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Web Design and Internet Jargon Guide

When you first venture out looking for a company to design a website for you the responses you receive can be confusing. Many will presume a certain level of understanding of the web purely on the basis that you want to have a presence on it. Others will go head-first into techno-jargon without even thinking you might not have the first clue about what they're saying!

We find it is best to ask a client what their technical expertise/skill level is like to begin with, but we felt a beginners guide to often-used web-speak would be of assistance to many.

So, below, and to the right, is a list of the most commonly used terms and what they mean in the real world.

AdWords - a way of advertising on the internet with Google (the search engine company). AdWords allows you to set a budget and displays an advertisement for your company when a user types in certain words. For example, you might advertise for the words 'chinese takeaway sunderland' and when a user typed that phrase into Google your advertisement would be shown. When a user clicks on your advertisement (thereby taking them to your website) you are charged an amount of money that is called a 'Cost per click' and is determined by the budget you set yourself when you started your advertising campaign with Google.

Bandwidth - determines the speed at which you connect to the internet (or any other computer for that matter). We could go into a lot of detail on this one, but we won't. Instead, think of it like a pipe into which you pour water. If you have a very thin pipe (say 5mm across), the amount of water you could pour into it in, say, 10 seconds would be limited by the width of the pipe. However, if you had a very wide pipe that was 2 metres in width, you could clearly pour a lot more water into it in 10 seconds. Well, companies that provide internet connections in homes and businesses offer different levels of bandwidth. Some are thin pipes, some are medium pipes, some are like the 2 metre wide pipe we mentioned. The width of the pipe is the bandwidth. If this article appeared on your screen very slowly, then you might be on low bandwidth. Bandwidth is also very important for your website. For example, let's say that all your visitors have 2 metre pipes - well it won't be much use if your website is sat on a computer that has a very thin pipe. Because your computer can only send the water (data) down its very thin pipe in order to get to the visitors computer - so it doesn't matter how wide the visitors pipe is if your website pipe is very thin. They'll only get the information (water) as quickly as your website computer can send it.

Blog - a blog is a 'web log'. Think of it as a website that is much like a diary of events. It might tell the world what is happening in your company every day, or be updated every few weeks. Blogs are usually easy to maintain with a small amount of training and can be an invaluable resource of attracting visitors to your site.

Brochure (website) - a commonly used term to describe a website that tells a visitor about the company and the services or products it offers. Brochure websites don't allow the taking of payments online. However, a brochure website can be very small or very large. Many have little more than 5 pages, telling visitors about the company, what they, where they are and so on. Others may offer large volumes of information for customers and run into hundreds of pages. Prices of brochure websites vary immensely, depending on the amount of design that goes into them and how many pages they'll have - as well as how often the content on the web pages might change (see 'CMS' below).

Browser - a browser is what you use to access the internet. Be it Internet Explorer (as provided with Microsoft Windows PC's) or a variety of others. A lot of people we meet have never even heard of other browsers. However, they all do the same thing - allow you to use the internet. Mozilla Firefox, Apple Safari, Google Chrome and Opera are the other main browser products currently available.

Cache - think of 'cache' as a form of memory in your browser. That is, a store of the sites you have recently visited. When you revisit a website you've visited before, elements of that website may be stored in your 'cache', thereby meaning your browser can show the page more quickly the next time you visit it. The 'back' button on your browser often utilises the cache, because it is taking you to a page you've already visited (you are, after all, 'going back').

Code - when a web designer/developers refers to 'code' they are generally speaking about the 'code' that forms the basis of your website. If you read below, CSS, HTML and Javascript would all be referred to as the 'code' in which your website was written.

CSS - Cascading Style Sheet. A programming standard (the way a company writes your website) that sets a common format for your website and its pages. CSS is very flexible and powerful.

CMS - Content Management System. A CMS allows you, the website owner, to change the content of your website pages without having to go back to the company that designed it. You usually 'log in' (entering a name and password) to a CMS and choose the content (pages or specific paragraphs, items etc) that you want to change. CMS based websites are usually more expensive than websites that don't use a CMS. However, the price will also depend on how complex the CMS you want is. For example, you might just want to be able to change the News page on a website, in which case the web design company won't have to provide a very complex system. On the other hand, you might want a CMS that allows you to change almost every section of text or photographs/images on your website - in which case the overall cost of the website is likely to be higher. Some companies will offer you a CMS that uses software they don't write themselves. They'll download freely available software and integrate it with your website. If they do this (common names of such software are Joomla and Drupal and you'll see that on your CMS when you log in) make sure they don't try to claim you have to pay an annual fee for the CMS software - because you shouldn't. Others will write a custom-built CMS for you. These tend to be much easier to use as they are specifically created with you in mind.

Cookie - think of a cookie as a piece of specific information sent to your computer by the internet, or more specifically by a website that you're visiting. The website sends a cookie to your computer and if you revisit the website your computer is asked by the website if it has a 'cookie' for it. If it does, your computer sends it back and this determines the way the website you are visiting responds to you. The main reason cookies are used is to impact the way in which the website you are visiting is displayed. For example, a cookie may be used to store certain information about the pages you visit on a website. The next time you visit it, depending on what the cookie tells it you looked at last time, the website may display very specific (targeted) information for you. Some websites insist that you 'enable cookies' (because you can set your PC to refuse them if you want) in order to use them.

Copy - when a web design company refers to 'copy' they'll usually be talking about the text that will become the content of your website. You will commonly be asked to supply 'copy' - and by that they mean supply the words that you want on your website (and 'copy' means pictures, images etc too). Sometimes a web design company may offer a 'copy writing' service (i.e. they'll do the writing on your behalf if you tell them what it is you want to get across on your website) at extra cost.

Crawlers/Robots/Spiders - these are automated processes used by search engines (such as Google). They visit your website and 'crawl' it (search it). They monitor the words on the site, the links (to other pages or websites) on it, and any changes in the content of your site. They report this back to the search engine and the results of their visits depends on how your site is listed by search engines.

Database - lots of websites use databases. They are nothing more than an information store. In them, information is held until a computer asks for it. For example, if you had a website that sold products to visitors you would have a database behind the website on which all the product information was held. When a visitor clicked a certain product on your website, the database would commonly show the information it held on that product. Sites that use databases are generally more expensive to design than those that simply display information that doesn't change much.

Development Server - the computer on which your website is being 'written' on before it is made publically available to everyone on the internet. Most companies will give you a link (see definition below) to the Development Server that your website is being written on. Then, they'll let you know when changes have been made to it so you can revisit it from the comfort of your own business/home without having to go into their offices to view it. Then, when you're happy with the website, they'll take it 'live' (see Live date).

Domain - a domain is the top level of your website, more commonly known as your domain name. For example, www.website-design-newcastle.co.uk is the domain name of the website you're reading this article on. Domains have geographical or domain-type identifiers on them - such as .co.uk (UK website), .gov (a government website), .com (a commercial website) and so on. A domain name is little more than an easy to remember way of masking what is a number. Behind every domain name is a map (of numbers, called 'IP Addresses') that tell the internet where the computer that your website is on is physically located.

Download - you 'download' something from the internet. It could be a picture, a file, a music track or a video. When you download something you are simply transferring it from the computer on which it originates to the computer you are using.

Dynamic website - a dynamic website is one that draws information from another source (perhaps another website) and regularly changes the content it displays. The source might also be a CMS (see earlier) because that allows the content to be changeable by the website owner. A common example of a simple dynamic website would be one that gets news headlines on a specific subject from another website. The headlines are shown on your website and when a user clicks on them they get taken to the website on which the story originates. For example, if you were selling football strips and boots online, you might ask for a dynamic feed of the latest football headlines from the Sky Sports website - because that type of information might be of interest to people who visit your site.

E-Commerce - Electronic Commerce. A fancy term for a shop or a website that sells things to visitors. If you want to set up a website to sell products over the internet, you'll need an E-Commerce website. In fact you'll need an E-Commerce website for any form of taking payments over the internet directly through your website.

FAQ - Frequently Asked Questions. A common term for describing a section on a website that answers questions regularly asked by visitors. If you were a company selling products online you might want an 'FAQ' section on your website that answered questions you may otherwise receive lots of e-mails/enquiries about.

Facebook - one of the world's most popular websites that connects millions of computer users together. On Facebook a user creates a page on which they post various elements of information about themselves. This information is shared with 'friends' or with the public in general (the user dictates what is shared with the public and what isn't). Facebook, like Twitter (see below), is now very popular with companies for promoting themselves.

Favourites/Bookmarks - a collection of websites that you collate in a list on your browser so they are easy to access in future without having to type the full website name is.

Field - a field is a specific type of information that is held in a database (a large store of information) on a computer. For example, if you completed a form on a website into which you typed your forename, then your surname, both of these are 'fields'. Databases (the stores of data into which field information goes) often hold thousands of fields of information.

Fixed Width (website) - this type of website will always appear at the same dimensions on a visitor's screen, no matter how large or small their screen (monitor, display, etc) is. Nowadays it is very popular with website owners and designers because if a site uses a 'fixed width' then you know it is going to look the same on the screen of every visitor. The 'width' is defined by pixels - i.e. the number of dots across a screen. Designing websites to be a fixed width of 900 pixels is common today - because they'll appear centred on the most modern of computers/displays and on most of the oldest of computers/displays.

Fluid Width (website) - this type of website design is 'fluid'. It adjusts the way your website appears depending on the width of the screen that the visitor is using. It'll automatically scale to the full width of the screen available to it. Fluid width websites used to be commonplace, but they are less frequently used nowadays because a design company will usually try to make sure your website looks the same on every visitor's screen. If a website is 'fluid', it can lead to lots of white space (blank space) in the centre of a visitor's screen - because the website will stretch its content across the display area.

Freeware - software (applications, programs that you install and run on your computer) that is free of charge and has few, if any, limitations on its use. Be careful though, some freeware isn't free if you use it for business purposes and is intended purely for home use.

FTP - File Transfer Protocol is a very common term in web design. It is a method used to electronically transfer data to and from a website. For example, your web design company will probably use FTP to send all the pages of your website up onto the internet. Similarly, FTP can be used to bring down information from a website. It is simply a method of exchanging information between computers.

GIF - a graphic (image, photograph, picture etc) in electronic format. GIF is simply a type of file that handles images. Other common files of this type are called JPEG's and PNG's. If you have photographs that you have taken on a digital camera, they will probably be held on your camera or computer in one of these file formats. Normally a web design company will ask you to supply any images you want on your website in one of these formats (another type may be 'RAW'). However, you may also be told you can supply printed photographs that they will 'scan' and change into electronic format (but you should be aware that the quality of these images is usually poorer after scanning).

Google Analytics - this is a very popular tool (accessible by the internet) that lets you see how your website is performing. It tells you how many people have viewed your site over a specific period, the pages they looked at, how long they stayed on your site, what your most popular pages are and much more.

Header - the top section of a website page. Your website might have a header in which your company logo and a menu of options is shown.

Hits - this is the number of visitors that your website gets. If someone visits your website, it is a 'hit'.

Host - your website will be stored somewhere on the internet. This will be on a host. A host, or hosting server, is simply a computer on the internet on which your website is held. So, if you hear someone say 'what are you going to do about hosting?' they're simply asking you what you plan to do about physically locating your website on the internet. Most companies will take care of this for you. They'll offer you a 'hosting package' which includes the use of computer on which your website will sit and often other services such as providing e-mail services for your domain name (so if your website is called www.mywebsite.co.uk they may offer a hosting package for your website as well as ensuring you can send and receive e-mail on addresses like myname@mywebsite.co.uk, sales@mywebsite.co.uk etc). You'll usually pay an annual fee for 'hosting' 12 months in advance. However, you may also be offered to pay monthly. We'd actively discourage anyone doing this - because ultimately you'll usually find the companies that offer you this are charging you an awful lot more over the period of a year. There are also different types of hosting. 'Shared hosting' is common and is when your website is one of many held on a particular computer (in some cases up to 5,000 websites are known to be held on the same computer). 'Dedicated hosting' is when your website is hosted on a computer on which it is either the only website (thereby normally much faster to use) or one of a very limited number of websites on that computer.

HTML - oooh, now we're getting all technical on you! Well no, not really. HTML stands for Hyper text Mark-up Language. It is nothing more than a language which a computer translates - a programming language. Web design companies may use HTML to construct your website. Rather like a book can be read by humans, HTML can be read by computers and the end result is your website appearing on the internet.

Internet - what exactly is it? Well it's not a single huge computer as someone once told us they thought it was. The 'internet', or 'world wide web' is a collection of millions of computers connected across the world. Google isn't the internet, again as someone once told us! No, Google is merely a company that provides internet services. If you think back to earlier and our description of 'host' - well the computer that your website would be hosted on is part of the internet. Just one very small part of it. It speaks to other computers on the internet by way of a map. It's a special type of map that a computer understands, made of a series of numbers, and it allows computers on the internet to exchange information 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. If you wondered how big the internet is, well as of 2009 there are well over one trillion (yes, trillion) web pages on it - and that figure grows by millions every single day.

IP Address - a series of numbers that computers use to identify themselves on the internet. An IP Address is a series of numbers separated by dots. For example, 165.113.245.8 is an IP address. Behind a domain name is an IP address. The domain name is merely an easy to remember way for humans to recall. You shouldn't have to worry about IP addresses too much unless you delve a lot deeper into information technology or web design.

ISP - Internet Service Provider. The company that provides your connection to the internet is an ISP. Well known ISP's are British Telecom, Virgin Media, O2, Sky etc.

Java/Javascript - another type of language that computers understand (in the same way that HTML is). In fact, Javascript interacts with HTML - they work together to put together your website. There are lots of other programming languages too though!

Keywords/Keyphrases - these are words, or a collection of words, that search engines pay particular attention to. Or, if you think in reverse, they're the words you type in to Google when you search for something. Google goes looking for websites that contain the 'keywords' or 'keyphrases' that you have typed. They're important because they play an important role in how your website will be treated by search engines. Your website company will ask you what 'keywords' your website should target. That is, what keywords do you want to make sure results in visitors being shown your website in the results that the search engines displays. There is a lot more to 'keywords' than this though. In truth, the process behind targeting keywords is much more in-depth and you should never let a web company trick you into thinking they can guarantee that they can get your keywords shown at the top of search engine listings such as Google - if they say they can promise that, they're lying to you.

Link - a link is precisely that, a link from one location on a website to another location, be it on the same page, the same website or another website altogether. Links are usually easy to identify because they'll be underlined on the screen and often appear in a different colour text.

Linux - is a type of 'operating system'. That is, software that runs on a computer much like Microsoft Windows XP, Vista etc.

Live date - this is the date on which your website is available to anyone who wants to view it on the internet. Prior to the 'live date', your website is in development or testing.

Operating System - the software (program) that is installed on a computer to allow you to interact with it more easily. Often abbreviated to 'O/S', popular examples are Microsoft Windows XP, Microsoft Windows Vista, Apple O/S X and, less commonly, Linux (note, Linux is free whereas most other operating systems are purchased or come as part of the computer when you originally purchased it).

PDF - Portable Document Format is a type of document that any computer can download and 'read' (i.e. open it up on screen for you to read) as long as that computer has a free piece of software on it that enables the file to be read. Generally, a PDF will be opened by free software from a company called Adobe, called Adobe Reader. PDF's are popular because they eliminate the need for a computer to have a certain type of software installed that a company or PC owner may have to pay for (such as Microsoft Word). For example, let's imagine that you want everyone who visits your website to be able to download and print off a map of directions to your company. You can't be sure the visitor has Microsoft Word or any other software that you created the original document in. So, if you offer the document as a PDF, they can download it and open it with Adobe Reader. Most PC's come with Adobe Reader, or another PDF reader, installed already. If not, you can even offer them the opportunity to download a PDF reader from your website. PDF's also have the advantage that the way the document is shown will be more or less identical on any computer in the world, because PDF reader software works in a rigid way and adheres to a certain standard.

Plug-in - a small piece of software that 'plugs in' to a certain type of browser. So, if you're using Microsoft Internet Explorer, you might download a plug-in that displays a new range of options at the top of the browser screen. Mozilla Firefox (another type of browser) has hundreds of plug-ins available for it (most plug-ins are free) and these are extremely popular with web developers in particular.

Privacy Policy - a policy that should be easily accessible on your website that explains, to visitors, how you treat information that you might gather pertaining to them. For example, how you protect their e-mail address if they send you an enquiry via the website, etc. Strictly speaking, all websites should have a Privacy Policy page.

Ranking - you might hear a web design company refer to a website 'ranking'. All this means is the ranking (rating) assigned to your website (or a page on your website) by search engines. The ranking is dependent on the popularity of your website, how many visitors it gets, how many other websites have 'links' to it - and a lot more things! Ranking is important, very important, if you want to get as many visitors as possible to your website.

Remote Access - the ability to connect to a computer from anywhere that you can obtain an internet connection. You may be told that your CMS (see earlier) can be managed by 'Remote Access' - and that means you can change your website content from anywhere in the world where you can get online and 'log in' to the CMS to make the changes you want to. The term is also commonly used in relation to E-mail; remote access of e-mail means you can access your 'mailbox' remotely from anywhere you can get an internet connection.

RSS - Really Simple Syndication. RSS is often referred to followed by the word 'feed'. Such as, RSS Feed. Your website could issue an RSS Feed to the rest of the world that people can 'subscribe' to. When the content of your website changes, an RSS Feed will let those that have subscribed to it know that your content has changed - and they might revisit your website to look at what is new. Users of RSS Feeds need a 'feed reader' - a piece of software that allows them to 'read' the feeds from your website. Often, a user won't even revisit your website because the content you have added or changed will be sent to them by their 'feed reader' software.

Script - a script is text written in a programming language (such as Javascript mentioned earlier) that is used by a computer to do something specific. Scripts can be short or very long. It depends on what function they're written to perform.

Search Engine - a computer that searches the internet and indexes the content of websites, then showing the results that correspond to searches that a user might make. For example, Google is the most widely used search engine on the internet. Google computers visit websites on the internet and index their content. Then, when you visit Google and type in 'flower shops in Newcastle', Google displays results of websites that match the words ('keywords') that you have typed in. Search engines are also very important to the future success of your website - because most website owners will want a search engine to display their website details to someone searching for their service or product. See 'SEO' for information on this.

SEO - Search Engine Optimisation. The process of 'optimising' (or tuning, adjusting, etc) a website to ensure that it is popular with search engines and shown to as many people making 'searches' as possible. SEO is a complex subject that encompasses a whole range of techniques. You'll hear words such as 'meta tags', 'keyword density' and so on, but ultimately SEO is the combination of vast array of techniques and is highly dependent on the amount of effort you, as the website owner, put into regularly changing the content of your website.

Server - your website will usually be 'hosted' on a server. A server is a more powerful (usually much more powerful) computer that processes instructions and is usually networked (connected) to lots of other computers (such as on the internet). When someone visits a website hosted on a server, the 'server' processes a series of instructions received from your computer. It then returns the results to your computer (such as displaying a particular website or sending you a file that you want to download). Your computer is known as a 'client' computer - because, if you think about it, it is the 'client' of the server (it is being asked to do something by a customer/client).

Shareware - software that you can obtain free of charge for a limited period of time, usually between 7 to 30 days. After the 'trial' period has expired you have the option of paying for the software in order to continue using it, or it will cease to function on your computer.

Site - web companies will regularly refer to your website as a 'site'. They simply shorten the word. Ultimately, 'site' is the term for the collection of individual webpages that make up your 'website'.

Spam - describes e-mails that you receive that you do not want and do not know the sender.

Twitter - is a website that connects millions of internet users together in a way where they 'post' (type) messages to each other. Twitter is incredibly popular and increasingly used by companies to promote their products and services. Twitter is completely free to use for companies (at present, though that may change in time).

Upload - the opposite of a 'download', whereby you are sending information/data 'up' to a server (computer) on the internet. For example, when the web design company publishes your new website on the internet they do so by 'uploading' the files that create it onto a the 'host' server.

URL - Uniform Resource Locator. If you look at the top of your browser screen now, you should see a line of text that starts with 'http://www.website-design-newcastle.co.uk/articles/....' - this is the address on the internet of the web page that you're reading. It is known as a URL. It's simply a posh way of saying that it is the address of a specific part of the internet or a website.

W3C - an organisation that governs standards by which websites are recommended to be written to. W3C develop the standards to which web designers should try to adhere to. You might want to ask if your website will be 'W3C compliant'. You can also test if your website passes the standards set by W3C by visiting their website and typing your website address in to their 'Validation' page.

WWW - the World Wide Web. Often shortened to 'the web', the WWW is the abbreviated term for the internet as a whole.

Zip (Zipping) - refers to a way of compressing a file (or group of files) down to a size that is much smaller than it originally was. For example, you might offer your visitors the option of downloading a full product brochure from your website. However, this might create a very large single file for them to download. If this is the case, your web design company may recommend 'zipping' the file. The file is compressed to a smaller size and when the visitor receives the file on their computer they use a program to 'unzip' it to it's original size and then open it (the benefit being that they are able to download it much quicker than they would have been in its original size).

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