

Proficient levels of skill are critical for Australians to be able to maximise the benefits of the internet. More formal and continuing education for online users could also raise awareness of e-security and address knowledge gaps about the appropriate measures that can be implemented to mitigate online risks.



Internet skills maximise benefits and minimise risks

ACMA's latest research report looks into internet users' levels of trust and confidence in the internet.

The findings of *Australia in the Digital Economy Report 1: Trust and Confidence* show that Australians overwhelmingly value the internet and see it as critical to their daily lives; however, internet users are either taking no measures or only limited measures to ensure their online security.

The report suggests that this lack of action can be linked to a high reliance by internet users on informal methods of training and gaining knowledge about the internet. It may also affect users' awareness of available technical measures to protect home computers from online risks.

'These concerns do not currently form a barrier to participation in the online environment, as evidenced by the increasing numbers of people using the internet for a wide range of activities, including e-commerce and social networking,' said Chris Chapman, ACMA Chair.

Other key findings from the report include:

- Nearly 30 per cent of Australian internet users trust the internet as a valued source of information.
- Installing anti-virus and firewall programs on computers remain the two most common protective measures for home internet users, at 49 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively.
- Although parents engage in monitoring and filtering behaviours, the majority (79 per cent) place trust in their children and believe their child is careful with the type of information they give out about themselves online.

- Fifty-four per cent of frequent internet users (who used the internet 8 or more times in the last week) installed anti-virus and/or firewall software on their home computer, compared with 29 per cent of infrequent users (who used the internet less than once in the last week), showing a relationship between risk mitigation and frequency of use.
- Just over 68 per cent of internet users professed to be self-taught. Less than 18 per cent of internet users received formal training.
- Eighty-one per cent of internet users perceived their internet skills to be average or above average. Only 45 per cent of those who assessed their online skills as being very much above average had anti-virus software installed on their computer.

Proficient skills are critical for Australians to maximise the benefits of the internet. They are also fundamental in ensuring that Australians are able to guard against online threats by setting in place appropriate technological or behavioural measures. However, although many Australian internet users consider themselves

to have average or above average internet skills and have concerns about online security, they are not proactive in protecting themselves online.

Australians also have concerns about keeping up with the pace of technological change. This may also affect users' awareness of available technical measures to protect home computers from online risks.

'While more than 80 per cent of Australian internet users consider themselves to have average or above average internet skills, these survey results highlight the need for more formal and continuing education for online users. Such education could also raise awareness of e-security and address knowledge gaps about the appropriate measures that can be implemented to mitigate online risks,' Mr Chapman said.

Australia in the Digital Economy Report 1: Trust and Confidence is available on the ACMA website www.acma.gov.au (go to About ACMA: Publications & Research > Research > Australia in the Digital Economy: Research report series).

