

# behind the news

Could you live without technology? Devices like a PC and mobile phone have become indispensable tools of modern life to which some avid users become unhealthily attached. Wendy Brewer asks whether we're a little too dependent on our gadgets

Whether we like it or not we are a nation that relies on technology. Last month alone the UK sent over 1.35 billion text messages, not to mention millions of emails and mobile calls. It is clear that we have adopted technology with open arms – and for good reason. For many of us our jobs would be infinitely harder without access to the internet and email, while giving up TV would mean weaning ourselves off one of our main sources of entertainment.

But has our enthusiasm for the modern world left us dependent on the technologies that underpin it? Ask yourself, could you live without the gadgets and gizmos that make your life easier?

## Culture dependent

It appears that the answer most of us would give to that question is no. Top of the technology pops is definitely the PC and all the indispensable services it provides. In a recent *PC Advisor* online poll a massive 61 percent of the 1,149 respondents said they could not live without their computer.

These findings are backed up by another survey carried out by Age Concern and Seniority.co.uk, which found that 64 percent of the over 55s asked would rather ditch their TVs than their PCs. The main reason stated for the popularity of the computer is access to the internet, offering as it does a means to both learn about and communicate with other people.

In fact, for some users the internet experience surpasses enjoyment and becomes an addiction. "The anonymity,



**"Internet addicts tend to be attracted to the empowerment of the internet, something most often missing in their real lives."** Dr Kimberly Young, psychologist

accessibility and stimulation of the internet is appealing to those who become addicted," said Dr Kimberly Young, psychologist, director of the centre for online addiction and author of the book *Caught on the Net*. "Internet addicts tend to be attracted to the empowerment of the internet, something most often missing in their real lives."

## Man's best friend

According to Young, people have a tendency to personify their IT equipment. "Their computer becomes a source of comfort, excitement and companionship, in the same sense as human beings do," said Young. She points to evidence of "strong dependency and withdrawal signs – depression, anxiety, moods – when people attempt to cut down or stop [using their PCs]".

However, other psychologists dismiss the emphasis on 'emotional' attachment. "I would be attached to anything which I spent £1,000 on," said Professor John Annett, psychologist and professor at Warwick University. "Of course I would be emotional if someone pinched my laptop, partly because it is a useful tool and partly because it costs so much."

## Childhood companions

But whether or not you are convinced by these extremes of attachment, it still remains the case that nowadays most of us would be lost without the battery of electronic devices we have come to rely on. And this dependence starts young.

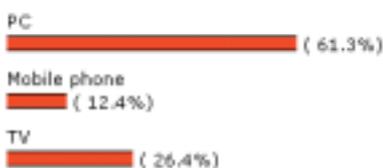
A recent poll published by ISP Telewest revealed that this September most children had gone back to school with at least two electronic gadgets, worth around £160 in total, in their satchels with the most common item being the mobile phone.

But this must-have attitude towards technology is costly. "There is a real pressure on parents to shell out hundreds of pounds every year on the latest games consoles or mobile phones and the pressure is often too much," said a spokesperson at the Consumers Association. "I do think it's fair to say that children are the real technology addicts, as once they become hooked on expensive gadgets it's impossible for parents to take them away. It's a real slippery slope."

Whatever the case, technology is here to stay. With fully networked homes and public wireless internet access becoming a reality it looks like it is only going to become harder to get away from. ■

## PC Advisor poll

What technology couldn't you live without?



From a total of 1149 votes