Computers and Society

Digital Divide

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As creators and developers of technology, we have a responsibility to think about the impact of this technology.

If a technology is widely accepted and used, what happens to people who don’t have access to this technology?
What are some areas of society in which unequal access to technology might be an issue?
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- Education
- Government
- Employment
- Entertainment
- Others?
Brookwell Consulting has moved from the pacemaker industry into consulting about the digital divide. Your group is contracting with:

- The SF Unified school district
- The IRS
- Manpower
- Disney

Your clients want to know:

- What are ways that we can use the Web to better serve our customers?
- What problems might the digital divide present us or our customers?
- What can we do to address these issues?
Some facts:
- Households making $75,000 a year are nine times more likely to have a computer at home (86.3%) than households earning less than $15,000 per year (12.7%). (as of 2000).
- 20 times more likely to have Internet access
- By 2000, approximately 70% of jobs required some computer knowledge
Some issues:

△ If technology is an essential part of education, do all schools have adequate access to that technology?

△ How do we train teachers to integrate technology into their classes in a useful way?

△ Are there gender-related issues?
   □ Traditionally, there has been an imbalance between boys and girls going into the sciences.

△ Are there disadvantages to incorporating computers into education?
Where are some places where government can take advantage of technology?

- Online forms, instructions, filing
- Streamlining bureaucracy
- Electronic voting
- New modes of participation
Some issues:
- Community being served may be the same community that has low access rates. (HUD, social services, Medicare)
- Does technology solve the problem?
- Does it introduce new problems?
- How to engender trust?
Issues for young people:

- New jobs require more education in general, and technological expertise in particular.
- Funding, access to education is important.
-9: The Digital Divide in the Workforce

Issues for older people
  ▶ Job re-training
  ▶ Content
    - Education
    - Job listings
    - Business development resources
Are there populations that are difficult to reach through the Internet?

Are there populations that have a difficult time getting information online?

- Economics and financing
- Disability
- Location
Statistically, there seems to be an unequal usage of IT.

We’ve already seen economic data.

Race:
- 62% of white households have computers
- 55% have Internet access
- 40% of Hispanic households have computers
- 32% have Internet access
Some dimensions to consider:
- Economic background
- Race/ethnicity
- Gender
- Age
6 You’re now consulting for a nonprofit interesting in reducing the digital divide.

6 For your particular population group, identify three reasons why they are not online or are online less frequently.

6 For each of these reasons, suggest a way to address this problem.
Some facts (as of 2001):
- 6% of the world’s population is online. (429 million)
- 41% of those are in North America
- 27% in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa
- 20% in Asia
- 4% in South America

Unsurprisingly, usage much heavier in industrialized nations.

What are some factors that make adoption difficult for developing nations?
Difficulties in Developing Nations:

- Economics
- Infrastructure
- Education
- Culture
- others?
On Globalization

- The Internet is a powerful tool for globalization.
- What is globalization?
- What are some advantages of globalization?
- What are some drawbacks to globalization?