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## Digital Divide Shrinks, Political Divide Doesn't

By [Paul Shigley](#) July 15, 2011 [2 Comments](#) [Printer-Friendly](#)   



If you are reading this, you have access to the Internet. That places you among the large majority of Californians who go online regularly through a home, work or school computer, their cell phone or with a library computer. Most likely, you have access through broadband technology that makes Internet transactions speedy and reliable.

But not everyone has such easy access to the Internet, and those people are at a disadvantage – not only because they can't visit A News Café.

"If you have access to high-speed connectivity, you understand its value – in applying for a job, in accessing friends on a social network, in obtaining medical information, paying a bill or accessing government services. We almost take it for granted," said Sunne Wright McPeak, president and CEO of the California Emerging Technology Fund. "Now, imagine not having that access."



McPeak's organization, along with the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) and the group ZeroDivide, just released a new survey of how California residents use the Internet. The

survey's "big news" centered on the increased usage of cell phones to go online. Forty percent of Californians say they use their cell phones to go online, about double the percentage of only three years ago.

However, it's the regional variations that I find of interest. In the past, these surveys have found that the Central Valley and rural areas – which include Shasta County and the northern Sacramento Valley – lagged behind most coastal urban areas in Internet usage and broadband access. But that digital divide is closing.

"We've seen that the gains in the Central Valley have been on par with other regions when it comes to Internet use and to broadband use," Dean Bonner, a PPIC researcher who helped compile the survey, told me.

The survey did not break out rural areas specifically this time. But it did find that 85 percent of Central Valley (Redding to Bakersfield) residents access the Internet or receive email at least occasionally. The state average is 84 percent. The survey also found that 77 percent of Central Valley residents have an Internet connection at home, and 70 percent have a broadband connection, such as DSL or a cable modem. These figures lag the Bay Area and San Diego/Orange county region, but are about at the state average.

While the regional digital divide seems to be melting away, there other divides. The richer and better educated you are, the more likely you are to use the Internet and have high-speed service at home. The numbers trend the other way the older you are. Some ethnic and racial divides also persist (Latinos are least likely to have broadband at home) but those appear to be closing.

What I found intriguing are attitudes about the Internet. These figures do not show up in the report, but Bonner shared them with me. Essentially, Central Valley residents are less likely than Bay Area residents to see lack of broadband access as a disadvantage to finding a job and gaining new career skills, or to accessing medical information and government services. Similarly, Central Valley residents are less likely than Bay Area or Los Angeles residents to see broadband as a public utility in which the government should play a significant role.

Bonner speculates that this divide is mostly a political one. In regard to many social values and perceptions, the Bay Area and Los Angeles are in one camp, and the rest of the state in another. However, Bonner pointed out that the attitudinal difference isn't preventing Central Valley residents from personally embracing communications technology or from insisting on high-speed Internet access for children and schools.

You may download the full report and many other surveys and studies from the [PPIC website](#). It will take a while if you have dial-up.

**On today's A La Carte menu:**

**Online tickets** ... While you're on the Internet, you might as well get your tickets for **Westside Performing Arts Company's** "Masquerade: A Broadway Revue." The two performances, scheduled for July 30 at Sequoia School's very fine McLaughlin Auditorium, is the culmination of Westside's six-week summer theater academy. A cast of more than 40 kids and adults will act, sing and dance their way through pieces from "Phantom of the Opera," "Little Shop of Horrors," "Jim Henson's Muppets," "Bye Bye Birdie," and "Memphis." The important thing right now is that tickets are \$2 cheaper if you buy them in advance, which you may do online through the [Cascade Theatre's website](#).

**Not greasy kid stuff** ... Congrats to **Pacific Sun Gourmet**, based in little ol' Gerber, for taking the best of show award in the extra virgin olive oil division at the recent Napa Valley Olive Oil Competition. Pacific Sun's Ascolana Extra Virgin Olive Oil was the big winner. Pacific Sun also won awards for its Eva's Blend Manzanillo Extra Virgin, Meyer Lemon and Tehama County Blend Extra Virgin olive oils.



**Paul Shigley is a freelance journalist based in Western Shasta County, CA, and remembers when a fax machine was considered high technology. He may be reached at [pauls.aneWScafe@gmail.com](mailto:pauls.aneWScafe@gmail.com).**

A News Cafe, founded in Shasta County by Redding, CA journalist Doni Greenberg, is the place for people craving local Northern California news, commentary, food, arts and entertainment.

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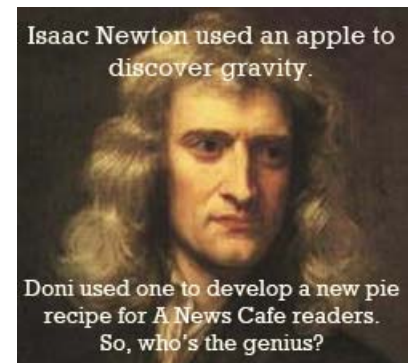
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## 2 Responses »



1. **Mike P**  
**July 15, 2011 • 8:41 am**

Nice article Paul. I wonder if the type of jobs in the Central Valley is why we (Bakersfield) are less likely than Bay Area residents to see the lack of broadband access as a disadvantage to finding a job?

**Reply**



o **Paul Shigley**  
**July 18, 2011 • 8:56 am**

That's a possibility. The Central Valley is heavy on service work and manual labor, while the Bay Area is full of tech and professional jobs. But the valley also has a sizable percentage of government jobs, especially in the Sacramento region. I can't imagine searching for work in the government sector anywhere except online.

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