



## **A Summary of Ethnographic Research Findings**

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## 1 Introduction

In September and October 2004, funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, WISE KIDS commissioned *\*ethnographic* research to be carried out with young people aged between 14 and 19 years, as well as trainers (i.e. teachers, youth workers or librarians) who worked with young people and manage their Internet access in schools/libraries/ youth clubs. This research was undertaken to help WISE KIDS formulate a Peer Mentoring Programme for youth on savvy, cool and safe Internet use. Light Minds, a company specializing in ethnographic research undertook this research. All the researchers involved have CRB clearance, and applied ethical practices in their research.

The overall research process covered many stages. However, what is presented here is only a summary of the main findings from the ethnographic research. WISE KIDS felt that these findings would be of interest to those working with youth, particularly those interested in young people's use of the Internet. It must be stressed that *the research undertaken is not intended as a stand-alone piece of research but was undertaken specifically to generate customer insight to help formulate the WISE KIDS Peer Mentoring Programme. The customers in this case are the young people and trainers.*

\*Ethnography was used for several reasons including that it:

- Provides real life accounts of customers' everyday activities, needs, desires, beliefs and values.
- Highlights the differences between what people do and what they say they do, and as a result, finds needs that have not been directly expressed.
- Describes what meanings people place on products and how products are used.
- Can be used to discover new products or services, design new products or services and evaluate existing products or services.
- Gives the unbiased viewpoints of key customers that help during product development discussions.

*\*Ethnography is the description and study of human culture. The use of ethnographic research provides an understanding of human culture by gaining an "insider's point of view". By using such an approach, the underlying beliefs, desires and values of people can be ascertained. As a result, an understanding can be gained of the shared meaning (and consequently the use) given to products and services by a cultural group.*

## **2 Research Process**

### **Pre-Study**

The first part of the research was a pre-study with seven teenagers (specially selected to represent a wide demographic) to get a feel for their daily activities, habits, desires, beliefs and values in relation to Internet use. The pre-study also included four youth trainers to understand how they work, operate and manage Internet access. The plans for the new peer mentoring programme were not mentioned at this stage.

For any ethnographic study, the selection or profiling of respondents is critical when it comes to projecting the data to a broader population. In this stage, the researchers developed a detailed profile and screener for the teenagers and trainers based on decisions made in an earlier market research workshop with WISE KIDS. One key feature added to the selection criteria, together with the other criteria specified by WISE KIDS previously, was, whether teenagers had home Internet access or not. Once completed, the researchers started recruiting teenagers and trainers who met the profile, based on telephone interviews and arranged times for face-to-face interviews.

The researchers developed fieldwork guides for the ethnographic interviews. These guides were used by the interviewers – not to read questions verbatim and in sequence – but rather to quickly and selectively steer the conversation and observation.

The heart of the research was the observation of, and ethnographic interviews with seven teenagers and four youth trainers. Each interview was conducted over a 1 to 2 hour period, one-on-one with interviewees, in the places where teenagers use the Internet or where the trainers are based. This included youth clubs, schools and the homes of the teenagers. When consent was granted by the interviewee, each interview was videotaped.

The specific fieldwork activities included:

- > A discussion on the overall patterns of technology and communication activity covering characteristics such as access, behaviour and motivation.
- > Exercises to elicit the different meanings of various devices, products, services and features, from mobile phones to picture messaging and from PC's to online chat.
- > Encouragement for interviewees to tell stories about certain experiences related to technology and communication activity.
- > The review of several technology products and services with interviewees to elicit the different meanings of specific package features and designs. Interviewees were encouraged to build on the ideas and project themselves and the products into scenarios.

Following each interview the researchers reviewed and analyzed each video recording of the interview. Important scenes were cut and noted. The researchers

then went through a synthesis process to create need models, by correlating and contrasting the fieldwork data in order to more deeply understand and fully explain teenagers and trainers behaviours, values and beliefs around Internet use.

After the first part of the ethnographic research, the researchers conducted a full-day workshop with WISE KIDS to document the pre-study findings and explore the implications of these for the next stage of the research and for the WISE KIDS' peer mentoring programme structure, content and delivery mechanism.

The workshop included field research summaries, video highlights, and user models. The workshop consisted of two sets of activities:

1. The review, analysis, and experiencing of fieldwork data including the presentation of findings and observations from the field.
2. The mapping of implications and requirements for the peer mentoring programme; discussion and agreement on scenarios that describe the possible structure, content and delivery mechanism of the peer mentoring programme; discussion of plans for the main ethnographic research study.

## **Main Study**

The second part of the research was the main study with fourteen teenagers and five trainers (specially selected to represent a wide demographic) to get a more detailed understanding of their daily activities, habits, desires, beliefs and values in relation to Internet use and to get direct feedback on ideas for the new peer mentoring programme planned.

As in the pre-study, the researchers developed a detailed profile and screener for the teenagers and trainers needed based on decisions made in the 'customer research workshop'. Once completed, they started recruiting teenagers who met the profile through telephone interviews and arranged times for face-to-face interviews. As in the pre-study, fieldwork guides were developed for the ethnographic interviews. However, for the main study, the researchers also created visual storyboards describing the new peer mentoring programme concepts.

The heart of the study was again ethnographic research, but this time with fourteen teenagers and four trainers. Again, interviews were conducted over a 1 to 2 hour period in the places where teenagers use the Internet or where trainers were based. If consent was granted by the interviewee, each interview was videotaped.

The specific fieldwork activities included:

- > A discussion on the overall patterns of technology and communication activity covering characteristics such as access, behaviour and motivation.
- > Exercises to elicit the different meanings of various devices, products, services and features, from mobile phones to picture messaging and from PC's to online chat.
- > Encouragement for interviewees to tell stories about certain experiences related to technology and communication activity.

- > A study of the new programme concept scenarios to gain feedback on initial impressions and on the different aspects highlighted in the scenarios. The researchers encouraged respondents to build on the ideas and project themselves into the scenarios. The feedback sought would relate to the value of the concepts presented.

As in the pre-study, following each interview, the researchers reviewed and analyzed each video recording of the interview. Important scenes were cut and noted. The researchers then went through a synthesis process to create need models, by correlating and contrasting the fieldwork data in order to more deeply understand and fully explain teenagers' behaviours, values and beliefs around Internet use.

### **3 Interviewees**

Overall there were twenty one teenagers and nine trainers interviewed during the study. This equates to over forty hours of interviews. Of the twenty one teenagers interviewed, all had mobile phones, with six of the twenty one not having any Internet access at home. Four of the interviewees were from ethnic minorities and three were Welsh speakers. Five were aged between 18 and 19 years old, seven aged between 16 and 17 years old, and nine between 14 and 15 years old. Twelve of the teenagers were based in South Wales, five in West Wales, two in Mid Wales and two in North Wales. Of the twenty one teenagers, eleven were male and ten were female.

### **4 Research Findings**

As a result of the analytical process, several common traits appeared amongst different interviewees. In addition, common themes appeared with regards the feedback to the scenarios presented. These are as follows:

- Internet access
- The role of MSN Messenger
- Mobile phone usage
- Gadgets used
- Methods of learning
- Website exploration / creation
- Knowledge of viruses / spam
- Chat room awareness
- Shopping habits online
- Teenager initiatives
- Positives and negatives views of the Internet
- Trainer knowledge

#### **Internet Access**

All the teenagers interviewed had Internet access either via their school, a youth club, a library or at home. It seemed to be the case that the main driving factor for home Internet access was the interest of the teenagers rather than income levels. However, having Internet access at home was also partly linked to income levels and parents' attitudes.

Those who had Internet access at home, in particular those with broadband Internet access seemed to have spent a lot more time exploring the Internet and learning more about the different uses of the Internet. Teenagers with broadband access used the Internet extensively at home (1-4 hours per day) compared to dial-up users who normally spent minutes rather than hours on the Internet. It is also important to note that users with broadband access at home experienced many more problems on the Internet (viruses etc.) compared to people without broadband access at home.

## **The Role of MSN Messenger**

MSN messenger was the main application teenagers' aged 15+ seemed to use on the Internet to keep in contact with their friends. On average, they spent 1-2 hours per day on MSN Messenger. The reason seemed to be that it was the application best suited to communication, socialising and the sharing of information with their friends. MSN Messenger also gave the teenagers the capability to block people whom they did not wish to communicate with, (unlike chat rooms), and provided immediate interaction. These teenagers, who were aged 15+, generally had a minimum of 70 people on their MSN Messenger buddy list. As MSN Messenger is free and offers a communication style similar to mobile phone text messaging, many sent text messages to their friends (which costs them money) to tell them to log on to MSN Messenger to continue a conversation. Very few of the teenagers used email, except for planning activities, e.g. party invites, as it was perceived as a slower form of communication and associated with spam and viruses.

## **Mobile Phone Usage**

The mobile phone was central to the lives of all the teenagers interviewed. It was not a nice device to have. It was *a requirement*. Every teenager interviewed (regardless of social economic background) had one. They all tended to use text messaging rather than voice calling, and that seemed to be predominantly a cost issue. All of the teenagers had learnt how to manage their phone costs (some the hard way), and all used pay-as-you-go services rather than being on a contract with a Mobile Operator. This was to help them manage their costs. The minimum mobile phone bill was about £20 per month. Most of the teenagers had downloaded ring tones and some had downloaded music and games. Several of the teenagers had camera phones and took photos. Some sent these photos to other friends using the multimedia messaging service (MMS) capability of mobile phones.

## **Gadgets Used**

All teenagers interviewed tended to own a very large number of gadgets and had them in their bedrooms. This usually included a TV and either a video player or DVD player, and a HiFi system. Other common gadgets were MP3 players and game machines such as the PlayStation 2 or X-Box. The teenagers from poorer backgrounds did not know about the latest gadgets that had recently come onto the market whilst the teenagers from more wealthy backgrounds tended to be far more clued in, often owning these gadgets, e.g. the iPod. A few of the older teenagers mentioned that they were making use of the new printing booths in Boots where they could print pictures from CD or from memory cards.

## **Methods of Learning**

Teenagers interviewed seemed to learn about new technologies such as the Internet, mobile phones etc. through exploration, asking friends and through help lines. All the teenagers said they had no or almost no formal Internet skills training at school, the library or at youth clubs. All also generally found IT boring in school. Another common comment from teenagers was that there were site access restrictions at the school, library and youth club, such as no access to chat rooms at school, restrictions on saving information at some youth clubs, as well as MSN messenger restrictions generally.

One major theme that kept recurring from the interviews was the importance of capturing teenagers' interest when it came to learning. Several trainers suggested teenagers learnt best through role play. Teenagers also said that they generally learnt new technologies through exploration and playing. All the teenagers interviewed mentioned that they preferred the Internet for research than using books and the library, and many stated that they hadn't been to the library for more than a year.

### **Website exploration / creation**

Most of the teenagers interviewed generally explored very few websites. The most common sites were Google, the BBC and sites related to music, games, cinema, hobbies, and clothes shops. Exploration of these sites usually took place at home (therefore excluding teenagers without home access). 14-15 year olds had less knowledge of the variety of websites available compared with teenagers aged 16 and above. There was also generally little interest in exploring new sites. There was a general lack of understanding of the trustworthiness of websites. Google, BBC, Amazon were classed as trustworthy, whilst E-Bay and chat rooms were classed as untrustworthy.

Google and Ask Jeeves were usually used for finding information. However most of the teenagers usually only looked at the first few answers returned. There was also generally little regard for copyright (music or pictures) and the downloading of free MP3 music was common practice. There was also a common theme that the teenagers were not willing and not able to pay for goods online (as this usually required credit card payments).

Very few of the teenagers knew how to create their own website or knew about blogs and there was generally little interest in website development, especially for the younger teenagers. This seemed to be because they didn't have a topic of interest to share with others (via a website).

### **Knowledge of Viruses and Spam**

Viruses and spam were generally experienced by the teenagers who were 16+, and they tended to experience viruses regularly. They tended to get viruses through either being lured into con websites, e.g. click here to win, through music downloads or from documents sent by friends. Most of the teenagers tended to avoid using emails as they associated them with viruses. None of the teenagers seemed to be able to effectively manage viruses. Neither did most trainers. Most had to reformat the computer hard disk and re-install Windows.

### **Chat Room Awareness**

All the teenagers had used chat rooms at some point in the past and tended to use it for role play, exploring different identities and flirtation. Overall the teenagers generally had a good understanding of chat room danger, however the 14-15 year olds seemed more naïve. One of the teenagers described a meeting with a "16 year old male" (who turned out to be a 40+ year old male) when she was just 13 years old. Luckily she went with a friend to the meeting. No other significant problems

were reported by the teenagers. Most experienced chat rooms in their early teenage years and then migrated to using MSN Messenger as they got older.

### **Shopping Habits Online**

Most of the teenagers interviewed didn't shop online. Those who did were the older teenagers. Several of the older teenagers had had bad experiences with EBay but most thought other sites were trustworthy, especially ones that had high-street outlets.

### **Teenager Initiatives**

One of the teenagers had tried to setup his own webpage at his Youth Club but had to stop because the Youth Club was closing and he couldn't save his work. Another teenage group set up a Hotmail account for their school counselling service to provide anonymous counseling. Two others ran a music promotions enterprise and used the Internet extensively for publicity (email, MSN, poster creation, video and pictures of events).

Most teenagers also expressed a clear idea of what they wanted to do, career wise in the future.

### **Positive and Negative Views of the Internet**

All teenagers mentioned that the main benefits of the Internet were quick access to information and the fact that it was great for communication. The downsides expressed by the teenagers 16 years and over were about getting viruses, pop-ups, trojans, spam and having their sites hijacked. Most of the 14-15 year olds didn't highlight any major downsides to using the Internet.

### **Trainer Knowledge**

The trainers (including IT teachers, youth workers and librarians) tended to have to police, control and monitor the Internet when teenagers were using it. However they also recommended sites and provided direction. They often felt that teenagers were sometimes more technically aware than they were themselves, and were eager to learn more as they recognised their lack of skills.

Several of the trainers felt that the controls placed on Internet access at schools etc. were too restrictive sometimes and blocked useful sites.