# INTERNET ADDICTION

WHAT IS THE INTERNET:

According to the Global Internet Society, *"The Internet is a uniquely universal platform that uses the same standards in every country, so that every user can interact with every other user in ways unimaginable 10 years ago, regardless of the multitude of changes taking place."*

This statement sums it up in a very precise fashion. The Internet has undoubtedly changed the entire world. Open access to the Internet has revolutionized the way individuals communicate and collaborate, entrepreneurs and corporations conduct business, and governments and citizens interact. At the same time, the Internet established a revolutionary open model for its own development and governance, encompassing all stakeholders. Fundamentally, the Internet is a 'network of networks' whose protocols are designed to allow networks to interoperate. In the very beginning, these networks represented different academic, government, and research communities whose members needed to cooperate to develop common standards and manage joint resources. Later, as the Internet was commercialized, vendors and operators joined the open protocol development process and helped unleash the unprecedented era of growth and innovation.

INTERNET PENETRATION BY COUNTRY:

If we look at global Internet penetration by country, we see the following:

80-100%
60-80%
40-60%
20-40%
0-20%
No data available
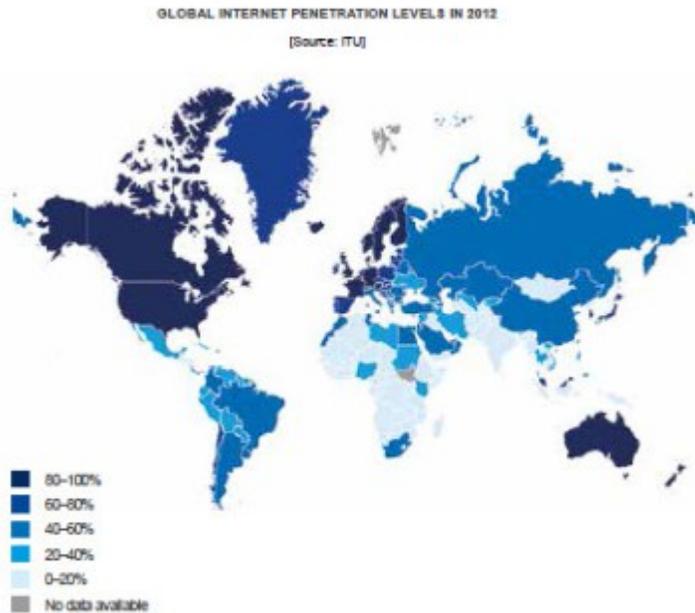
Internet penetration on a global basis is obvious for countries other than those considered third-world. Internet usage on a daily basis approaches use by one billion individuals per day. There should be no doubt that with numbers such as these, there will be those with obsessive/compulsive disorders producing addiction. With that being the case, what is Internet addiction?

INTERNET ADDICTION:

Internet Addiction, otherwise known as computer addiction, online addiction, or Internet addiction disorder (IAD), covers a variety of impulse-control problems, including:

- **Cybersex Addiction** – compulsive use of Internet pornography, adult chat rooms, or adult fantasy role-play sites impacting negatively on real-life intimate relationships. The Internet is the cheapest, fastest, and most anonymous pornography source. Internet pornographers made over $1 billion in revenues dealing their merchandise on-line. The threat of pornography over the Internet cannot be discounted: 70 percent of children viewing pornography on the Internet do so in public schools and libraries (The Internet Online Summit, 1997). All of us realize that we are surrounded by various forms of pornography, whether noticing the "adult" section of videos at Blockbuster, surfing the Internet, seeing advertising which is clearly sexually suggestive, or innocently going to a movie that just happens to have some kind of sex scene.
- **Cyber-Relationship Addiction** – addiction to social networking, chat rooms, texting, and messaging to the point where virtual, online friends become more important than real-life relationships with family and friends.   Facebook has 1.4 billion profiles, and 1.06 billion of those (or 15 percent of the world's population)

use Facebook regularly. Of those, 78 percent of users access Facebook on a mobile device a minimum of once a month. Every second, there are 8,000 likes on Instagram. Instagram launched in 2010, and boasts 200 million active users in 2014, with over 75 million users daily. Google+ has over 540 million profiles and over 300 million monthly active users. LinkedIn, launched in 2003, has 300 million users, and an average of two new members per second. Forty percent of users on LinkedIn check the site daily, and Mashable is the LinkedIn company with the most engaged following.

- **Net Compulsions** – such as compulsive online gaming, gambling, stock trading, or compulsive use of online auction sites such as eBay, often resulting in financial and job-related problems. Obsessive playing of off-line computer games, such as Solitaire or Minesweeper, or obsessive computer programming.
- **Information Overload** – compulsive web surfing or database searching, leading to lower work productivity and less social interaction with family and friends. An average US citizen on an average day consumes 100,500 words, whether that is email, messages on social networks, searching websites or anywhere else digitally. Take a look at the global statistics given below and consider what happens in sixty (60) seconds:
    - **168 million e-mails sent**
    - **694,445 Google searches launched**
    - **695,000 Facebook updates attempted**
    - **370,000 Skype calls made**
    - **98,000 Tweets accomplished**
    - **20,000 new posts on TUMBLR**
    - **13,000 iPhone apps downloaded**
    - **6,600 new pictures on Flickr**
    - **1,500 new blog entries posted, (just like this one)**
    - **600+ videos posted totaling over 25 hours duration on YouTube**

The most common of these Internet addictions are cybersex, online gambling, and cyber-relationship addiction. Talk about busy.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS:

Signs and symptoms of Internet addiction vary from person to person. For example, there are no set hours per day or number of messages sent that indicate Internet addiction. But here are some general warning signs that your Internet use may have become a problem:

- **Losing track of time online.** Do you frequently find yourself on the Internet longer than you intended? Does a few minutes turn into a few hours? Do you get irritated or cranky if your online time is interrupted? From a business standpoint, I have often heard the Internet is a "black hole" when it comes to wasting time. This is primarily due to net-surfing. I will admit, in the work I do as a consulting engineer, I use the Internet on a daily basis to investigate vendors and companies supplying

services to complement my work. I don't really consider this wasting time but actually saves time spent in research through phone calls, magazine searches, searches through Thomas Register, etc.

- **Having trouble completing tasks at work or home.** Do you find laundry piling up and little food in the house for dinner because you've been busy online? Perhaps you find yourself working late more often because you can't complete your work on time—then staying even longer when everyone else has gone home so you can use the Internet freely.
- **Isolation from family and friends.** Is your social life suffering because of all the time you spend online? Are you neglecting your family and friends? Do you feel like no one in your "real" life—even your spouse—understands you like your online friends?
- **Feeling guilty or defensive about your Internet use.** Are you sick of your spouse nagging you to get off the computer or put your smart phone down and spend time together? Do you hide your Internet use or lie to your boss and family about the amount of time you spend on the computer or mobile devices and what you do while you're online?
- **Feeling a sense of euphoria while involved in Internet activities.** Do you use the Internet as an outlet when stressed, sad, or for sexual gratification or excitement? Have you tried to limit your Internet time but failed?

INTERNET USAGE/USA:

If we look at Internet usage relative to addiction, we see the following for the United States:

So how much time do we spend online and what do we do...

19 hrs/week   14 hrs/week

This calculates to 988 hours per year for men and 728 hours per year for women. How much time do you spend per year reading a good book, calling your mother, taking a course at a local technical school or university, volunteering in your community, etc? Have you improved your reading speed and reading comprehension lately? You get the picture.

SITEOPEDIA has conducted polls that indicate significant addiction can result from Internet usage. The graphic below will highlight the results of that poll. Note: those indicating they are not addicted may just be lying. The real rates of addiction are estimates at best.
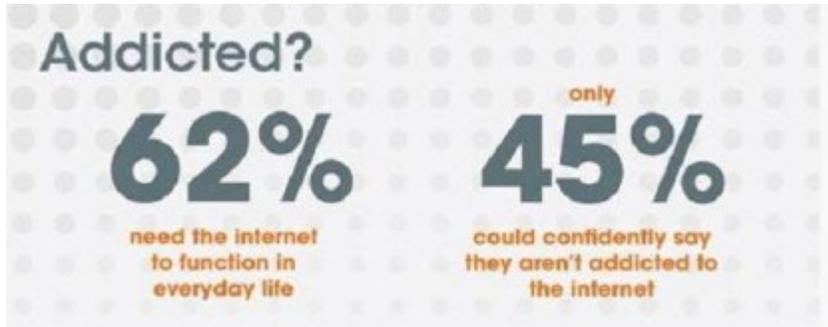
Those indicating they are addicted might consider the following recourse:

- **Recognize any underlying problems that may support your Internet addiction.** If you are struggling with depression, stress, or anxiety, for example, Internet addiction might be a way to self-soothe rocky moods. Have you had problems with alcohol or drugs in the past? Does anything about your Internet use remind you of how you used to drink or use drugs to numb yourself? Recognize if you need to address treatment in these areas or return to group support meetings.
- **Build your coping skills.** Perhaps blowing off steam on the Internet is your way of coping with stress or angry feelings. Or maybe you have trouble relating to others, or are excessively shy with people in real life. Building skills in these areas will help you weather the stresses and strains of daily life without resorting to compulsive Internet use.
- **Strengthen your support network.** The more relationships you have in real life, the less you will need the Internet for social interaction. Set aside dedicated time each week for friends and family. If you are shy, try finding common interest groups such as a sports team, education class, or book reading club. This allows you to interact with others and let relationships develop naturally.

Modify your Internet use step by step:

- To help you see problem areas, keep a log of how much you use the Internet for non-work or non-essential activities. Are there times of day that you use the Internet more? Are there triggers in your day that make you stay online for hours at a time when you only planned to stay for a few minutes?
- Set goals for when you can use the Internet. For example, you might try setting a timer, scheduling use for certain times of day, or making a commitment to turn off the computer, tablet, or smart phone at the same time each night. Or you could reward yourself with a certain amount of online time once you've completed a homework assignment or finished the laundry, for instance.

- Replace your Internet usage with healthy activities. If you are bored and lonely, resisting the urge to get back online can be very difficult. Have a plan for other ways to fill the time, such as going to lunch with a coworker, taking a class, or inviting a friend over.

WHAT WE DO:

The fascinating thing about Internet usage is what we actually do with all that time. From the graphic below, we see legitimate usage of the Internet to accomplish "chores" and execute responsibilities. I think shopping online and paying bills certainly fall within reason.

Wasting time on the Internet is a matter of definition. Please keep in mind the graphic below indicates time per DAY. Left side men—right side women.

OK, now that I have your attention, where do we go next?
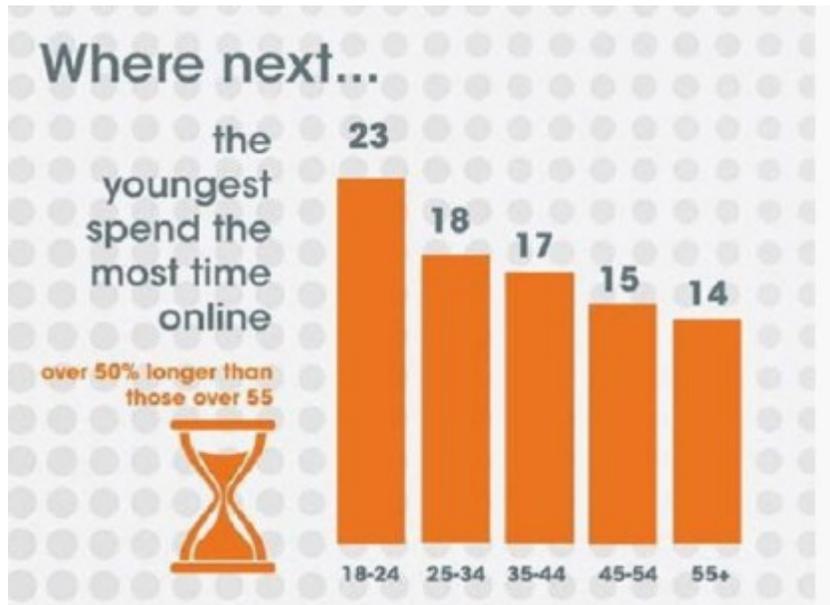
We just might be doomed as a society. Curb that habit. I welcome your comments: