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The Latest in Technology From David Pogue

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Is the Web Dead?

The garish red cover of September's Wired magazine bears the huge headline "The Web is dead." The article's argument is that we do a lot of stuff on the Internet nowadays that does not, in fact, take place on a Web page. We use all kinds of tools — phone apps, Internet radio, Twitter, Skype and so on — that don't necessarily involve going to a Web site.

The opening spread of the article depicts a graph of all of these activities, showing use of the Web plummeting downward. It's the red chunk here:

Wired Magazine A graph showing Internet activity ([Click to see full-sized image](#)).

O.K., first of all — what an irresponsible headline. "The Web is dead"? Come on. So Facebook is dead? Google is dead? Nobody uses Craigslist, eBay, YouTube, Flickr, Amazon, NYTimes.com anymore?

Total poppycock. In fact, all of these are growing — not declining.

And now let's take a look at the graph. If you look closely, you realize that the graph represents Web usage as a percentage of Internet traffic.

The graph, in other words, doesn't say that we're using the Web less. It just says that we're using a lot more online tools. Actually, what it really says is that online video has taken off in the last few years (well, duh), which totally skews the "percentage of Internet traffic" statistic. Wired completely misinterpreted its own chart.

At a conference this week, I saw a speaker throw that same graph onto the big screen — and repeat the misinterpretation. "You can see here that clearly, people aren't using the Web as much," he said. Argh.

For the purposes of this blog post, I decided to go find the Cisco survey that Wired claims provided the data for its graph. Thanks to Google (huh! thought that was dead?), I found it easily enough. It was in a [boingboing.net column](#) that makes precisely the same point I'm making. In fact, it even plotted the same data to form a new graph, a more truthful graph, that depicts actual Web usage (that is, not as a percentage of the whole). And, as I suspected, actually Web use is skyrocketing:

Obviously, Wired chose its headline to be deliberately inflammatory, to get people talking, to sell magazines — not to report accurately. But come on; there's a point where that kind of thing gets to be just silly. If Web use were down slightly, even then "The Web is dead" would be a gross exaggeration. But in fact, the data actually prove exactly the opposite point of what Wired is trying to say.

A more responsible, accurate article would have been titled, “The Web Remains Increasingly Popular, Even as It is Joined by More and More Special-Purpose Internet Apps.” But something tells me it wouldn’t have sold as many copies.

If you want more, the further thoughts of Chris Anderson, author of the Wired article, on this topic can be found [here](#).

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