (age 69+, born 1935 or earlier)	29

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking Survey, February 2004. Margin of error is ±5%.

Although most instant messengers still use email more frequently than IM, the disparity between email and IM use varies greatly between generations.

Of those who rely on instant messaging more often than email, Gen Yers lead the pack at 57%, compared to 16% of Gen Xers, 18% of Trailing Boomers, 18% of Leading Boomers, and less than 1% of the Matures and After Work populations.

Meanwhile, of those who email more than instant message, Gen Yers come in third at 19%, behind Gen Xers and Trailing Boomers (both 24%).

Email vs. IM *Which do you use most frequently?*			
	The percent of internet users in each generation who use IM	*Percent of IM users who use IM more than email*	*Percent of IM users who use email more than IM*
Gen Y	62%	57%	19%
Gen X	37	16	24
Trailing Boomers	33	18	24
Leading Boomers	29	7	16
Matures	25	<1	7
After Work	29	<1	5

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking Survey, February 2004. Margin of error is ±5%.

Younger generations tend to stay on IM longer once they have logged on.

In the February 2004 survey, Pew Internet found that among the different generations of Americans, there are no major differences in frequency of logging onto instant messenger programs. However, once logged on, younger IM-ers are more likely than their older counterparts to instant message for longer periods of time, which perhaps may be explained by the great numbers of peers in this cohort who also use IM, suggesting that there simply may be more people for those in this age group to talk to over IM.

Time spent logged on to IM *Time spent actively sending and receiving instant messages on a typical day using IM*		
	Less than 15 min	*About an hour*
Gen Y	19%	35%
Gen X	23	22
Trailing Boomers	26	29
Leading Boomers	18	8
Matures	<1	<1
After Work	3	<1

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking Survey, February, 2004. Margin of error is ±5%.

Wired Gen Y and Gen Xers use IM more robustly than other online Americans.

Gen Y instant messengers manage their buddy lists much more actively than other IM users. Fourteen percent of Gen Y-ers add someone new to their buddy list at least once a week, an activity that 2% or less of every other generation engages in. Gen Y-ers are also more likely to engage in several separate IM conversations at the same time. Nearly a third (29%) do so everyday – a percentage that is more than double the next highest proportion.

Gen Y-ers who use IM are also more likely to take advantage of the away message feature, posting messages daily and employing them as canvases for creative self-expression. Gen Y-ers are least likely to use the standard away messages provided by IM software programs, opting instead to creating their own messages. Finally, Gen X and Gen Y-ers are more likely than older Americans to multitask by carrying out other computer-related tasks or non-computer activities, such as talking on the phone or watching television.

Gen Y and Gen X are the most zealous practitioners of alternative IM activities.

In the February 2004, Pew Internet asked IM users if they ever used IM to carry out five other tasks. Y and X generation IM-ers reported doing so in greatest numbers.

Younger Americans Utilize Alternative IM Functions						
Percentage of IM users						
	Gen Y	*Gen X*	*Trailing Boomers*	*Leading Boomers*	*Matures*	*After Work*
Include a link to an interesting or funny article or website	35%	41%	24%	18%	21%	18%
Send photos or documents	39	29	23	26	21	23
Use streaming audio or video to hear or see the people you instant message	21	12	12	12	14	5
Send music or video files	11	14	<1	<1	<1	<1

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking Survey, February 2004. Margin of error is ±5%.

Part 4. IM at work

Instant messaging has become a familiar reality in some offices

21% of instant message users use IM at their job.

In recent years, the use of IM programs has gained popularity in the workplace. Twenty-one percent of IM users, or approximately 11 million American adults, say they instant message at work. This is the first time Pew Internet has probed more deeply into people's behavior and attitudes toward IM at work.[3] Individuals who report instant messaging at work also say their IM use adds to productivity.

Among all IM users, men use IM at work in significantly larger numbers than women. Twenty-six percent of instant messaging men use IM at work, while only 15% of their female counterparts engage in similar activity. This reading reflects a higher percentage of men than women in our sample that are employed full-time.

Survey results indicate at-work IM users are better educated and live in households with higher levels of income: 32% of the Internet users who have a college degree or higher use IM at work.

Individuals who use the internet more frequently and have more experience with the Web are more likely to IM at work. Twenty-eight percent of survey respondents who have 6 or more years of internet experience use IM at work, followed by 16% who have accessed the internet within the last 4 to 5 years. By contrast, 7% of those who have been online for 2-3 years instant message in the office, and 12% of those with a year or less of internet experience use IM at their desks. A quarter of all American adults who use the internet daily report using IM at work. Those with broadband connections are also more likely to use IM at work.

The "buddies" of work-based IM users.

Instant messengers use IM at work to communicate with both coworkers and personal family and friends.

- 40% indicated they generally instant message coworkers.

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[3] The figures in this section are based on individuals who use IM at work. Margin of error is plus or minus 10 points, based on sample size, n = 111.

Part 4. Instant messaging has become a familiar reality in some offices

■ 33% reported instant messaging with friends and family.

■ 21% responded that they IM with both groups equally.

For at-work IM-ers who use email more frequently than IM, it appears that instant messaging is reserved for work purposes. Among IM-ers who use email more frequently than IM, 49% use IM at work to keep in touch with coworkers. In contrast, of IM-ers who instant message more frequently than email, only 20% use IM at work to converse with coworkers.

IM improves quality of workday, without detracting from workflow.

At-work IM users report that instant messaging improves their productivity. Forty percent of these individuals feel IM has improved teamwork. Of the remaining users, 15% think IM has contributed minimally to teamwork, while 41% feel it hasn't at all. Among those reporting a lot of improvement, over half (53%) spend more than an hour on IM.

Half of at-work instant messengers (50%) believe IM saves "some" to "a lot" of time. Meanwhile, only about a quarter (26%) claim IM has made no impact on saving time. IM users are not distracted by the application. A few (9%) find IM distracting and even fewer (5%) feel additional stress because of IM.

At the same time, some IM users concede it can be a distraction. Thirty-two percent believe IM encourages gossip. In contrast 49% believe IM does not encourage gossip at all and 15% IM sessions contribute to gossip only a little. Nearly half (47%) of instant messengers report that IM has provided some or even a lot of moments of relief during the workday. Fewer people (26%) find only a little relief, and 23% indicate experiencing none at all.

Generally people who use IM at work feel positively about it. Sixty-eight percent think that although it may be a mixed blessing, instant messaging is positive, and 11% insist they couldn't live without it. The number of people with positive attitudes toward IM remains relatively high across gender, race, age, education, and income.

Part 5. Other Uses of IM

Other ways people use IM

Americans incorporate IM into their repertoire of interpersonal communication.

IM serves as an additional mode of communication for individuals in the same location. Nearly a quarter (24%) of IM users report that they have instant messaged someone in a physically close location, such as a home, office, or classroom. The silent aspect of using IM is especially appealing for individuals who wish to communicate secretively. When asked how frequently they set-up group conversations on IM, 87% of instant messengers say they do so only once every few months or less often. IM remains a way for two people to converse, while chatting occurs in other venues.

According to the February 2004 survey, male IM-ers are more likely than female to send an IM to someone in the same location (29% vs. 19%). This is particularly striking given that online women and men report using IM in roughly equal proportion.

IM-ers are high multi-taskers.

IM users perform multiple tasks on the computer when they instant message. When asked if they do other things on the computer or the internet at the same time they are instant messaging, 32% of adult IM users report that they multitask all the time; 29% admit they to doing this some of the time.

Gen Y-ers are the most avid multi-taskers, but a substantial number of older IM-ers divert their attention to other computer-related tasks, as well. Forty-nine percent of the Y generation report conducting other computer-related business every time or almost every time they IM. The next highest group of individuals are Gen X-ers, at 32%. For older generations, the percentage of each age cohort is even smaller.

Fewer IM users conduct non-computer-related activities, such as talking on the phone or watching TV while IM-ing—20% engage in other activities all the time and 30% some of the time.

Younger IM-ers perform other tasks while instant messaging

Percentage of IM users	Total Users	Gen Y	Gen X	Trailing Boomers	Leading Boomers	Matures	After Work
Do other things on the computer or internet, such play games for browse the internet							
Every time or almost every time	32%	49%	32%	25%	20%	<1%	10%
Just some of the time	29	28	33	33	17	27	32
Never	38	23	33	41	62	67	58
Do other things NOT on the computer or internet, such as talk on the phone or watch TV							
Every time or almost every time	20%	31%	17%	15%	10%	10%	10%
Just some of the time	30	36	37	26	17	15	11
Never	49	34	46	56	71	69	75

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking Survey, February 2004. Margin of error is ±5%.

IM and wireless devices

A number of IM users (15%) have instant messaged using a wireless device, such as a cell phone, PDA, or wirelessly enabled laptop. At the same time, 17% of all internet users have logged online using a wireless device.

Not surprisingly, among all instant messengers a greater number of online Gen Y-ers (25%) than members of any other age group have IM-ed wirelessly.

Frequent IM-ers are more likely to have IM-ed wirelessly than occasional instant messengers. IM-ers who log onto the internet daily and IM for longer periods of time are more likely than those who do so less frequently to have IM-ed via a wireless connection. Daily IM-ers (22%) and those who instant message several times a week (20%) have IM-ed wirelessly. A fifth of IM-ers who have spent 15 minutes to an hour logged onto IM have instant messaged using a wireless device, and a quarter of IM-ers who have spent more than an hour online have chatted with others wirelessly.

Some 27% of IM-ers who use IM more often than email say that they have instant messaged using a wireless device. Fewer (12%) individuals who use email more frequently than IM have instant messaged using a wireless device.

As reported earlier, online Americans making less than $30,000 are more likely to have ever IM-ed. However, among instant messaging adults, those earning more than $75,000 per year are more likely to have IM-ed wirelessly (34%).

Methodology

This report is based on the findings of a daily tracking survey on Americans' use of the internet. The results in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates between February 3 to March 1, 2004, among a sample of 2,204 adults, 18 and older. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 2 percentage points. For results based internet users (n=1,371), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys may introduce some error or bias into the findings of opinion polls. Additionally, some data for this report came from a tracking survey conducted between May 14 to June 17, 2004 for a sample of 2,200 adults, 18 and older. Results based on the total sample are reported at 95% confidence an error of plus or minus 2 percentage points. For results based internet users (n=1,339), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

The sample for this survey is a random digit sample of telephone numbers selected from telephone exchanges in the continental United States. The random digit aspect of the sample is used to avoid "listing" bias and provides representation of both listed and unlisted numbers (including not-yet-listed numbers). The design of the sample achieves this representation by random generation of the last two digits of telephone numbers selected on the basis of their area code, telephone exchange, and bank number.

New sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. Additionally, the sample was released in replicates to make sure that the telephone numbers called are distributed appropriately across regions of the country. At least 10 attempts were made to complete an interview at every household in the sample. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Interview refusals were recontacted at least once in order to try again to complete an interview. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day. The final response rate was 32.2%.

Non-response in telephone interviews produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population, and these subgroups are likely to vary also on questions of substantive interest. In order to compensate for these known biases, the sample data are weighted in analysis. The demographic weighting parameters are derived from a special analysis of the most recently available Census Bureau's 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (March 2003). This analysis produces population parameters for the demographic characteristics of adults age 18 or older, living in households that contain a telephone. These parameters are then compared with the sample characteristics to construct sample

weights. The weights are derived using an iterative technique that simultaneously balances the distribution of all weighting parameters.

For details about the methodology employed by comScore Media Metrix please review the material at: http://www.comscore.com/method/.