



# IT Glossary

**Alphanumeric.** Consisting of letters, numbers, and symbols.

**Antivirus software.** A program designed to look for and destroy viruses that may infect the memory of a computer or files stored on a computer.

**Applet.** A small application, that is, a program designed to perform a simple task. An applet is usually embedded within a larger program or downloaded from the Internet when needed.

**Application (or app).** A program designed to perform information processing tasks for a specific purpose or activity (for example, desktop publishing and database management).

**Archive.** A file compressed for more efficient use of storage space.

**Backup.** Storage of duplicate files on disks, diskettes, or some other form of magnetic medium (such as tapes) as a safety measure in case the original medium is damaged or lost.

**Bandwidth.** The volume of information that a network can handle (usually expressed in bits per second). The greater the bandwidth, the more quickly data can be downloaded from the Internet or moved from a network to a user's computer.

**Bookmark list.** See Favourites.

**Boot (short for bootstrap).** To start a computer and load the operating system to prepare the computer to execute an application.

**Browser.** See Web browser.

**B2B.** Business-to-business (online transactions).

**B2C.** Business-to-consumer (online transactions).

**Bundled software.** Software that is sold along with a computer system; several software programs that are packaged together (also called software suites).

**Character.** A single letter, figure, punctuation mark, or symbol produced by a keystroke on a computer.

**Character set.** The complete set of characters—alphabetic, numeric, and symbolic—displayable on a computer. (see also ASCII.)

**Character string.** A specified sequence of typed characters, usually representing a word or phrase.

**Chat.** A method of communication in which people type text messages to each other.

**Check box.** A small box that appears onscreen alongside each option displayed in a dialog box. When an option is selected, an X or a check mark appears inside the box.

**Click.** To quickly press and release a mouse button once while the cursor (mouse pointer) is positioned over a specific item on the screen. (See also Double-click.)

**Command.** An instruction that causes a program or computer to perform a function. A command may be given by means of a special keystroke (or series of keystrokes), or the command may be chosen from a menu.

**Compatibility.** The ability of one type of computer, device, data file, or program to share information or to communicate with another.

**Computer.** An electronic device that is capable of (1) accepting, storing, and logically manipulating data or text that is input and (2) processing and producing output (results or decisions) on the basis of stored programs of instructions. Some computers are also capable of processing graphics, video, and voice input. Most computers include a keyboard for text entry, a central processing unit, one or more disk drives, a display screen, and a printer—components referred to as hardware.

**Control menu.** An onscreen Windows element that appears in a box in the upper left corner of a window.

**Cookie.** A small text file that a Web server stores on a user's hard drive when the user visits certain Web sites. A cookie contains all the information that a user has to submit on a first visit to a particular Web site in order to gain access. When a user revisits that Web site, the cookie makes it unnecessary for the user to enter the same information all over again. The positive aspect of cookies is that they make it possible for users to take advantage of the convenient "shopping cart" feature of many Web sites.

Unfortunately, cookies also make it possible for marketing organizations to monitor users' browsing patterns; users then find themselves the targets of custom-tailored marketing campaigns.

**CPU.** See Central processing unit.





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**Crash.** A malfunction in hardware or software that keeps a computer from functioning. (See also Glitch.)

**Cyberspace.** A realistic simulation of a three-dimensional world created by a computer system; also referred to as virtual reality. Now commonly used to refer to the world of the Internet as a whole.

**Data.** Information consisting of letters, numbers, symbols, sound, or images—in a form that can be processed by a computer.

**Data compression.** A procedure for reducing the volume of data so as to shorten the time needed to transfer the data or to reduce the amount of space needed to store the data.

**Database.** A stored collection of information.

**Database management system (DBMS).** The software needed to establish and maintain a database and manage the-stored information.

**Default settings.** The pre-established settings (for margins, font, type size, tab stops, security settings and so on) that a program will follow unless the user changes them.

**Desktop.** The electronic work area on a display screen.

**Desktop computer.** A microcomputer that is bigger than a laptop.

**Dialog box.** A message box on the screen that supplies information to, or requests information from the user.

**Directory.** A list of the files stored on a disk.

**DNS.** Domain name system.

**Documentation.** The manuals or guides distributed with hardware or software.

**Domain.** Typically, a two or three-letter element in a Web address or an e-mail address. This typically describes the type of organisation (.gov – Government) or location of services (.co.uk – UK based).

**Double-click.** To quickly press and release a mouse button twice while the cursor (mouse pointer) is positioned over a specific item on the screen.

**Download.** To transfer information to the user's computer from another computer.

**Drop-down menu.** See Menu.

**Ellipsis marks.** Three spaced dots (. . .) that appear as part of a menu option. Ellipsis marks indicate that a dialog box will appear if that option is selected.

**E-mail (short for electronic mail).** The term e-mail refers to the transfer of messages or documents between users connected by an electronic network. The term is also used to refer to the message that is being transmitted in this way.

**Encryption.** Coding confidential data so that only a user with the right password can read the data.

**Ethernet.** A type of computer network.

**Ethernet card.** A circuit board that allows a computer to be connected to a network by cable.

**Execute.** To perform an action specified by the user or the program.

**Face time.** Time spent dealing with someone face to face (as opposed to time spent communicating electronically). Sometimes referred to as facemail. (See also f2f.)

**FAQ.** Frequently asked question. Pronounced as a word (to rhyme with pack) or as separate letters.

**Field.** A group of related characters treated as a unit (such as a name); also, the area reserved for the entry of a specified piece of information.

**File.** A collection of information stored electronically and treated as a unit by a computer. Every file must have its own distinctive name. (See also File name.)

**File name.** The name assigned to a file stored on a disk.

**Firewall.** A security system usually consisting of hardware and software that prevents unauthorized persons from accessing certain parts of a program, database, or network.





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**Folder.** A storage area on a disk used to organize files.

**Freeware.** Copyrighted software that is available for use without charge. (See also Shareware.)

**f2f.** Communicating face to face.

**Gateway.** A machine that links two networks using different protocols.

**Glitch.** A hardware problem that causes a computer to malfunction or crash. (See Bug.)

**Graphical user interface (GUI).** A visual computer environment that permits the user to click on icons or select options from a menu.

**Graphics.** Pictures or images presented or stored using a computer.

**Groupware.** Software that lets network users collaborate on a variety of documents.

**GUI (pronounced goo-ee).** See Graphical user interface.

**Hack.** To work on an electronic project.

**Hacker.** A dedicated computer programmer. The term hacker is sometimes used erroneously to refer to a computer criminal who penetrates and tampers with computer programs or systems. The preferred term for a computer criminal is cracker.

**Handheld computer.** A portable computer smaller than a notebook computer. Also called a palmtop computer.

**Hardware.** The physical components of a computer: the central processing unit, the display screen, the keyboard, the disk drive, the modem, the mouse, and the printer. (See also Software.)

**Hit.** A single request for information made by a client computer from a Web server. The popularity of a given Web site is often measured by the number of hits it receives. However, this number can be extremely misleading, since a particular Web page may contain a number of elements, each one of which will be counted as a hit when a visitor opens that page. Thus the number of hits recorded for a particular Web page can be significantly greater than the actual number of visitors to that page.

**Home.** The upper left corner of the display screen; the starting position of a page or document.

**Home page.** The main page for a Web site established by an organization or an individual; it usually serves as the entrance for a series of related pages.

**Host computer.** A computer that provides information or a service to other computers on the Internet. Every host computer has its own unique host name.

**HTML.** See Hypertext markup language.

**HTTP.** See Hypertext transfer protocol.

**HTTPS.** See Hypertext transfer protocol secure.

**Hyperlink.** An element in a hypertext document that is highlighted by means of underlining or the use of a different colour. When a user clicks the highlighted element, the user is connected with another element in the same document or another document.

**Hypermedia.** An extension of hypertext that integrates audio, video, and graphics with text.

**Hypertext.** A technology that links text in one part of a document with related text in another part of the document or in other documents. A user can quickly find the related text by clicking on the appropriate keyword, key phrase, icon, or button.

**Hypertext markup language (HTML).** The formatting language used to establish the appearance of a Web page.

**Hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP).** The protocol used on the World Wide Web that permits Web clients (Web browsers) to communicate with Web servers. This protocol allows programmers to embed hyperlinks in Web documents, using hypertext markup language.

**Hypertext transfer protocol secure (HTTPS).** This is a combination of the Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) with the Secure Socket Layer (SSL)/Transport Layer Security (TLS) protocol. TLS is an authentication and security protocol widely implemented in browsers and Web servers. TOSPS.com is a HTTPS site.

**Icon.** A symbol (such as a picture of a trash can or a file folder) that represents a certain function. When the user clicks on the icon, the appropriate function is executed. (See also Graphical user interface.)

**IM.** See Instant messaging.





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**Indexing.** The ability of a program to accumulate a list of words or phrases that appear in a document (along with their corresponding page numbers) and to print or display the list in alphabetic order.

**Information Superhighway (or I-way).** The Internet. Also referred to as the Infobahn (based on the German term for its network of highways, the Autobahn).

**Input (n.).** Information entered into the computer for processing.

**Input (v.).** To enter information into the computer. (See also Type; Key.)

**Input device.** A hardware component (such as a mouse, a keyboard, or a microphone) that lets the user input information.

**Instant messaging (IM).** A chat program that lets people communicate over the Internet in real time.

**Integrated software.** Software that combines in one program a number of functions normally performed by separate programs.

**Internet (or Net).** A system that links existing computer networks into a worldwide network. The Internet may be accessed by means of commercial online services (such as America Online) and Internet service providers.

**Internet community.** A group of individuals with common interests who frequently exchange ideas on the Internet.

**Internet protocol (IP) address.** A unique set of numbers that identifies a computer over a network.

**Internet service provider (ISP).** An organization that provides access to the Internet for a fee. Companies like America Online are more properly referred to as commercial online services because they offer many other services in addition to Internet access—for example, news, travel services, and financial and shopping information.

**Internet telephony.** Another name for Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP).

**I/O.** An abbreviation for input/output.

**IP address.** See Internet Protocol address.

**ISP.** See Internet service provider.

**Java.** A programming language designed for programs or applets used over the Internet.

**Key.** To enter characters into the memory of a computer.

**Keyboard.** The device used to enter information into a computer.

**Keystroke.** The depression of one key on a keyboard.

**LAN.** See Network, local area.

**Laptop computer.** A portable computer. Also known as a notebook computer.

**Load.** To transfer information or program instructions into a computer's memory.

**Local area network (LAN).** See Network, local area.

**Log off or log out (v.).** To exit or leave a computer system.

**Logoff or logout (n.).** The process of exiting a computer system.

**Log on or log in (v.).** To access a computer system.

**Logon or login (n.).** The process of accessing a computer system.

**Macro.** A time-saving feature (like telephone speed dialing) that allows the user to store in memory a set of keystrokes or commands that will accomplish a certain task.

**Macro virus.** A type of virus that attaches itself to documents or word processing templates.

**Malware.** Software that disrupts normal computer functions or sends a user's personal data without the user's authorization.

**Memory.** The part of a computer that stores information. (See also Storage.)

**Random-access memory (RAM).** The temporary memory that allows information to be stored randomly and accessed quickly and directly (without the need to go through intervening data).





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**Read-only memory (ROM).** The permanent memory of a computer; a set of instructions that has been built into the computer by the manufacturer and cannot be accessed or changed by the user.

**Menu.** A list of choices shown on the display screen. For example, a format menu would include such options as the type style and the type size to be selected. A menu is often referred to as a pull-down menu, a drop-down menu, or a pop-up menu because it appears onscreen after the user clicks the menu bar or some other item on the screen.

**Menu bar.** The bar across the top of the screen or window that displays the names of available menus.

**Monitor.** The display screen of a computer.

**Mouse.** A hand-operated electronic device used to move a cursor or pointer on the display screen.

**Multimedia.** The use of several types of media (such as text, graphics, animation, sound, and video) in a document or an application.

**Net.** See Internet.

**Network.** A system of interconnected computers.

**Local area networks (LANs)** use cable to connect a number of computers within the same location or in close proximity.

**Wide area networks (WANs)** use telephone lines or other telecommunications devices to link computers in widely separated locations.

**Internet** is a system that links existing networks into a worldwide network.

**Offline.** Refers to the state in which a computer is temporarily or permanently unable to communicate with another computer (even though it is turned on and capable of performing other functions).

**Offscreen.** Refers to any computer function that does not produce a display on the screen.

**Online.** Refers to the state in which a computer is turned on and ready to communicate with other computers.

**Onscreen.** Refers to anything displayed on the screen of a computer.

**Open source software.** Software that makes the underlying source code available to all users at no charge. Users may make changes and improvements as long as they do not try to sell the software commercially.

**Operating system (OS).** Software that manages the internal functions and controls the operations of a computer.

**Option button.** An onscreen element that allows a user to select one option from a group of items. An empty circle precedes each option not selected. A dot appears in a circle to signify that the user has selected that option. Also referred to as a radio button.

**OS.** See Operating system.

**Output.** The results of a computer operation.

**Output device.** A hardware component (such as a monitor, a printer, or a sound speaker) that delivers the results of computer operations to the user.

**Password.** A user's secret identification code, required to access stored material. A procedure intended to prevent information from being accessed by unauthorized persons.

**Paste.** A command that transfers information from a clipboard and inserts it in another location. (See also Cut and paste.)

**Patch.** A small program that improves an existing piece of software or corrects an error in it.

**PC.** See Personal computer.

**PDF.** See Portable Document Format.

**Peripheral.** A device that extends the capabilities of a computer (for example, a printer).

**Personal computer (PC).** A microcomputer for personal and office use.

**Personal information manager (PIM).** A database management system that permits a user to store and retrieve a wide range of personal information (for example, names, addresses, phone numbers, appointments, and lists of people to call and things to do).

**Phishing.** A type of computer fraud that tries to trick users into revealing their passwords and other confidential information.





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**PIM.** See Personal information manager.

**Piracy.** The illegal copying of software or other creative works.

**Platform.** A term used to define the type of microprocessor and operating system on which a computer is based.

**Plug-and-play.** The ability to plug in a peripheral and have it work without difficulty. The term plug-and-play is now sometimes used to refer to a new employee who can immediately do the job without any preliminary training. Because of the problems some users have experienced with items so labelled, they refer instead to plug-and-pray.

**Pointer.** An onscreen device that indicates the current position of the mouse.

**Pop-up menu.** See Menu.

**Port.** A socket on a computer into which an external device (such as a printer cable) can be plugged.

**Portable Document Format (PDF).** A format that makes it possible, with the help of Adobe Acrobat, to view documents that employ different fonts, various types of graphics, and complex layouts.

**Posting.** A message entered into a network (such as a newsgroup) or on a Web site.

**Printers.** Output devices of various types that produce copy on paper. (See also Dot matrix printer; Inkjet printer; Laser printer.)

**Program.** An established sequence of instructions that tells a computer what to do. The term program means the same as software.

**Prompt.** An onscreen symbol (for example, a cursor) that indicates where to type a command; a message that indicates what action is to be taken.

**Protocol.** A set of standards that permits computers to exchange information and communicate with each other.

**P2P.** Peer-to-peer (network).

**Pull-down menu.** See Menu.

**Push technology.** A process that allows a user to obtain automatic delivery of specified information from the Internet to the user's computer—for example, stock market quotes, weather forecasts, and sports scores.

**RAM.** See Memory, random-access.

**Record (n.).** A collection of all the information pertaining to a particular subject.

**Retrieve.** To call up information from memory or storage so that it can be processed in some way.

**ROM.** See Memory, read-only.

**Save.** To store a program or data on a storage device such as a disk.

**Screen.** See Display screen.

**Scroll.** To move information horizontally or vertically on a display screen so that one can see parts of a document that is too wide or too deep to fit entirely on one screen.

**Scroll bar.** An onscreen element that allows a user to scroll by using a mouse.

**Search engine.** A free program that helps Web users locate data by means of a keyword or concept. Among the most popular search engines are Google, Yahoo!, Excite and AltaVista.

**Server.** A computer that delivers data to other computers (clients) linked on the same network.

**Shareware.** Software that usually may be downloaded and used initially without charge; the author may subsequently ask for some payment. (Compare with Freeware.)

**Software.** The instructions that a computer needs to perform various functions. The term software means the same as program. (See also Hardware.)

**Spider.** An automated program that searches the Internet for new Web sites and indexes their URLs and content descriptions in a database for examination by a search engine for matches.

**Split screen.** The ability of some programs to display information in two or more different areas on the screen at the same time.







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**Spyware.** Software that enables a user to track someone's computer activities without that person's consent.

**Storage.** The memory of a computer.

**External storage.** A magnetic medium such as a disk, diskette, or tape used to store information; can be removed from the computer.

**Internal storage.** An integral component of a computer; cannot be removed.

**Store.** To place information in memory for later use.

**Streaming.** The process of sending and temporarily storing large amounts of audio or video information in small pieces and playing them back on the computer so that there is a continuous flow.

**Surfing the Net.** Browsing through various Web sites on the Internet in search of interesting things.

**Tablet.** A computer that accepts handwritten notes entered on the display screen by means of an electronic pen. The notes are then converted into text.

**TCP/IP.** See Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol.

**Telecommunications.** The process of sending and receiving information by means of telephones, satellites, and other devices.

**Teleconferencing.** Conducting a conference by using computers, video, and telecommunications to share sound and images with others at remote sites.

**Template.** A pre-established format for a document, stored in a computer. The template determines the margins, the type style and size to be used for the text, placement instructions for various elements (such as the date line), and design specifications for certain items (such as a letterhead). A user can simply call up the appropriate template, insert text where needed, and then print a final document. The user can modify the original template or create a new template to satisfy personal preferences.

**Terminal.** Any device that can transmit or receive electronic information.

**Text.** Broadly speaking, the material displayed on a screen or printed on paper. Within a given document, the term refers to the body of the document as distinct from headers, footers, and other elements.

**Text entry.** The initial act of typing that places text in storage.

**Thread.** A series of posted messages that represents an ongoing discussion of a specific topic in a bulletin board system, a newsgroup, or a Web site.

**Toolbar.** An onscreen element that offers instant access to commonly used commands. The commands are represented by icons on a row of buttons at the top of the screen. Also called a button bar.

**Touchpad.** The device on a laptop computer that takes the place of a mouse.

**Touchscreen technology.** The technology that permits a user to perform a function simply by touching the screen in an appropriate spot.

**Transfer rate.** The rate at which data is transmitted between two computers or other electronic equipment.

**Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP).** A collection of over 100 protocols that are used to connect computers and networks.

**Trojan horse.** A type of computer virus that is hidden within an innocent-looking program.

**Uniform resource locator (URL).** The specific Internet address for a resource such as an individual or an organization. (See also World Wide Web.)

**Universal Serial Bus (USB).** A common standard for connecting multiple peripherals to a computer as needed.

**Upload.** To transfer information from a client computer to a host computer.

**URL (pronounced you-are-el or erl).** See Uniform resource locator.

**USB.** See Universal Serial Bus.





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**User-friendly.** Describes hardware or software that is easy to use. A related phrase, user-obsequious, describes hardware or software that is so simplistic in design that it is virtually unusable.

**Userid (pronounced user-eye-dee).** The name a person must use, along with a password, to gain access to restricted areas on a network.

**Virus.** A piece of computer code designed as a prank or malicious act to spread from one computer to another by attaching itself to other programs. Some viruses simply cause a humorous message to appear on the screen. Some cause minor glitches, but others cause serious damage to a computer's memory or disks. Some viruses flood an organization's Web site, interrupting or entirely preventing access to the organization's customers. (See also Antivirus software; Denial of service attack.)

**Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP).** The transmission of voice communications by means of the Internet Protocol. VoIP is an inexpensive alternative to long-distance telephone calls.

**Voicenet.** Ordinary telephone service.

**VoIP.** See Voice over Internet Protocol.

**WAN.** See Network, wide area.

**Web.** See World Wide Web.

**Web browser.** Software that permits a user—with a click of a mouse—to locate, display, and download text, video, audio, and graphics stored in a host computer on the Web. The most common Web browsers now in use are Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox.

**Web site.** One or more related pages created by an individual or an organization and posted on the World Wide Web.

**Webcam.** A video camera that sends live images over the Internet to a Web site.

**Webcaster.** An application that can be custom-tailored to satisfy an individual user's need for constantly updated information in specific areas. A Webcaster, when appropriately programmed, will automatically deliver the needed information to the user's computer. (See also Push technology.)

**Webmaster.** The person who maintains a specific Web site and is responsible for what appears there.

**Wide area network (WAN).** See Network, wide area.

**Wi-Fi.** Wireless fidelity. A process that permits high-speed wireless transmission of data.

**Window.** A frame that permits users to view messages they have received or documents they are working on.

**Windowing.** The ability of a program to split its display screen into two or more segments so that the user can view several different documents or perform several different functions simultaneously. (See also Split screen.)

**Windows.** A Microsoft operating system used on the vast majority of PCs.

**Wizard.** An interactive feature within an application that helps a user through each step of a task, such as creating a customized document or adding hardware. The term wizard is also used to refer to the person in an organization who can quickly find and fix everyone else's computer problems.

**Workstation.** A desktop computer that runs applications and serves as an access point in a local area network. (See also Network.)

**World Wide Web.** The component of the Internet that combines audio, video, and graphics with text. Also called the Web or WWW. (WWW is sometimes pronounced triple-dub, to avoid pronouncing each W separately.)

**Worm.** A type of computer virus that runs a program to destroy data on a user's hard drive. Worms spread by sending copies of themselves to everyone on the user's list of e-mail addresses.

**WWW.** See World Wide Web.

**Zombie.** A computer that has been hijacked by a cracker without the owner's knowledge and used to perform malicious tasks on the Internet.

