

Generations and Gadgets

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Many devices have become popular across generations, with a majority of adults 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 younger than age 65. Some 85% of adults own cell phones. 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 the 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.
- Just 5% of all adults own an e-book reader; they are least popular with adults ages 75 and older, with only 2% owning this device.
- Tablet computers, such as the iPad, are most popular with American adults ages 65 and younger. Only 4% of all adults own this device.
- Additionally, 9% adults do not own any of the devices we asked about, including 43% of adults ages 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 use only 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.

Gen X, however, is 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.

% of American adults in each generation who own each device

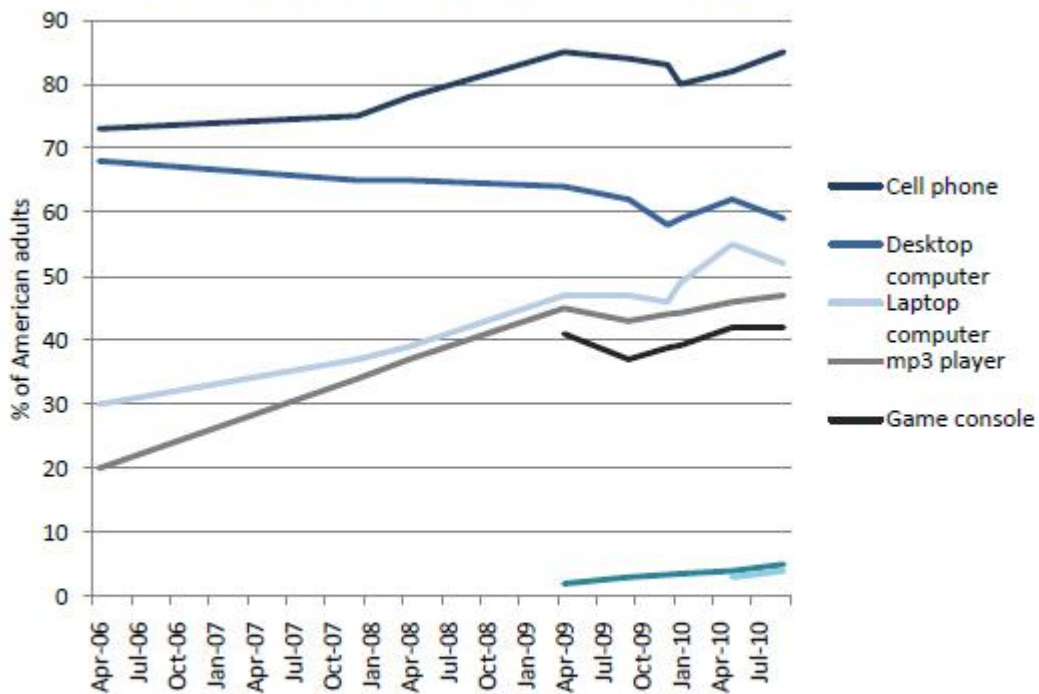
	Millennials (Ages 18-34)	Gen X (35-46)	Younger Boomers (47-56)	Older Boomers (57-65)	Silent Gen. (66-74)	G.I. Gen. (75+)	All adults (18+)
Cell phone	95	92	86	84	68	48	85
Desktop computer	57	69	65	64	48	28	59
Laptop computer	70	61	49	43	30	10	52
iPod/MP3 player	74	56	42	26	16	3	47
Game console	63	63	38	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).

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

These findings are based on a survey of 3,001 American adults (ages 18 and older) conducted between Aug. 9 and Sept. 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 which had the effect of reducing the overall tech-ownership numbers in some instances because respondents who chose to be interviewed in Spanish were somewhat less likely than others to be tech non-users.