Beyond Access: Engaging Citizens in the Information Society

Dr. Catherine Middleton
Canada Research Chair
(Communication Technologies in the Information Society)
Ted Rogers School of Information Technology Management, Ryerson University

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Tackling Ontario’s Digital Challenge
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Tackling Ontario’s Digital Challenge

Two key points:
• Access is not enough
• Access may not be what you think it is
Accessing the Information Society

• The vision:
  – Promotion of economic and social development through the deployment of broadband technologies
  – All sectors of Ontario society will participate in the ‘digital economy’ and the ‘information society’

• Basic requirement:
  – Development of broadband infrastructures for use by all citizens

• Infrastructure development is a necessary but not sufficient condition to enable participation in the information society
Understanding the Terrain

• The information society is experienced at many levels
• People engage with a digital economy in many ways:
  – Government use of information and communication technologies
  – Online delivery of public services
  – Provision of electronic services to communities
  – Proxy access to the internet and services
  – Individual access to the Internet and information services
Progress to Date

2006 data from the CRTC:

• 70% of all Canadian households subscribe to the Internet
• 86% of Internet subscribers have a broadband connection
• So far, so good...?
Multiple Digital Divides

- ‘Dual’ digital divide:
  - lack of basic access for certain segments of society
  - not interested
- Technology divides
  - connection speeds, availability of service (e.g. choice)
- Capacity divides
  - literacy and skill levels of users
- Engagement divides
  - intensity and scope of usage
What does ‘Broadband’ Mean?
Types of Broadband Connections in Canadian Households

How do we Compare?
Types of Broadband Connections in Canadian Households

In Japan and Korea:
$40 USD or less per month for > 50 mbps service
How do Canadians use the Internet?

- **Intensity of use:**
  - high intensity users are online daily, and for more than 5 hours per week
  - almost 60% of Internet users are low intensity users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly or less</th>
<th>Daily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≥ 5 hours</td>
<td>4.3% Infrequent, high hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5 hours</td>
<td>30.3% Occasional users - Low intensity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Intensity of Use by Age/Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Low Intensity</th>
<th>High Intensity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 - 24</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
<td>64.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 - 34</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 - 44</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 - 54</td>
<td>66.1%</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 - 64</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 +</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Male vs Female

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intensity</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Intensity</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Intensity</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Scope of Internet Usage/# Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>91.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General browsing</td>
<td>84.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather/road condition</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel information</td>
<td>63.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View news sports</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for health information</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic banking</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay bills</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for Canada government information</td>
<td>52.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scope of Usage</th>
<th>Low Hours</th>
<th>High Hours</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low (1-7 activities)</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (8-11)</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (≥12)</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>52.7%</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
So, what about ‘Engagement’?

• Does Internet access = Internet engagement?
• How can engagement be assessed?
• What are the implications of low intensity, and limited scope, of Internet usage?
  – Have you heard (or made?) this argument?: “the data is old and the ‘problem’ will solve itself with time”
  – the lowest intensity group is aged 45-54
Who are the Participants in the Information Society?

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base.
Engagement, Intensity and Web 2.0

• Blogs, Wikis, MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, RSS, Twitter, Ning, Chumby, Nabaztag

• There is a huge challenge here, to bridge the gap (social/technical) between ‘digital natives’ and ‘the rest of us’

• The technology gap will be persistent (remember when you could run technological circles around your elders?)
What Role does Broadband Play?

• It’s just the beginning, one starting point on a path toward an information society/digital economy

• Access to broadband infrastructure is important
  – Infrastructure should be developed in the public interest (e.g. affordable, choice in providers, unrestricted usage, reliable, high quality, ubiquitous
What Else is Access About?

• Access to information and services, independent of technologies, locations, ability to pay, skill levels etc.
  – Mobility, choice of access devices
  – Use of cellular technologies (SMS/txt msg anyone?)
  – F2F

• 2005 data indicate ~2.2 billion mobile phone users worldwide compared to .97 billion Internet users

• High speed ‘pipes’ to fixed locations and ubiquitous mobile access
Key Issues to Consider in Building a Digital Economy

- Access and capacity building are just the beginning
- Access is more than broadband connectivity to homes, it’s about information connectivity to people
- There will always be generational differences in capacity to use/interest in/engagement with information and communication technologies
- Citizens must embrace the Information Society to achieve the anticipated benefits