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Technically Incorrect: AOL's quarterly earnings report throws up a glorious statistic about how slow some are to change their habits.

by **Chris Matyszczyk** @ChrisMatyszczyk / May 8, 2015 11:43 AM PDT



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Technically Incorrect offers a slightly twisted take on the tech that's taken over our lives.

I don't know anyone who does it, but perhaps you do.

I have a distant memory of disks arriving in my mailbox for free, a whiny noise that sounded like it was coming from an alien drone and thinking: "Why do people do this?"



For some people, getting one of these in the mail is how it all started.

Getty Images

But perhaps you're one of the 2.1 million people who still have AOL dial-up service and actually pay for it.

AOL's quarterly earnings report, **published Friday**, revealed discreetly that 2.1 million people are still dialing up and paying AOL around \$20 a month for the privilege of accessing the Internet.

Dial-up is infernally slow. It's about as narrowband as a contemporary connected mortal could imagine and far beyond anything they could tolerate. Just to compare, in January the **FCC redefined broadband** as 25 *megabits* per second, though the average speed in the US is 10 Mbps. Dial-up is 56 *kilobits* per second. (As a quick refresher: *kilo*- anything is much smaller, or in this case slower, than *mega*- anything.) About **70 percent of Americans have broadband at home**, as of a September 2013 survey, the latest figures from the Pew Internet Research project.

So who might these people be? I have contacted AOL to ask whether it could offer a breakdown and will update, should I hear.

One is left, therefore, to speculate. An obvious view would be that many of these people are senior citizens. For them, perhaps, the price is comfortable. Even more comfortable is the security of knowing how something works because they've been doing it for a long time.

Another group might be those for whom \$20 a month is simply all they can afford. They might not be able to stretch to bundled cable packages or fancy computers. AOL offers, in their minds, a good deal.

Of course, it might be that some are neither grouped by age nor income bracket. They're simply people who are too ingrained in habits. They either don't notice what is going on around them, or they just don't care.

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Not all AOL dial-up subscribers actually pay for it. Some have been induced to stay by freebies when they threatened to leave. There are, though, some who are on a free trial. Now. Yes, they're actually joining as if, for them, Kurt Cobain is still alive.

However odd it might be to conceive, for some people AOL dial-up is still synonymous with the Internet. Why, only the other week, **a California man received a \$24,000 AT&T bill** (later rescinded) that appeared to be for his AOL dial-up use.

Internet arrangements are not dissimilar to marital ones. Sometimes, what happens on the inside isn't necessarily what people see on the outside.

Just as with the most peculiar marriages, at least some of the people who use AOL dial-up must still be happy with it, mustn't they?

(Via [CNN Money](#))

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Chris Matyszczyk is an award-winning creative director who advises major corporations on content creation and marketing. He brings an irreverent, sarcastic, and sometimes ironic voice to the tech world. [See full bio](#)

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biffhenerson

May 11, 2015

Funny how we all assume that everyone has a computer and that it is hooked to the internet using broadband. We are fools.

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May 11, 2015

I know a Senior couple who is still on AOL dial-up, even though broadband is available. They do nothing but e-mail and don't desire to surf the internet is fast enough for their e-mail. I have tried to explain some of the advantages of internet access to them (connecting with Grandkids, researching health sites. etc) but they have no interest.

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Scenario1

May 10, 2015

Wow, I'm still baffled when I get email from an AOL address.

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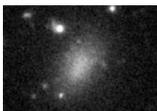
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