



Pew Internet
Pew Internet & American Life Project

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Generations and their gadgets

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Overview

Many devices have become popular across generations, with a majority now owning cell phones, laptops and desktop computers. Younger adults are leading the way in increased mobility, preferring laptops to desktops and using their cell phones for a variety of functions, including internet, email, music, games, and video.

Among the findings:

- **Cell phones** are by far the most popular device among American adults, especially for adults under the age of 65. Some 85% of adults own cell phones overall. Taking pictures (done by 76% of cell owners) and text messaging (done by 72% of cell owners) are the two non-voice functions that are widely popular among all cell phone users.
- **Desktop computers** are most popular with adults ages 35-65, with 69% of Gen X, 65% of Younger Boomers and 64% of Older Boomers owning these devices.
- Millennials are the only generation that is more likely to own a **laptop computer or netbook** than a desktop: 70% own a laptop, compared with 57% who own a desktop.
- While almost half of all adults own an **mp3 player** like an iPod, this device is by far the most popular with Millennials, the youngest generation—74% of adults ages 18-34 own an mp3 player, compared with 56% of the next oldest generation, Gen X (ages 35-46).
- **Game consoles** are significantly more popular with adults ages 18-46, with 63% owning these devices.
- 5% of all adults own an **e-book reader**; they are least popular with adults age 75 and older, with 2% owning this device.
- **Tablet computers**, such as the iPad, are most popular with American adults age 65 and younger. 4% of all adults own this device.

Additionally, about one in 11 (9%) adults do not own any of the devices we asked about, including 43% of adults age 75 and older.

In terms of generations, Millennials are by far the most likely group not only to own most of the devices we asked about, but also to take advantage of a wider range of functions. For instance, while cell phones have become ubiquitous in American households, most cell phone owners only use two of the main non-voice functions on their phones: taking pictures and text messaging. Among Millennials, meanwhile, a majority use their phones also for going online, sending email, playing games, listening to music, and recording videos.

However, Gen X is also very similar to Millennials in ownership of certain devices, such as game consoles. Members of Gen X are also more likely than Millennials to own a desktop computer.

e-Book readers and tablet computers so far have not seen significant differences in ownership between generations, although members of the oldest generation (adults age 75 and older) are less likely than younger generations to own these devices.

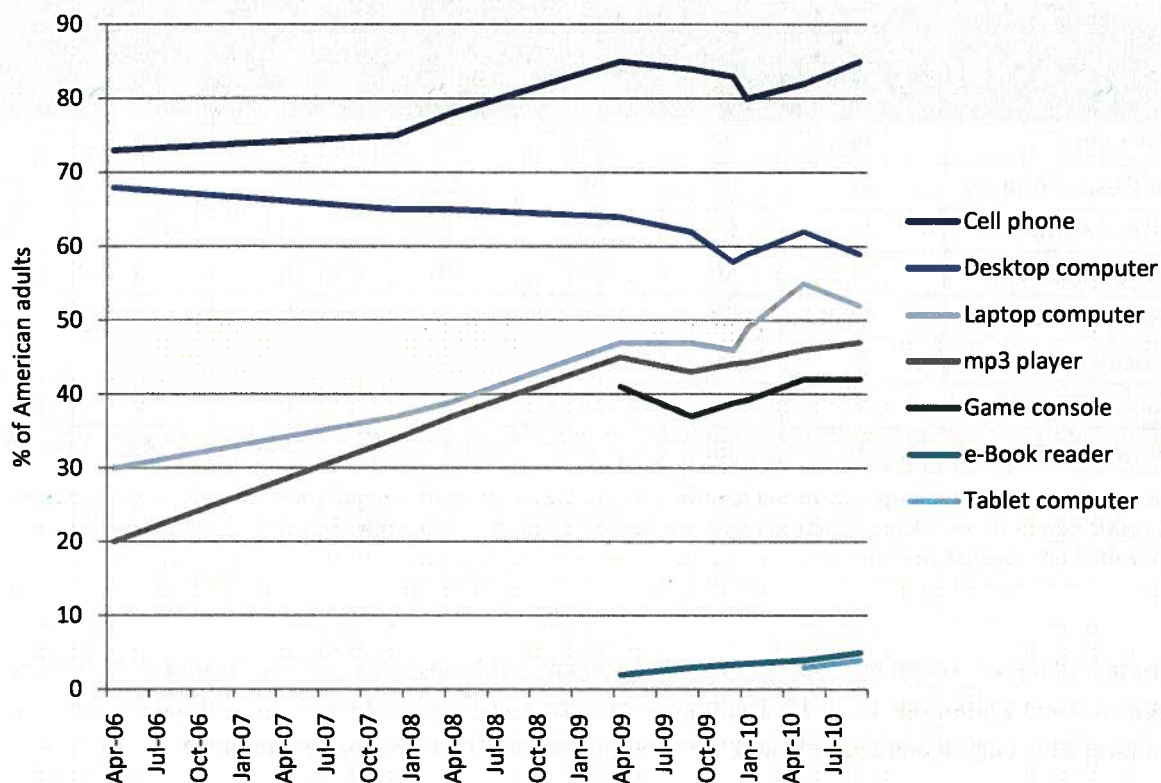
% of American adults in each generation who own each device

	Millennials (Ages 18-34)	Gen X (35-46)	Younger Boomers (47-56)	Older Boomers (57-65)	Silent Gen. (66-74)	G.I. Gen. (75+)	All adults (18+)
Cell phone	95	92	86	84	68	48	85
Desktop computer	57	69	65	64	48	28	59
Laptop computer	70	61	49	43	30	10	52
iPod/MP3 player	74	56	42	26	16	3	47
Game console	63	63	38	19	8	3	42
e-Book reader	5	5	7	3	6	2	5
Tablet, like iPad	5	5	4	3	1	1	4
None of these	1	3	8	8	20	43	9

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, August 9-September 13, 2010 Tracking Survey. N=3,001 adults 18 and older, including 1,000 reached via cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English (n=2,804) and Spanish (n=197).

These findings are based on a survey of 3,001 American adults (ages 18 and older) conducted between August 9 and September 13, 2010. The margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish, and the survey included 1,000 cell phone interviews.

Gadget ownership by American adults, 2006-2010



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project surveys, April 2006-September 2010.

In this chart, the dips in tech ownership registered in the September 2010 survey are mostly a result of the fact that Spanish interviews were added to the survey. Most of the Pew Internet surveys before 2010 were only conducted in English. The Project has added Spanish to this survey and that knocked down the overall tech-ownership numbers in some instances because respondents who wanted to be interviewed in Spanish were somewhat less likely than others to be tech non-users.

Background: Generations defined

This is part of a series of report by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project exploring how different generations use technology. All the generation labels used in these reports, with the exceptions of "Younger Boomers" and "Older Boomers," are the names conventionalized by William Strauss and Neil Howe in their book, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* (Perennial, 1992). The Pew Internet Project's "Generations" reports make the distinction between Younger Boomers and Older Boomers because enough research has been done to suggest that the two decades of Baby Boomers are different enough to merit being divided into distinct generational groups.

Generation name	Birth years	Ages in 2011
Millennials	Born 1977-1993	Ages 18-34
Gen X	Born 1965-1976	Ages 35-46
Younger Boomers	Born 1955-1964	Ages 47-56
Older Boomers	Born 1946-1954	Ages 57-65
Silent Generation	Born 1937-1945	Ages 66-74
G.I. Generation	Born before 1936	Age 75+

The Pew Research Center recently published a series of reports that more closely examined the values, attitudes and experiences of the Millennial generation.¹ These reports are available in full at pewresearch.org/millennials. Many of these reports also compare this younger generation to older cohorts.

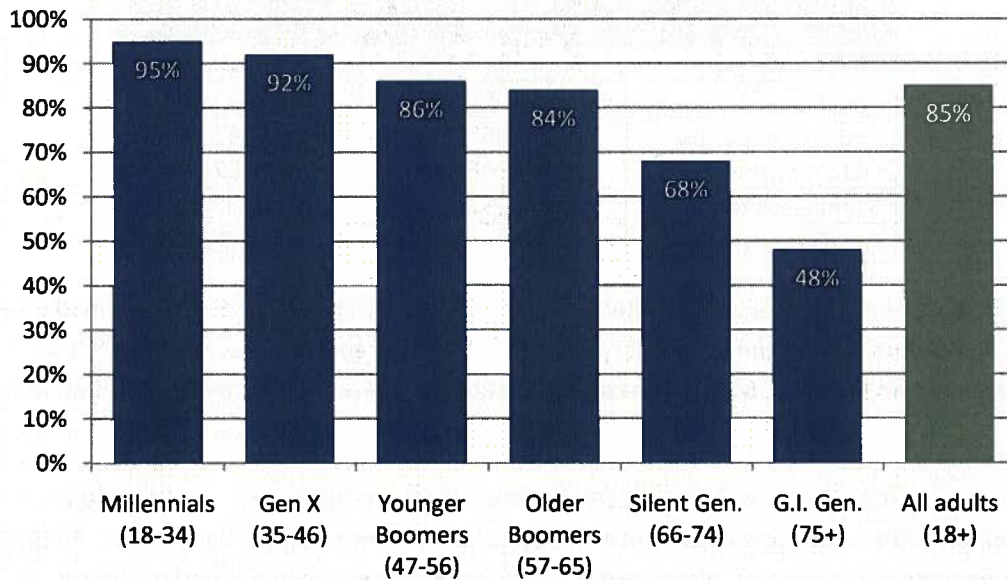
The primary adult data in this report come from a Pew Internet Project survey conducted from August 9-September 13, 2010, with some data from a survey conducted April 29 to May 30, 2010. For more information about these surveys, please see the **Methodology** section at the end of this report.

¹ Scott Keeter and Paul Taylor, "The Millennials." Pew Research Center, December 11, 2009. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1437/millennials-profile>

Cell phones

Eighty-five percent of Americans age 18 and older own a cell phone, making it by far the most popular device among adults. Mobile phones are especially popular with adults under the age of 66, although the largest drop-off is for adults in the oldest generation (those age 75 and older), of whom 48% own a cell phone.

Do you have a cell phone, or a Blackberry or iPhone or other device that is also a cell phone?



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, August 9-September 13, 2010 Tracking Survey. N=3,001 adults 18 and older, including 1,000 reached via cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English (n=2,804) and Spanish (n=197).
