

## Digital Literacy Among Veterans

*The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn. — Alvin Toffler*

High-speed Internet is changing our world in a manner similar to electricity and telephone. It is shaping how we work, communicate, and enjoy entertainment. It is ubiquitous. Access to high-speed Internet and the ability to use it are essential to securing a job and taking full advantage of civic and educational opportunities. Activities that were once completed in person — for instance, submitting a job application, taking college classes, and renewing your driver's license — are now commonly completed online. In fact, more than 60 percent of Americans report using high-speed Internet and related technologies as an integral part of their jobs each day.<sup>1</sup>

## Internet Use Among Veterans

The National Survey of Veterans reveals that overall, more than 70 percent of veterans use the Internet. When considering only young veterans (those age 18–30), Internet use is nearly universal (98.7%). Veterans who access the Internet tend to do so from home or work at least once per day (68.4%) to send and receive e-mails (70.6%).<sup>1</sup> Such findings are significant because they indicate that most veterans have access to the Internet; however, they tell us relatively little about veterans' digital literacy skills. That is, whether veterans can use the Internet and related technologies, such as computers, effectively.

## Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is the ability to understand and evaluate information using digital technology. Digitally literate people have a working knowledge of digital technologies — for instance, computer hardware, software (particularly those used by businesses), and the Internet — and understand how to use it. These skills enable people to communicate more efficiently and improve productivity at work.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, businesses often seek out applicants with strong digital literacy skills. Basic computer skills, such as typing and checking e-mail, are no longer sufficient. Businesses are looking for employees who have a digital identity, use devices and applications effectively, and can assess whether online sources are credible.

## Improving Your Digital Literacy Skills

Digital technology is constantly evolving; therefore, digital literacy is a continuous learning process. There are several resources available to help people improve their digital literacy skills. DigitalLiteracy.gov, for instance, was created by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and includes tutorials, presentations, and reports that help people find jobs (e.g., create a resume) and learn to use productivity enhancing software, such as Microsoft Word and Excel. More advanced users might benefit from websites such as Codeacademy.com, which teach advanced, highly sought after coding and programming skills in programs such as Python, JavaScript, and SQL.

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<sup>1</sup>The United States Department of Commerce, *Digital Literacy Fact Sheet*:  
<http://2010-2014.commerce.gov/news/fact-sheets/2011/05/13/fact-sheet-digital-literacy>

<sup>2</sup>The Federal Communications Commission, *National Broadband Plan*:  
<https://www.fcc.gov/national-broadband-plan>