

Flexibility

- Online learning accommodates diverse preferences and needs – it's student-centred
- One can choose instructor-led or self-study courses
- One can skip over material they already know and focus on topics they would like to learn
- One can use the tools best suited to their learning styles

Higher retention

- Online learning will draw you to topics you like and enjoy. Studies show that because of this and the variety of delivery methods used to reach different types of learners, retention is frequently better than in a traditional classroom

Greater collaboration

- Technology tools make teamwork among students much easier. Since many projects involve collaborative learning, the online environment is far easier (and often more comfortable) to work in and can thus eliminate the need to meet face-to-face.

Global opportunities

- The global learning community is at your fingertips with online learning. The technologies used give online instructional designers the ability to build in tools that take you to resources you may never see in a traditional classroom.

Disadvantages of e-learning

- Technophobia and unavailability of required technologies. Lack of familiar structure and routine may take time to get used to and managing learning software can involve a learning curve. Furthermore, slow or unreliable Internet connections can be frustrating
- Reduced social and cultural interaction, the impersonality, suppression of body language, and elimination of peer-to-peer learning are some of the disadvantages of e-learning, but their impact is reducing with advances in communications technologies
- Unmotivated learners or those with poor study habits may fall behind
- Instructors may not always be available on demand
- Some courses such as traditional hands-on courses can be difficult to simulate

5. Internet Research

Internet research is the practice of using the internet, especially the World Wide Web, for research. From a research perspective, the Internet is just a pathway to various sites that contain information.

When you consider using the Internet as an information resource, approach it the same way as you would for any other research: examine the purpose and goals of the project and use the tools and resources that are appropriate to meet those goals. Keep in mind that the Internet is just one tool that can be used. Most of the hard data resources that are on the Internet can be found in other media, such as books, CA-ROMs, and commercial online databases. Depending on your project, these may be more effective and efficient sources to use.

The strength and uniqueness of the Internet as a communication tool is that it provides researchers a way to share their ideas with like-minded people and the opportunity to ask questions about things that aren't covered in the hard data resources. The Internet provides access to experts and specialists on almost any topic imaginable.

To the extent that the Internet is widely and readily accessible to hundreds of people in Kenya in cybercafés, homes, at work and now in some schools, it practically provides instant information on most topics. It is therefore having a profound impact on the way ideas are formed and knowledge is created.

Numerous libraries, publications and conference schedules are available on the Internet

It should be noted, however, that much of the information on the Internet can also be found by using other paths that may, in certain instances, be less expensive, and/or easier to access. It is also important to realise that the information required may not always be available through the Internet.

6. Internet Calls (VoIP)

Phone calls may be made through the internet – sometimes for free. The routing of voice conversations, as digital packets of data, over the Internet or other packet switched networks, such as the Internet is referred to as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP). The Internet was originally meant for data transmission, but by using VoIP sound and audio visual media is carried over the Internet or Internet Protocol base networks.

Benefits of VoIP

One of the key benefits of using VoIP is potentially much lower call costs. In some cases, the calls may even be free. New services such as enhanced conference calling, video calling, and the ability to send one's voicemail forward to e-mail are also possible.

Challenges of VoIP

In cases where internet speeds are low, the quality of VoIP calls is often also very poor. It is often also however that, presently, many users of VoIP services tend to retain another voice service, such as a mobile or fixed line service that can be used in the event of an emergency or where the VoIP service is severely degraded.

7. News and Entertainment

A lot of news and entertainment companies also have websites where people can get updates on the latest news and entertainment. With the Internet, it is also possible to watch or download movies and songs mostly after making a payment. Examples of news and entertainment companies include MTV, BBC, CNN, Nationmedia, Supersport and FOX. Similarly, useful blogs are also available on the Internet with information ranging from politics to money markets and stocks.

Guidelines for using the Internet

With all that the Internet offers, one needs to be careful on how to navigate and operate on the Internet. Communication on the Internet is fast, and a hasty hot-tempered word can literally go round the world in minutes, leaving an impression with thousands of people that may be regretted. Where such words are archived, they may be around for a long time and may be used to haunt you.

a) Netiquette

Like any group or community, the Internet has some common practices, customs, conventions and expectations. On the Internet these are called netiquette. If you follow netiquette you will get more and better responses to your requests for information.

Internet access services are provided by companies referred to as Internet Service Providers (ISP).

Each ISP has its network and some policies and procedures. Practices and behaviour routinely allowed on one network may be controlled, or forbidden, on another network. It is the user's responsibility to abide by the policies and procedures of these other networks. The fact that one can perform a particular action does not mean one should take that action –examples are sending bulk e-mail (Spamming) and hacking.

If you fail to observe netiquette, your access to the network may be curtailed or altogether bared. Most ISPs have acceptable use policies (AUP) which outline the kinds of actions considered inappropriate on their system. Inappropriate conduct generally includes the placing of unlawful information on a system, the use of objectionable language in e-mail or chat messages, the sending of broadcast messages to lists or individuals, and any other types of use which would cause congestion of the networks or otherwise interfere with the work of others.

b) Copyright

The Internet makes it very easy to obtain information, transmit it and even copy it to another location. One may not realise that almost all of the information on the Internet, including interest group discussions, is copyrighted and that all laws and penalties relating to copyright and other intellectual property laws apply on the internet. The general rule of thumb is to assume that any information you find is copyrighted and to seek permission before using it. This includes discussion group postings, graphics and documents, audio and video clips.

Need to know more?

For further information on the above topic of the other aspect of productive use of the internet, please contact us on the address given below.

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Productive Use of the Internet



This brochure has been developed by the **Communications Authority of Kenya** for its **Consumer Education Programme**. This document is intended to enable Consumers have a good understanding of the issues discussed and hence empower them to make informed decisions regarding ICT products and services.

Introduction

The Internet is a worldwide, publicity accessible series of interconnected computer networks that allows users to access resources and information within the network. The Internet has made it possible for people all over the world to communicate effectively and inexpensively. Unlike traditional broadcast media such as Radio or TV, the Internet does not need a centralised system for distribution of information. Instead, an individual who has Internet access can post information for general consumption, retrieve information or communicate directly with anyone else on the Internet.

Information drives the Internet with the bulk of the time spent surfing the Internet being used for research or sending and retrieving e-mails. The Internet provides a very good environment for people to communicate (email and phone calls) with each other, allowing businesses to trade with other businesses, and for marketers to better understand consumer needs better and develop closer relationships with them. The Internet has therefore brought new opportunities to governments, businesses and educators, some which are discussed below:

1. E-Banking

With e-banking, also known as Internet banking, any person with Internet access can connect to his or her bank website/database(s) to perform many banking transactions. General purpose information like interest rates, branch location, bank products and their features, loan and deposit calculations and customer-specific information such as account balances, transaction details and statement of accounts can be accessed from the banks' information databases.

The following are services that can be availed through e-Banking:

Payment of bills: several banks in Kenya today have linked their operations with various utility companies, across the country. All one needs to do is complete a simple one-time registration for each service or utility provider. One can also set up standing instructions online for paying recurring bills automatically, or alternatively pay them through the ATM machines.

Fund transfer: a person can transfer money from one account to another within the same bank or even to another bank. Most bank networks in Kenya permit the sending and receiving of money through electronic funds transfer in any of their branches in Kenya and abroad.

Credit card related services: with Internet banking, customers can not only pay their credit card bills online but also get loans on their cards and can even report lost cards online.

Shopping: with a range of all kinds of products, customers can shop online and make payments conveniently through their accounts or by means of their credit cards. Businesses have now made payment for goods and services easier for their customers by means of credit cards.

Advantages of Internet Banking

- E-banking services are convenient and accessible from all geographical locations (as long as one can access the Internet)

- E-banking services are not restricted to working hours and are offered at a minimal fee or no cost

Security Precautions

- Customers should never share personal information like PIN numbers and passwords with anyone, including employees of the bank
- It is important that documents that contain confidential information are safeguarded or shredded/ destroyed when no longer required
- The PIN or password mailers should not be stored, while PINs and/ or passwords should be changed immediately and memorised. Customers are advised not to provide sensitive account-related information over unsecured communication channels such as e-mail or over the phone to safeguard against identity theft
- Customers should take simple precautions like changing the PIN and transaction passwords on a regular basis. They should always ensure that they have completely logged out from the website they use to access Internet banking services
- Ensure you use secure Internet services and authentic websites for Internet banking

2. E-Government

E-government is the use of information technologies, such as the Wide Area Networks, Internet, and Mobile Computing, by a Government and its agencies, to transform government operations in order to improve effectiveness, efficiency, service delivery and to promote good governance. It is the use of information technology to support government operation and to provide government services.

Importance of e-Government

E-government is a fundamental component in the modernisation of governance. It provides a common framework and direction across the public sector and enhances collaboration between government and the business community, and between government and the citizens that it serves.

E-Government in Kenya

The Kenyan government has put in place an e-government strategy designed to achieve a pre-determined set of goals and objectives, which are as follows:

Better and efficient delivery of government information and services to the citizens, promote productivity among public servants, encourage participation of citizens in government and empower all Kenyans in line with development priorities outlined in the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation.

The specific objectives of the Kenya e-government are to:

- Improve collaboration between government agencies through reduction in the duplication of efforts, in order to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of resource utilisation
- Improve Kenya's competitiveness by providing timely information and delivery of government services
- Reduce transaction costs for the government, citizens and the private sector through the provision of products and services electronically

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- Provide a forum for citizens' participation in government activities

Some e-Government services in Kenya

The use of computers and related technologies has helped speed up service delivery in several areas of government with more systems being developed. Information on most of these e-government initiatives can be obtained from Kenya's Directorate of e-Government website www.e-government.go.ke. Some of these services are presented as follows:

The Kenya Revenue Authority and the Kenya Ports Authority have embraced ICT in service delivery and transparency. Through the KRA website, www.kra.go.ke, one can download tax return forms, fill and submit them online. The KRA's Customs department has also implemented clearance of import goods online, thereby greatly saving on logistics and time needed for clearing goods.

The ministry of education has also created a website where results and selection to primary and secondary schools can be accessed through the internet or mobile phones through the cheaper short text message (SMS). The Kenya National Examination Council, www.exams.council.or.ke, has also implemented a system for releasing examination results online and through a text-based system.

The Ministry of Agriculture's National Farmers Information Service (NAFIS), www.nafis.go.ke, provides extension information online and also through a voice platform.

Electoral Commission of Kenya has also implemented an Internet, www.eck.or.ke, and text-based system for voters to verify their voter registration details.

3. E-Commerce

More and more businesses are setting up sites on the internet to enhance their efficiency in sales, customer support, distribution and marketing. Electronic commerce, commonly known as e-commerce or eCommerce, is the process of buying and selling of products or services over electronic systems such as the Internet and other computer networks. Common applications of e-commerce include:

Tracking industry trends and competitive intelligence

- Stay current with what's going on in your industry through information on new products, conferences, and executive appointments, among others
- Track industry and company activities on the stock and bond markets
- Track government and industry tenders, procurement bids and contract awards
- Research innovative developments and patents filings in your industry
- Track the latest regulatory and legislative initiatives related to your industry
- Discover what your customers think, and are telling others, about your products and services

- Discover what people are saying about your competitors' products and services

General research

- Locate a supplier of products you need in your business
- Locate buyers, or new markets, for your products and services
- Find market information for your business plans
- Get evaluations of software and other products from people who have used them
- Search for jobs, or employees, in your industry

Customer Service and Sales

- Find new customers for your product or service
- Obtain upgrades of computer software programmes directly from the manufacturer as soon as they are available
- Test software applications before you buy them
- Provide an ordering mechanism through the 'net for people to directly buy your product. or services
- Provide information background and financial information, about your company to potential investors
- Save on postage and other distribution costs by putting your product catalogue and information on the web

4. E-Learning

Electronic learning is a general term used to refer to computer-enhanced learning which deals with both the technologies and associated methodologies in learning using networked and/or multimedia technologies. In Kenya there are e-learning initiatives at the various public and private universities.

Benefits of e-learning

There are many significant advantages for the student who learns online, a few of which include:

Convenience and Portability

- Courses are accessible on one's schedule
- Online learning does not require physical attendance
- Learning is self-paced (not too slow, not too fast)
- You're not bound by time – courses are available any time of the day
- You are not unbound by place – study at home, work or on the road
- One can read materials online and or download them for reading later

Cost and selection

- One can choose from a wide range of courses to meet their degree, vocational and certificate programmes
- There are a wide range of fees to fit diverse budgets