



Among Home Computer Users, Beginners and Novices Still Rule

Dan Ness, Principal Analyst, MetaFacts, November 19, 2004

Most home PC users (more than 60 percent, in fact) have less than ten years experience using a PC, and add-ons like digital cameras and broadband Internet connections may only intimidate them. But there are also plenty of veterans sitting at home PCs, and the figures (derived from the latest Technology User Profile research from MetaFacts, with a sample of 10,418 users) concerning the experience level of home users hide some surprises.

For instance: yes, home users are less experienced than workplace users—but there are nearly as many long-time veterans in each market. The early adopters with over 20 years of computer experience number 6.3% of the home PC users and a close 7.6% of workplace users. But the basic fact is that a healthy majority of home PC buyers will be either beginners (with one to five years' experience) or novices (six to ten years), with the two groups together representing nearly two-thirds (61.3%). The numbers change dramatically after the 10-year level, with fewer and fewer home users in the tiers with more experience. But, surprisingly, there is a significant bulge in the novice (six to ten years) tier. That tier is 45 percent larger than the beginner tier, and bigger than the next two tiers put together (i.e., those with 11 to 15 years, and those with 16 to 20 years experience.) Evidently there was a disproportionately large uptake of home PCs in the late 1990s, driven with the mass market's discovery of email, and other off-shoots of the dot-com bubble catching the buyers' fancies.

But while beginners continue to arrive at (and expand) the market, they are evidently not being drawn by the siren call of digital cameras, or of broadband Internet connectivity. In the beginner tier, digital camera ownership was 26 percent lower than the rate of PC ownership, and the percent subscribing to a broadband Internet connection was 32 percent lower than the rate of computer ownership. Evidently, beginners have all they can handle with the basic PC, and may be more likely to be frightened than enticed by additional options. But these adoption rates are made up for by modestly higher rates among the more experienced tiers.

Beginners vs. Novices

Years Using a PC	General	Home PC Users	With Broadband Internet Connection	With Digital Camera	Less Than \$50,000 Income	With Users Aged 3-12	With Users aged 13-19
Beginner (1-5)	20.4	25.0	17.1	18.4	34.7	25.6	24.9
Novice (6-10)	33.8	36.3	37.2	36.8	35.9	36.7	39.2
Veteran (11-15)	21.7	18.3	20.4	20.1	15.1	18.5	16.8
Old Hand (16-20)	17.2	14.1	17.9	16.6	9.5	13.9	12.8
Old (Over 20)	6.9	6.3	7.4	8.0	4.8	5.2	6.4

Percent of Installed PCs

Source: MetaFacts, Inc. – Technology User Profile – 2004 Annual Edition

When ranked by income, the number of beginners with incomes falling below \$50,000 per year was far above average (34.7 percent were beginners, versus 25 percent for total home PC users.) In that income bracket there was no real bulge—the beginner tier was almost as large as the novice tier. Presumably, this concentration of beginners stems from the presence of a lot of young people in the lower income brackets, who have not climbed the income ladder yet. At the same time, they have had not had time to buy many PCs for their homes, assuming they even have their own homes. This spike in the figures would point the advisability of youth-oriented advertising, to instill brand recognition and loyalty in those who are just coming into the market. But don't forget that these people are also in the lower income bracket, meaning that they are likely to be extremely price conscious.

What did not significantly sway the figures away from the average was the presence or absence of children in the home—computer experience and parenthood appear to be separate issues. (The majority of respondents, however, reported having children in the home.) The presence or absence of child and teenage users, however, was a slightly different story. Those with child users in the home (aged three to 12) showed experience rates very close to the average, indicating little impact on the market. But those reporting teenaged users (aged 13 to 19) showed experience rates slightly higher than the average—but only in the novice tier. This would indicate that the impact of teenage users is small, but should not be discounted.

Background & Methodology

Factual, decision-making information like this is only found in one place, the Technology User Profile from MetaFacts. The Technology User Profile market research information service is based on extensive primary research selected and balanced to represent the American population - including technology users and non-technology users. Drawn from more than 30,000 surveys per year reporting on over 250 questions, it is the most comprehensive total market technology study available. TUPdates are brief summaries of information contained in the Technology User Profile.

Links to Source Data

Current Technology User Profile subscribers may be interested in the following links with related, more detailed or updated information:

[Years of Computer Use for Primary User \(Total Market\)](#)

[TUP 2004 Annual Edition](#) (Excel)

[TUP 2004 Annual Edition](#) (pdf)

[Years of Computer Use for Primary User \(Home/Family\)](#)

[TUP 2004 Annual Edition](#) (Excel)

[TUP 2004 Annual Edition](#) (pdf)

Other Resources

Current Technology User Profile subscribers may be interested in the following links with related, more detailed or updated information:

[Years of Computer Use for Primary User \(Total Market\)](#)

[TUP 2003 Annual Edition](#) (Excel)

[TUP 2003 Annual Edition](#) (pdf)

[TUP 2002 Annual Edition](#) (Excel)

[TUP 2002 Annual Edition](#) (pdf)

[Years of Computer Use for Primary User \(Home/Family\)](#)

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