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Home Broadband Climbs Again

June 18, 2009

-By Mark Dolliver

NEW YORK After having stalled throughout 2008, the rise in home broadband penetration has resumed this year, according to a report released this week by the Pew Research Center's [Internet & American Life Project](#). The report says 63 percent of U.S. adults had broadband access at home as of this April, up from 55 percent last May. The figure had hovered "in a narrow range between 54 percent and 57 percent" from December 2007 to December 2008.

The increase in penetration rates since last May has been particularly steep in some population cohorts, including older baby boomers (from 50 percent to 61 percent), people 65 and older (from 19 percent to 30 percent), and people whose educational attainment peaked with a high school diploma (from 40 percent to 52 percent). There was also brisk upward movement for households with income of \$20,000 or less (from 25 percent to 35 percent) and those in the \$20,000-30,000 bracket (from 42 percent to 53 percent). The penetration rate among households with income of \$75,000-plus was already high, so it barely budged between last May and this April (from 84 percent to 85 percent).

You might expect broadband service to fall into the category of discretionary purchases that consumers are apt to trim in a recession. Instead, says the report, broadband adoption "appears to have been largely immune to the effects of the current economic recession." It's not as though the cost of broadband is insignificant for the typical household. Pew reports that the average monthly bill for broadband service was \$39 this April, up from \$34.50 last May.

People are willing, however grudgingly, to bear this cost because they've come to regard broadband service as one of life's essentials. Among respondents who have home broadband, 31 percent said it's very important and 37 percent said it's somewhat important "for finding out what is going on in their community." Thirty-four percent said it's very important and 31 percent somewhat important "for communicating with healthcare or medical providers"; 23 percent said it's very important and 35 percent somewhat important "for sharing their views with others about key issues."

What about the holdouts -- i.e., the 7 percent of Americans who are dial-up Internet users at home? Pew's survey asked them what it would take to motivate them to switch to broadband. Thirty-two percent said the price would have to fall; 17 percent said such service would have to become available where they live; 13 percent cited some other factor, and 16 percent said they don't know. But a steadfast 20 percent said "nothing would get them to change."

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