

Are Net users isolating themselves from family, friends?



MIKE WENDLAND

PC MIKE
Brace yourself for a barrage of anti-Net hype and hysteria from the traditional media about how regular Net users are socially isolated and abandoning family and friends for their PCs. A new study from a couple of California researchers has been released that concludes that Internet use leads to increased social isolation. The conclusions are based on the results from just three questions on social isolation. It surveyed 4,113 American adults in 2,689 households. Thirteen percent of "regular" Internet users (those spending five or more hours per week online) reported spending less time with friends and family. Eight percent said they were attending fewer social events. And 26 percent said they were

talking less to friends and family on the phone. "The Internet could be the ultimate isolating technology that further reduces our participation in communities even more than television," said Stanford University Professor Norman Nie, one of the authors. Who says people are isolated? E-mail, chat rooms, discussion groups and most Web sites are all about interactive communications. Frankly, I think this is a study aimed to give the television industry ammunition to attack the Internet, which is stealing away TV viewers by the millions. But it's very shaky ammo. And I'm not alone in dising this so-called "scientific study." On Nando-Net (www.nandonet.com) Internet author Jakob Nielsen says the conclusions could hold true for many modern conveniences. "How do you define what you count as personal contact?" Nielsen asked. "You could have had some other report a hundred

years ago that said the telephone would cause a loss in social relations and human contact. The big problem is that the definitions do not hold in the new human experience." **Should you upgrade?** Not if you are a typical home or user running Windows 95 or 98. Win2K, which is now on store shelves everywhere, is aimed at medium and large business enterprises, places with lots of networked PCs. There are lots of glitches and incompatibilities with the hardware and software on typical home systems running Windows 98. Windows 2000 offers the business user great stability, lots of new laptop support that Windows NT didn't provide and a less cumbersome interface. But the high tech research firm the GartnerGroup forecasts that over the next two years 50 percent of medium-sized and large companies will encounter compatibility problems between Windows 2000 and business applications or network infrastruc-

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fastest computer chip," running at 1.5 gigahertz. That's very nice. But the new chip, codenamed "Willamette," is way more... WAY more... than the average computer user will ever need. On the other hand, Intel says that that computers on Windows 2000, Microsoft's new business operating system, would require about 260 more megahertz of power to provide the same level of processing performance as current NT desktops. **Online documentary** If you want to get an idea what hackers are like, there's a short film called "Disinformation" available for viewing on the Net at a site called Undergroundfilm.com (www.undergroundfilm.com). The film is about some Internet-obsessed people who call themselves the "Cult of the Dead Cow," a group of computer hackers who developed the "Back Orifice." The "Back Orifice" is a computer application that allows anyone with marginal knowl-

edge of computers to gain remote access control over Microsoft Windows machines connected to the Internet. The Web site is a bit balky and sometimes the videos don't play so if you can't see it when you visit, try again. But it's worth checking out. The film is 11 minutes long. PC Mike's number one internet rule is: If you get an e-mail that says "forward this on to as many people as you can"... don't. It's rude to forward unsolicited messages. Besides, 99.9 percent of the time whatever you're being asked to forward is a hoax or a stupid joke. So... don't. PLEASE! "73" until next week. Mike Wendland covers the Internet for NBC-TV Newschannel stations across the country. His "PC Talk" radio show airs Saturday and Sunday afternoons on Detroit's WXYT-Radio AM1270. He is the author of a series of Internet books. You can reach him through his Web site at <http://www.pcmike.com>

BUSINESS CALENDAR

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SAT, MARCH 4
GRACING UP GRACEFULLY
Growing up gracefully — a seminar on etiquette for young ladies and gentlemen (ages 8-12) will be held from 10 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. Saturday, March 4 in the banquet room at the Country Epicure restaurant in Novi. Current subjects include letter writing and thank you

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