

**Media Release**  
**Wednesday 19 December 2007**

## **NEW ZEALANDERS MORE SOCIABLE THROUGH INTERNET**

New Zealanders are becoming more sociable with family and friends as a result of the Internet, according to the findings of a new nationwide survey.

Director of AUT's Institute of Culture, Discourse and Communication (ICDC) Professor Allan Bell led the study into New Zealanders' use of the Internet. Today's release of the first World Internet Project New Zealand (WIP NZ) survey highlights how we are changing as a nation as a result of the Internet, he says.

"Most people believe that the Internet is enhancing their contacts rather than diminishing them," says Professor Bell.

Sixty-four percent of survey participants who used the Internet say it has increased their amount of contact with friends while 58% report an increase with family members.

"There is also strong participation in social activities through the Internet such as networking websites like Facebook, Bebo and MySpace," Professor Bell says.

In contrast to this however, 22% say that since starting to use the Internet they spend less time interacting face to face with family they live with, although the amount of such time with friends has stayed the same.

More than 1500 New Zealanders around the country participated in the survey conducted by Phoenix Research in September and October this year. The questionnaire targeted areas such as people's online buying habits, e-commerce, e-democracy, education, identity, socialising and content creation on the web. The results will contribute to an international collaborative project, the World Internet Project, which investigates the social, political and economic impact of the Internet in nearly 30 countries.

Professor Bell says that the survey indicates that digital divides still exist when it comes to new communications technology in New Zealand.

"Internet access, usage, capability and attitudes are all strongly graded by New Zealanders' age, income and area of residence. The younger, wealthier, and more urban people are, the more connected and confident they are," he says.

Results show that the higher a household's combined income the more important the Internet was rated in daily life. Twice as many Asians (77%) as Maori (39%) rate the importance of the Internet highly.

Professor Bell says the survey shows that the Internet rates higher as an information source than traditional media and had even surpassed other people as a source of information – traditionally our main source.

Over half of all respondents (55%) and 66% of Internet users say the Internet is important or very important to their everyday life and 61% say it would be a problem if they lost access to the Internet.

The World Internet Project originated in the United States in 2000 and New Zealand joined the project in 2006 to assess the effects of the technology on New Zealand society.

Professor Bell says the value of tracking the trends should not be underestimated.

“With the rapid diffusion of Internet use in New Zealand it is likely that we are all affected by it in some way – whether we actually use it or not,” he says. “The survey data will provide information to assist in decision making and planning for communities, businesses and government policy.”

Further research based on the data will be carried out next year to investigate detail behind the statistics which will enable greater interpretation and explanation of the findings.

The World Internet Project New Zealand is principally funded under the New Zealand Government’s Digital Strategy through the National Library of New Zealand. Additional funding is provided by the non-profit organisation InternetNZ, which advocates for improved Internet access for New Zealanders.

For further information about the World Internet Project see:

[www.wipnz.aut.ac.nz](http://www.wipnz.aut.ac.nz)

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