

**Venkatakrishna V. Bellur - Professor of Marketing and Director - Direct Marketing Institute, California State University-Bakersfield, Bakersfield**

## **Internet: A Vehicle for On-Line Shopping**

Traditionally, marketers used mass media, direct mail, telephone, and other means like package inserts for communicating with the target group of customers for marketing products/services. Developments in electronic technology during the past three decades have provided opportunities to communicate with potential customers and market products/services using fax and the Internet. The Internet, a fast growing medium is an information infrastructure connecting 1000s of computers using 1000s of paths. The growth in Internet usage since its beginning in 1969 has been sporadic and it is difficult to predict where and when the next link will be added. Measured in terms of host computers, the use of Internet is growing at an annual rate of 70%. Although it is difficult to precisely estimate the number of Internet users, several forecasts indicate variations ranging from 117 million worldwide users to 300 million by the end of this century. However, as of May 1998, a total of 119.5 million users were online globally. Firms using the Internet, as promotional and marketing tool must have a thorough knowledge of their target customers if they are to anticipate the direction in which the search for products and/or information may take place. The objective should be that the individual who is surfing the Internet encounter listing leading to the firm's Web page. It is important to make sure that the information provided in the form of advertisements creates awareness, interest, and favorable attitude toward the products offered by the firm. The primary objective of this study was to determine whether the respondents used Internet for online shopping. The specific objectives were, however, to determine: (1) the demographic and socioeconomic profile of respondents; (2) whether they had access to computer either at home or in the work place; (3) whether they had access to Internet and usage pattern; and (4) whether they were aware that the Internet could be used for shopping and used it for shopping. Data related to the study were collected using a two-page questionnaire by interviewing 151 households located in Bakersfield and suburbs using random digital dialing method of telephone interviewing during October-November 1997. Analysis of the information provided by the respondents showed that 71% had access to the Internet. Discriminant analysis related to the Internet usage identified sex, age, ethnicity, and annual household income as important variables in determining access to the Internet. Responses showed that only 6% shopped online and spent on the average a sum of \$20. The two variables identified as important to online shopping were occupation and annual household income. This suggests that marketers should develop and implement online marketing strategies to those that are "time poor" and have above average annual household income.