

## Online pulse: How connected are we?

The use of the internet in Lebanon and information on the evolution of the Lebanese community of users on the Web is scarce. According to the Minister of Economy and Trade, in the year 2000 there were around 17 Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in the country with a total subscription base of 150,000 paying rates ranging from \$10 to \$19 for unlimited internet access.

While no accurate data is available regarding internet users (not only subscribers), in the year 2001 they were estimated to be in the region of 300,000 (See **Graph 1** for the development of internet use in Arab countries).

Methodology and characteristics of the sample

*Information International* conducted a two-part poll in December 2002, with the first section designed to obtain information about users and how they access and utilize the internet. The second segment, which will be presented in the next issue of *li Monthly* explores the type of information users want, how they perceive its value and issues of online privacy.

A sample of 600 people in the Greater Beirut area was surveyed with female respondents representing 47.2% of the sample, while males made up 52.8%.

In terms of age distribution, the sample was geared toward the youth, with those aged between 18-44 representing 93.5% of the sample. A further breakdown shows that 26% of respondents belonged to the 18-22 year age group, with 38.2% between 23-28, 17.8% between 29-34, 11.5% between 35-44, while 6.5% of respondents were above the age of 45.

Home computers

Almost 61% of respondents confirmed that they have a computer at home. Most (94.2%) had only one computer while the other 5.8% owned two computers.

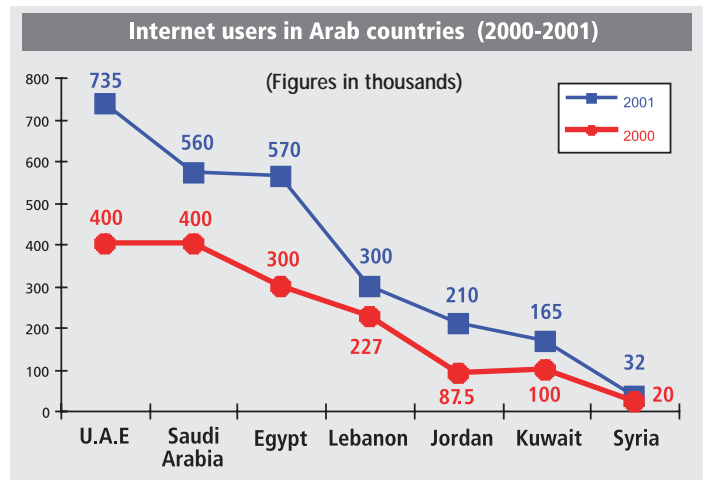
The poll also shows that the majority (35.6%) of households share a computer with two members of the household, while 28.6% share with three members, 14% have four members using the computer and 5.2% share with more than four people. Meanwhile, 16.8% of respondents have a computer for their sole use.

Internet use

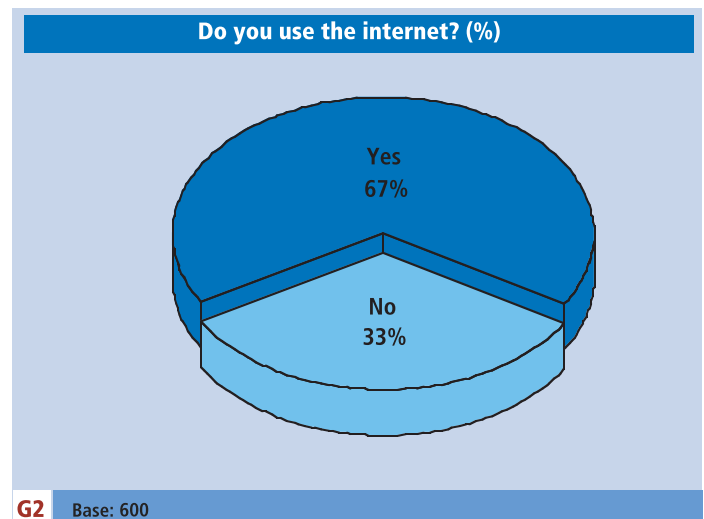
While 67% of those polled are internet users (See **Graph 2**), around 12% of them embraced the internet over four years ago, compared with half who have become familiar with the internet in the last one to three years. A further 25% have only been using the internet for the last 6 -12 months, while 13% were introduced to the internet less than six months ago. The percentage of internet users who also own a computer is illustrated in **Graph 3**.

User profile

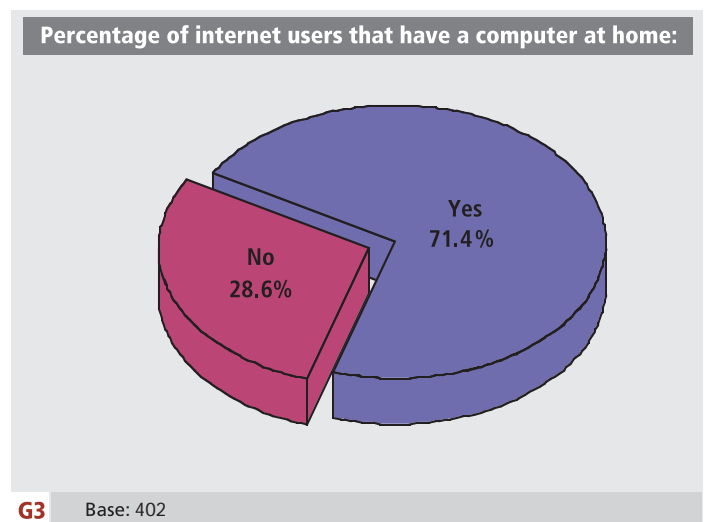
**Graph 4** shows internet users' age distribution, revealing the highest rates of internet penetration in the younger age brackets and vice versa. The poll also revealed almost equal rates of



G1



G2 Base: 600



G3 Base: 402

internet penetration in terms of gender, with 67.5% for females and 66.6% for males. The educational level of internet users was determined to be relevant, with the majority possessing a Bachelor's or Master's degree. The next category of users had a secondary education, followed by those with vocational degrees and intermediate schooling.

The poll also revealed that most users access the internet from specialized internet cafes, as shown in [Graph 5](#), followed by home access. Most users (56.2%) pay for their own access, while 23.7% have their parents pay on their behalf. Another 14.3% replied that their place of employment covers the cost of access and 3.4% are covered by their school or university.

Over half of internet users (51.8%) believe the cost of internet access in Lebanon is too high, while 41.8% perceive it as reasonable. In contrast, 3.2% deem it to be low with remaining respondents being unsure.

The responses were consistent with the income brackets of those polled, as the majority of respondents who perceived the cost to be too high fell into the first bracket of less than \$200 a month while those who felt it was too low belonged in the highest bracket of over \$2,000 a month. This is compared with an across-the-board consensus among all the other income brackets that the cost of internet access is reasonable.

#### Patterns of use

Patterns of online use in terms of the time of day users are most likely to access the internet were also explored. 6% replied that they go online in the morning, 12.9% in the afternoon and 24.4% access the internet in the evening. While 44.3% replied there was no particular time or pattern for use, 12.4% said they used the internet when the cost of telephone use is lowest.

The majority of respondents (33.1%) access the internet a few times a week, with 29.9% who go online a few times a day. About 28% only use the internet once a day and 7.7% use it once a week.

An average of 7-9 hours a week is spent on the internet by the majority (25.9) of those polled. They are followed by 22.4% who counted between 10-20 hours a week online. Another 21.4% fall in the time category of 5-6 hours per week with 18.2% being online 3-4 hours. 7.1% spend more than 20 hours on the internet and a remaining 5% tally only one hour a week.

#### Principal functions

As [Graph 6](#) illustrates, most respondents use the internet for communication purposes, followed by entertainment. The most popular modes of online communication and entertainment will be addressed in Part II, as well as the issue of online shopping.

\* Check out Issue 9 of *iMonthly* for Part II of this poll.

