

# What Do They Search For?

By June Campbell

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Do you know what and how people search when online? If you're operating an online business, this is important information. Understanding search habits and online behaviors helps you strategize your marketing campaigns.

Pew Internet Project has released a new study (summer 2002) describing what people do online. (<http://www.pewinternet.org/>)

The researchers found that searching for information is big -- second only to using email. Fully eighty percent of Americans who are on the Internet have used a search engine to find information. Twenty-five percent (that's thirty-three million) use a search engine on a daily basis.

Men are more likely than women to use a search engine on a given day. 33% of men and 25% of women reported using a search engine on a specified day.

College grads are more likely to use a search engine than high school grads. 39% of Internet users with three or more years under their belts use a search engine on a given day, while only 14% of those online for less than six months use the searches on a given day.

Google is the most used search engine in terms of minutes searched. It's currently at 25.9 minutes and gaining. However, MSN has the most number of users. It recorded 43 million unique users in May of 2002, compared to Google's 36 million. Yahoo had 38 million unique visitors during that month.

Information searches fell into four main categories: information about people, health, government and religion.

People searches leaned towards the personal (66.6%), more than the professional (33.3%). College grads were more likely to do people searches than high school grads, and younger people (18-29) were more likely to do people searches than older people (50-64).

Seventy-three million Americans looked for health information... up from 52 million in fall of 2000. Women are more likely than men to look for health information, but are likely to be turned off by sites that are selling something, or by sites that do not provide the date and source of their information. 81% started their search at a search engine or at a web portal like Yahoo, AOL or MSN. The others started at a health information site.

45% started at the top of the search list and worked their way down. The rest clicked through according to recognized names or relevant content descriptions.

82% reported satisfaction with the health information they found.  
One in three say they know someone who has been helped by Internet health information. Two out of 100 know someone who has been harmed.

Most searched for health information pertains to specific diseases, weight control, and prescription drug information. Inquiries are increasing for mental health information and for sensitive medical topics.

Sixty-eight million Americans reported using government agency web sites -- a dramatic increase from 40 million in the March of 2000. 40% started their search at a major search engine or web site such as AOL or MSN. Most scanned the search link for names that seemed to fit. Only 21% visited sites according to rank.

28 million Americans (up from 19 million in late 2000) use the search engines to find religious or spiritual information or contacts. Only 4% started their search at religious portals.

Other statistics of interest to marketers:

95% of Internet-using Americans go online to use email.

80% do searches

80% look for hobby-related information

37% play games online

75% go online to research a product or service before making a purchase

63% look for information about movies, books and entertainment

44% look for financial information

20% participate in auctions

9% visit dating web sites

5% go online to gamble

Only 21% of Americans (twenty-four million people) have broadband Internet access in their homes. However, this number is four times greater than in 2000. The broadband users are more likely to be wealthy, educated males. Not surprisingly, persons with high speed access make fuller use of the Internet's resources than those with dial up connections.

There you have it. Lots of numbers to help you develop your marketing plans or to incorporate in your business plan.

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