



Australian adults and the digital world

A significant minority of adult Australians are missing out on the benefits of new digital media, in particular the internet, due to a lack of skills, low individual motivation and economic circumstances, according to an ACMA report released in October.

'This is a challenge because without the necessary skills and motivation, this group of adult Australians will be left behind as digital media becomes increasingly integrated into everyday social, cultural and economic life,' said Chris Chapman, Chairman of the ACMA.

The report, *Adult digital media literacy needs*, was commissioned to assist the ACMA to understand the attitudes that lie behind the non-use or limited use of digital media, specifically the internet and the mobile phone. The research comprised group discussions and in-depth telephone interviews with adult non- and limited users of digital media in metropolitan, regional and remote areas of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.

According to a consumer survey conducted by the ACMA in April 2009, 17 per cent of Australians aged 18 plus have never used the internet. The proportion of those not having used the internet is higher among older Australians, regional Australians and lower income households.

'A common characteristic of non-users of digital media and communications is that they have never been required to use technology on a day-to-day basis,' Mr Chapman said. 'For example, they might be working outdoors, on the go, in a job that does not involve use of a computer, a stay-at-home parent or a retiree. Not having had the chance to be exposed and experiment online, these people have limited understanding of how the internet works, the commonplace language and terminology, and the ability to transfer skills across applications.'


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For many non- and limited users, using new digital media was regarded as a challenge that would involve a complete overhaul and change of lifestyle. As long as they have an alternative to using digital media, this group is likely to use that method either out of habit, convenience and/or fear.

One of the keys to motivating people to increase their digital media literacy is communicating the possible benefits of using digital media.

The research makes it clear there is not a one-size fits all approach to increasing skills and participation, with communication and education needs linked to individual attitudes and circumstances.

The report findings will inform development of policies and programs across the states and Commonwealth to build digital media literacy and will assist the ACMA in its provision of consumer advice and protection measures in the areas of cybersafety and e-security. 

The report is available on the ACMA's website at www.acma.gov.au (go to For the public: Consumer & community advice > Digital media literacy > The ACMA digital media literacy resources).

The ACMA's involvement in digital media literacy research

Digital media literacy is understood as 'the ability to confidently use, participate in and understand digital media and services'. Media literacy has been a topic of interest among education providers for years, and became an interest for media and communications regulators as digital technologies became mainstream and started to have an impact on the use of traditional media and communications.

Digital media literacy is identified as one of the measures of a successful digital economy in the Government's *Australia's Digital Economy: Future Directions* paper.

The ACMA undertakes a range of activities that support and promote digital media literacy, including consumer education on e-security and cybersafety. The ACMA has been engaged in digital media literacy research since 2007.

The two major objectives of this research are to:

- > provide an evidence base for understanding levels and nature of digital media literacy of the Australian population
- > foster a community of interest around digital media literacy.

Further information about the ACMA's digital media literacy activities is available on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au/medialiteracy.