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Statistical Brief

The Growing Use of Computers

It's now been nearly ten years since the introduction of the small personal computer. In that time, computers have become an established part of the daily lives of many people — at home, at work, and at school. By the fall of 1989, nearly 1 in 3 persons age 3 and above used a computer.

This brief examines computer use by adults and by children age 3 to 17 in 1989. It also takes a look at the dramatic rise in computer use that has taken place since 1984. The data used in this brief come from the October 1989 Current Population Survey (CPS) and are compared to similar data collected in the October 1984 CPS.

Computer ownership and use have risen substantially.

More of us own computers. Nearly twice as many households had computers in 1989 as in 1984: 15 versus 8 percent. Use has increased dramatically too. Forty-six percent of children used a computer at home or in school, up from 30 percent in 1984. Adult use at home, work, or school, while still lower than children's use, has also increased — from 18 to 28 percent.

Many children who don't have a computer at home use one at school.

While 24 percent of children had access to a home computer, 46 percent used one at school. Several factors influenced children's access to a computer:

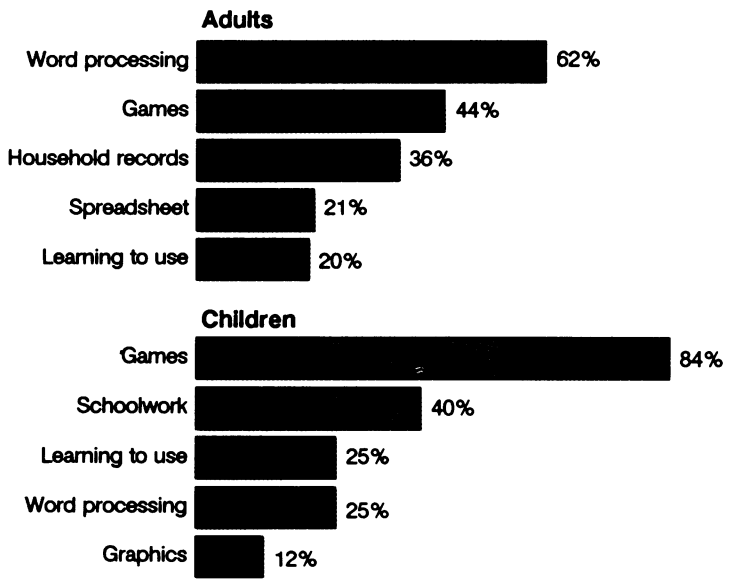
- Income: Both home access and school use rose with income (see chart on back).
- Education of householder: Home access and school use also increased with the householder's educational level. Children whose parents were college graduates were the most likely to have a home computer (49 percent) and to use one at school (52 percent).
- Race: Whites were more likely than Blacks both to have a computer at home (27 percent versus 11 percent) and to use one at school (48 percent versus 35 percent).

Overall, about 1 in 6 adults has a home computer.

The same factors increased the likelihood of adults having a home computer: income, edu-

Games and Word Processing Are Popular Uses Of Home Computers

Most common applications of home computers — percent who use a computer for these applications: 1989



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cation, and race all make a difference.

In addition, people in certain age groups are more likely to have a computer at home. Home access is highest for 35–44 year olds (27 percent) and lowest for those 65 and over (5 percent). Finally, having children helps too. About 26 percent of households with school-age children had home computers.

More than 1 in 3 adults uses a computer at work.

Computer use has spread throughout the workforce. Of the 116 million employed adults, 37 percent used a computer at work in 1989, up from 25 percent in 1984. The more education workers have, the more likely they are to use a computer: 58 percent of college-educated persons used a computer versus 29 percent of those with only a high school diploma.

Persons in managerial and professional positions (56 percent) and technical and administrative positions (55 percent) were the most likely to use computers. Among industries, computer use was most common in finance, insurance, and real estate, where 2 in 3 workers used them.

In the workplace, women use computers more than men.

Largely because they were more concentrated in occupations where computer use is high, women used a computer at work more than men: 43 percent versus 32 percent. For instance, 44 percent of employed women work in technical, sales, and administrative support jobs; only 20 percent of men do. This category includes positions such as sales clerks, secretaries, and administrative clerical workers.

For more information:

See
Computer Use in the United States: 1989, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 171.

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