



Pew Internet & American Life

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PRESS RELEASES

12/23/01--Internet resources are aids for the deeply devout

28 million American Internet users have gotten religious and spiritual material online
 3 million get such material every day

WASHINGTON D.C. - The number of Americans going online to find religious information is growing and those who seek spiritual material are generally looking for things to complement already devout lives by educating themselves on their own faiths and finding resources to assist in prayer or devotions.

Some 25% of adult Internet users -- about 28 million people -- have gone online to get religious and spiritual material, according to a survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project. That is a jump from the 20 million online Americans who reported last year they had used the Internet to get spiritual material.

More people have sought spiritual succor online than have gone to gambling Web sites, participated in online auctions, traded stocks online, or done online banking.

"The Internet fills many niches for religious people," said Elena Larsen, a Research Fellow for Pew Internet Project and the principal author of the report. "It is a helpful reference and communications tool for those who are active in their church. Converts to new faiths can find volumes of information. People who feel their religions are unpopular can meet others safely online. People who do not belong to religious communities can find resources and experiences that might not otherwise have been available to them."

The report calls those who seek spiritual information online Religion Surfers. Specific findings of the report include:

- Religion surfers differ from the general population primarily in terms of the place of religion in their lives. 84% of Religion Surfers belong to a religious community such as a church or synagogue, compared to 68% of the general population. They are also more likely than those in the general public to attend services at least weekly, by a margin of 58% to 39%.
- Surfing is largely aimed at finding educational or reference material, with 69% of Religion Surfers citing these goals for the last time they ventured online.
- Religion Surfers appear to be more comfortable offering spiritual advice online than requesting it: 35% have used email to offer advice, while 21% have sought advice in an email.
- 27% of Religion Surfers say their online activities have improved their own spiritual lives to some extent.
- 62% of Religion Surfers believe that the availability of spiritual information on the Internet encourages religious tolerance.
- However, Religion Surfers also see the potential for the Internet to harm as well as help people. 53% think that the Internet makes it easy for fringe groups to hurt people.

The phone-based survey for this report was conducted during July and August of 500 Internet users who had identified themselves as people who got religious or spiritual material online. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points. That poll does not account for changes in religious surfing that may have been prompted by the terrorist attacks. Other surveys by the Project since September 11 show:

- 41% of Internet users, many of whom had never considered themselves online spiritual seekers, said they sent or received email prayer requests.
- 23% of Internet users turned to online sources to get information about Islam. Presumably, most of them considered this to be information-gathering activity rather than spiritual activity.
- 7% of Internet users contributed to relief charities online.

The Pew Internet & American Life Project is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts to examine the social impact of the Internet. It does research about how use of the Internet affects families, communities, health care, education, civic and political life, and the work place.

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