

Jargon Buster

Although at Refresh-IT we speak both Jargon and English, to most people Computer and IT terms are a foreign language. We have put together a jargon buster to help you with the most common computer terms with plain English translations.

80211a, 80211b, 80211g, 80211i

Different standards for operating wireless networks (Wi-Fi). Loosely the higher the letter, the faster the speed. So far they are mostly incompatible with each other.

80286, 80386, 80486 (or 286, 386, 486)

Three generations of PC processor, now pretty much obsolete, the ancestors of the Pentium. The 286 was the earliest processor able to run (just about) a version of Windows, although the 386 was really the minimum to run it properly. The 486 was the earliest processor able to run Windows 95 - just about. Machines of this vintage cannot run modern versions of Windows at all, but many are still in use as basic word-processors or where a dedicated machine is required which doesn't need to be powerful.

ActiveX

A powerful Windows technology which allows programmers to do all kinds of good things with your computer. Unfortunately it also allows hackers do all kinds of bad things to your computer, particularly via webpages in Internet Explorer, and is safest switched off. (In Internet Explorer go to Tools/InternetOptions/Security and set the Security Zone slider for Internet to High). A few websites won't display properly, but most bad ones won't be able to hijack you.

ADSL (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line)

A method of connecting a computer to the internet over an ordinary phone line using ethernet office networking technology instead of an ordinary modem, which produces a much faster (broadband) connection. Asymmetric because it is faster from internet to PC than the other way (also true of a 56K modem).

Adware

Software which displays advertisements on your computer. Sometimes installed as part of a "free" application, sometimes by stealth. See also Malware, Spyware.

AGP (Advanced Graphics Port)

A special slot on the PC motherboard for the latest graphics cards, and the format of the cards themselves. Standard on new PCs from 1998. "AGP x 2" runs at twice the speed of the original AGP.

AMD

AMD is a leading manufacturer of processor chips for PCs, including the Athlon and Duron chips.

Anti-virus

Software which protects computers from viruses and suchlike. Has to be updated frequently to keep up with the latest threats, so is usually sold with a subscription which enables you to download updates from the internet.

AOL (America On Line)

An Internet Service Provider, or ISP. AOL were in business as a large commercial bulletin board before the internet really took off. Now they are an ISP specialising in family-friendly internet access.

Applet

A small program used to carry out a particular task, often on a web page. See Java.

Application

Software used to carry out a particular task, such as word processing or desktop publishing. Essentially another word for program.

Architecture

The basic design of a computer's hardware. Computers with different architecture, such as the PC and the Mac, cannot run each others' programs.

ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange)

An early and very basic format for txt files, standard across pretty much all computers and mail systems. It only includes upper and lower case letters, numbers, and standard punctuation marks, but more sophisticated txt formats still tend to be based on it. An ASCII file is a basic txt-only file generated by a program like Notepad.

ATAPI (Attachment Packet Interface)

An upgrade to EIDE which allows the hard disk controller to control CD drives as well. Almost all CD drives are controlled this way.

Athlon

A PC processor - AMD, the other leading chip manufacturer's equivalent to Intel's Pentium. Like the Pentium, constantly being upgraded. You will often see a number such as 2700 following the word Athlon, which is a rough measure of the processor's speed - the higher the number, the faster the chip.

Attachment

A file sent by email is "attached" to the email. An attachment can be a picture, a word processor document, a program or any other type of file. You should never open an attachment if you are not sure what it is, because some viruses propagate as email attachments; but they can't infect your machine if you don't open the attachment.

AUP (Acceptable Use Policy)

A document setting out what an Internet Service Provider deems an acceptable use of their services, usually published on their website. Typically it will forbid the publication of obscene or defamatory material, and sending email or newsgroup spam. If you violate your ISP's AUP, they will usually close your account down immediately.

Autocorrect

A feature in MS Word and other programs which automatically corrects your spelling, and even your grammar, as you type. Better switched off if you use obscure technical terms, or prefer your own interpretation of the rules of grammar, or you are likely to find that it's "corrected" your txt to something you didn't intend.

Backup, back up

An extra copy of your work, eg documents, pictures etc, saved onto floppy disk/CD/tape, so that if your computer is stolen or breaks down you don't lose everything.

Backwards-compatible

A program (or system) designed to work with data generated by earlier versions of itself, even though the format may since have changed completely.

Bandwidth

A measure of total amount of data transferred over a period of time, often used to measure how busy a website is. A webhost will usually base its charges on the bandwidth a website uses, ie how much data per month is requested from it.

BIOS (Basic Input/Output System; pr. "by-oss")

A program built into every PC for setting up very basic things, like keyboard, screen, how many hard and floppy disks you have and what type they are; the first thing that loads when you start your PC. You usually only need to access the BIOS if you are upgrading your hardware, eg adding more RAM or an extra disk drive, or setting a power-on password. BIOS settings are stored in a special type of memory called CMOS.

Bit

The smallest unit of information in a computer, can either equal 0 or 1. Eight bits equal one byte.

Bitmap

See bmp.

blog (weBLOG)

A website documenting someone's life and/or thoughts.

Bluetooth

A wireless communication system for PCs and other computing devices. However Bluetooth devices from different manufacturers won't always communicate with each other reliably, so it hasn't really taken off as the industry had hoped, and is now under threat from faster wireless technologies (see Wi-Fi).

bmp (BitMaP)

A standard type of graphics file. An uncompressed format, so the files tend to be fairly big.

Boot, boot up

Usually used to mean "start up the computer". Literally, the process of loading up the operating system and getting the computer ready for use. See Reboot. A "boot password" is a password you have to give to start up the computer.

Boot disk

A floppy disk (usually) which holds a copy of the operating system, or enough of it to start the computer, useful if the computer won't start up properly from the hard disk.

Bot (roBOT)

A semi-automated program, usually performing a function on the internet such as indexing webpages or sorting email.

bps (Bits Per Second)

A measure of how quickly information is being transferred, usually via a modem or network. Divide by ten to get an approximation of the number of characters per second (cps). See also Kbps, Mbps.

Broadband

Internet access over a connection much faster than an ordinary modem, such as ADSL or cable.

Browser

A program used for viewing World Wide Web pages on the Internet. The most widely used is Microsoft's Internet Explorer because it is built-in to Windows.

Buffer

A temporary storage area for data, often used to "smooth out" incoming audio or video streams. Several seconds worth of material is stored in the buffer and it is then played back from there, so that if there is a brief interruption in the stream your music or video doesn't stop.

Bug

Error, especially in a program, that has been missed in testing. The story goes that the original bug was an insect that got itself cremated inside an electrical circuit in an early computer, causing it to fail (and I don't suppose the insect enjoyed it much, either). It took them ages to figure out what was causing the problem, and when they eventually found the bug the story passed into legend.

Burn

Create a CD or DVD.

Byte

A basic unit of measurement for pieces of information; the space required to store one character. See also Bit, Kilobyte, Megabyte, Gigabyte, Terabyte.

Cable

An always-on high speed internet connection similar to ADSL but capable of higher speeds, which uses cable TV technology instead of a phoneline.

Cache

A temporary storage area for frequently or recently used data, either in memory, on your hard disk or the internet. For example, if you go back to a webpage you have recently visited, your PC will usually be able to display it from the internet cache on your hard disk, so it won't need to download it from the internet again.

CAD (Computer Aided Design)

Software used to produce complex technical drawings by designers and engineers.

CCD (Charge Coupled Device)

The component of a scanner or digital camera which actually takes the pictures. The quality of image it is capable of is usually measured in Megapixels - the higher the number, the better the image.

CD Burner

A CD drive that can create ("burn") CDs.

CD-ROM, CD-R (Compact Disk-Read Only Memory)

A misnomer, as strictly speaking it is not memory but storage. Identical to standard music CDs. Currently the most popular medium for releasing programs on, as it can hold literally hundreds of times as much information as a standard floppy disk, about 650 Megabytes in total. Once a CD-ROM has been created its contents cannot be changed. Now starting to be replaced by DVD.

CD-RW (Compact Disk-ReWriter)

A CD drive which can create CDs, either audio or data, using special rewriteable CDs which are also often called CD-RWs. A CD-RW drive can also create ordinary CDs, though not rewrite them.

Celeron

A PC processor - Intel's budget chip, cheaper than the Pentium, but also less powerful.

CMOS (Complementary Metal Oxide Semiconductor; pr. "see-moss")

A special type of memory which retains its data when the PC is switched off, used to store settings for things like what type of hard disk you have, and how much memory. The settings are accessed via the BIOS.

CMYK (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, Keystone black)

The standard four colours used by most printers - almost any colour can be created out of these. See also RGB.

codec (COmpressor/DECompressor)

A small piece of computer code that tells the computer how to decode particular types of information, usually video files. If your video player won't play a particular format, you can usually download and install a codec which will tell it how from the internet.

Compression

A way of making files smaller, either to fit into restricted storage space or to speed up transmission over the Internet. Popular compression standards include JPEG and GIF for pictures, MP3 for music files, and zip for just about everything else.

Console

Nowadays usually refers to a dedicated gaming computer such as the Playstation or X-Box. Originally meant a terminal connected to a mainframe computer.

Cookie

A small data file stored on your computer by a website, in theory to allow it to "remember" your preferences, but in practise mostly used to track which adverts you have seen. You can set most browsers to reject all cookies, or to ask your permission before storing them, but this can generate multiple error messages on some websites and is generally more hassle than it's worth - they are pretty harmless.

cps (Characters Per Second)

A measure of how quickly information, particularly txt, is being transferred over a modem link or network. See also bps.

CPU (Central Processing Unit)

The nerve centre of the computer : everything flows through it. Often just called "the processor". The best known, thanks to a barrage of advertising, is Intel's Pentium, now in its fourth incarnation, imaginatively called the Pentium 4.

Crack, cracked

A crack is a small program intended to defeat software's copy protection, thus allowing unlicensed copies to be made - stealing it, in effect. Software that is distributed with its copy protection disabled or bypassed has been "cracked".

Crash

When a computer program or operating system stops working completely or almost completely it (or the computer) is said to have "crashed". When a computer crashes it usually needs to be rebooted before it can be used again. See also lockup.

Crawler

A program that indexes pages on the World Wide Web for search engines.

CRT (Cathode Ray Tube)

The imaging technology used in most desktop monitors. Provides an excellent colour display, but is extremely bulky and is now being gradually supplanted by TFT.

CSS (Cascading Style Sheets)

A set of HTML commands used to control the style of web pages, more complex than the tag-set it is intended to replace, but also more powerful and particularly useful for retaining a uniform style across a large website. Generally only used by professional web designers.

Data

Any information created by a user, such as documents, pictures or sound recordings.

Database

A program used for organising any kind of information on a computer into a searchable form, anything from a list of contacts to a complex stock control system.

DDR (Double Data Rate)

A very fast type of RAM for a PC, originally only used on high performance graphics cards but now being used for general memory in most high-end PCs.

Desktop

A computer designed to sit on a desk (as opposed to a laptop). In Windows, it also means the screen you see when you aren't running any programs, with "My Computer", the Recycle Bin and so on.

Digital

Literally "to do with numbers". Often used to describe a device using computer technology to replace older, traditional technologies. For example, a digital camera is one that stores images electronically rather than on chemical film.

DIMM (Dual In-line Memory Module; pr. "dim")

A module of RAM (memory) for a PC, replacing the older SIMM specification.

Directory

An area on a disk for storing files, particularly in DOS. Usually called a folder in Windows.

Disk

Generic term for a type of storage device, such as a hard disk or a floppy disk (diskette). So called because the important part, where the information is actually stored, is circular, although you can't see it because it is hidden away inside a protective shell.

Diskette

Also known as a floppy disk. Called a diskette because it was smaller than the original huge floppy disks, now long obsolete.

Domain

An internet address owned by a company, organisation or individual, such as refresh-it.net, nasa.gov or bbc.co.uk. See also TLD.

Dongle

A small hardware device used for copy protection with some software. The dongle must be plugged in to a port on the computer, often the printer port, or the software won't function.

DOS (Disk Operating System; pr. "doss")

DOS was the standard operating system for PCs until Windows 95 came out, now pretty much obsolete. Will run on even the most basic PC. Controlled by typing in txt commands and has several serious limitations, but requires a much less powerful computer than Windows 95.

DoS (Denial of Service)

A form of attack on (usually) an internet service, which aims to prevent the service from operating properly, often by bombarding it with more information than it can process. See also Mailbomb.

Download

To transfer information (files) from a network (such as the Internet) onto a user PC. See also upload.

dpi (Dots Per Inch)

A measure of picture quality, often used to measure printer capabilities. The higher the number, the better the quality.

Driver

A small program used by the operating system to control hardware such as a sound or video card. Often downloading the latest driver for a device from the manufacturer's website will improve its functionality.

Duron

A PC processor - AMD's budget chip, cheaper than the Athlon but also less powerful.

DVD (Digital Versatile Disk)

A more advanced version of the standard CD which can hold far more information, now standard on most new PCs. Widely used for high-quality digital movies. DVD drives can usually also read ordinary CDs.

DVD RW, DVD Writer (Digital Versatile Disk ReWriter)

A DVD drive that can create ("write") rewriteable DVDs. There are several competing formats at the moment, largely incompatible with each other, though some drives support more than one format. It is likely that one of these formats will become standard in time, but at the moment it is not clear which. To add to the confusion, they tend to have very similar names : for example DVD+RW and DVD-RW are completely different formats, and incompatible with each other, though many recent drives can read and write both.

DVI (Direct Video Interface)

A special type of connector for computer monitors, particularly flat panels.

E-commerce

Conducting business over the internet, and particularly the World Wide Web.

EIDE (Enhanced Integrated Drive Electronics)

An extremely popular hard disk format. As its name implies, an upgraded version of IDE.

Email (or e-mail) (Electronic mail ; pr. "ee-mail")

A way to send messages between computers, or more to the point their users, either over a network or the Internet. E-mail is usually just txt. Although it is possible to send pictures, sounds or even programs as e-mail, you should check with the person you are sending to first, as some e-mail systems don't accept messages over a certain size (even the longest txt message is tiny compared to a picture).

Encrypt, encryption

Coding data so that it can't be read by hackers etc when transmitted over the internet. For example, any reputable website selling goods by credit card will encrypt your credit card number and personal details.

Ethernet

The most popular system used to connect a computer to a network, including most broadband internet connections. The computer needs to be fitted with a suitable expansion card, usually called an Ethernet card.

Excel

The most popular spreadsheet program for PCs, part of the Microsoft Office suite.

exe (or .exe) (EXEcutable; pr. "exie", "dot exie")

A file which is usually the main part of a program. A program may consist of just an exe file and nothing else, or there may be dozens of files, including more exes.

Expansion card (or board)

A circuitboard which can be inserted into an expansion slot on the PC's motherboard, to give the PC extra capabilities. Common examples are sound cards, graphics cards and network cards.

Expansion slot

A socket on a PC motherboard into which you can insert expansion cards to increase the PC's capabilities. Most PCs have several PCI slots, plus an AGP slot for a graphics card.

Extension

The part of a PC filename after the dot (.), often used to tell Windows what type of file it is. For example, files ending in .exe are programs, and files ending .jpg or .gif are pictures. Note that Windows is sometimes set up not to display the extension in Windows Explorer or My Computer, another helpful idea to confuse beginners from our friends at Microsoft.

FAT (File Allocation Table; pr. "fat")

A sort of index of where data is stored on a hard disk, used by the operating system.

File

All information on a computer is stored in files, whether it is part of a program, a document created by a user, a picture, or anything else. Most software is made up of dozens, sometimes hundreds, of different files.

File server

A type of computer used on networks to provide files and other services to other computers. Often just called a server.

Filter

A device which allows you to use an ordinary phone over a telephone line set up for an ADSL internet connection. Also called a micro-filter.

Firefox

An alternative browser, available free from Mozilla, which you can use instead of Internet Explorer. Works pretty well. It has a number of useful extra features, but perhaps the best is that it doesn't support Windows ActiveX, thus preventing rogue websites from using it to hijack your computer.

Firewall

Originally a dedicated computer between you and the internet, preventing hackers, spammers and similar undesirables from taking over your PC. Now often just a program running on your PC. Absolutely essential if you have an always-on internet connection such as ADSL or cable.

Firewire

A standard for very fast data transfer, popular for applications that use very large files, particularly video editing. Requires special hardware, generally added to a computer as an expansion card.

Floppy disk

Also known as a diskette. Originally called floppy disks because they were round and non-rigid, but modern floppies might as well be called rigid squares, as the actual floppy disk is enclosed inside a rigid, almost square protective casing. Most programs used to be released on floppy disks, but modern programs are so large that they are now released on CD ROM instead. Standard floppy disks have a capacity of only 1.44 Megabytes, but a floppy drive is still standard on almost all PCs.

Folder An area on a disk for storing files in. Folders can also contain other folders, which in turn can contain more folders, and so on almost to infinity. Also called a directory, especially by people used to DOS.

Forum

A public or semi-public area on a website or bulletin board where you can read and post messages on a particular topic, allowing public debate. See also Usenet, newsgroups.

FTP (File Transfer Protocol)

A way of transferring files to or from an internet server. Often how you upload webpages to the internet.

GB

See Gigabyte.

GHz Gigahertz

Billions of cycles per second. Often used as a measurement of a PC processor chip's speed and power, with bigger numbers meaning a bit more speed, and a higher price. 1000 MHz = 1.0 GigaHertz. See also MHz.

GIF (Graphics Interchange Format)

A popular type of compressed graphics (picture) file, widely used on the WWW. Best for artwork with 256 colours or less. See also jpg, compression.

Gigabyte (or Gig)

Unit of measurement for pieces of information : approximately 1 billion bytes, 1 million kilobytes, or 1000 megabytes. Hard disk sizes are usually measured in gigabytes. Often shortened to "GB", "Gig" or just G.

GPF (General Protection Fault)

A common error message in early versions of Windows, seen when a program tried to do something Windows thought it shouldn't, often locking up the PC.

Graphics

A catch-all term for anything involving drawing images on a PC screen. A game with great graphics is one that is visually spectacular.

Graphics card (or controller)

An expansion card which the PC uses to control the monitor's graphics. Modern PCs have a dedicated slot for graphics cards called AGP, but you can also still get PCI format cards.

GUI (Graphical User Interface; pr. "gooey")

Means that a program's controls are represented pictorially, with symbols, buttons and so forth, and mostly controlled by pointing and clicking with a mouse rather than having to type in txt commands. Almost all modern software is GUI controlled. (see also Windows, WYSIWYG).

Hacker

Person who uses computers to access ("hack") systems they are not supposed to have access to, eg other people's financial details, personnel files, military secrets etc. Hacking can get you arrested.

Hard disk

A computer's main (and fastest and most convenient) storage for programs and data. Originally named to distinguish it from floppy disks. All PCs are fitted with hard disks, sometimes more than one. The first (or only) hard disk is usually called C: by the computer. The most popular hard disk format is called EIDE.

Hardware

The physical parts of a computer.

HD, HDD (Hard Disk Drive)

The main data storage unit in a computer. See hard disk.

Homepage

A page on the World Wide Web. Confusingly "homepage" is used indiscriminately to describe several slightly different things : an amateur's hobby site; the front or main page of any website; or the page which your browser first goes to when you start it up.

Hotspot

A location where a computer can connect to a wireless network (see Wi-Fi).

HTML (Hypertext Markup Language)

The system used for creating World Wide Web pages, ordinary txt with commands for special effects like pictures, colour and links enclosed between < > symbols. You can add the various HTML commands to ordinary txt by hand - it's not difficult, see Absolute Beginner's HTML - or have it generated for you by software, either one of the many specialist editors or even a word processing program like Microsoft Word (although Word isn't very good at it).

http (Hypertext Transfer Protocol)

The protocol or "language" computers use to send web pages over the internet. Almost every WWW address starts "http://", though many browsers understand if you omit it.

Hub

A basic device for connecting computers together to form a network.

Hung

If a computer (or sometimes just a program) gets completely stuck and refuses to do anything, it has hung. See also lockup.

Hyperlink

Any kind of link on a webpage. Unless you typed this page's URL in by hand, you got here by clicking on a hyperlink.

Hypertext

A way of presenting txt so that you can click on a link within it, say a cross-reference, and instantly be transported to the relevant txt, whether it is elsewhere in the current document or in another document entirely. The most obvious examples are World Wide Web pages and Windows helpfiles.

IBM (International Business Machines)

The company that designed and built the first PCs, and still a giant of the industry. Standard PCs were originally referred to as "IBM compatible", although IBM no longer controls the PC standard.

Icon

Small pictogram either representing a file, or providing shortcuts for carrying out common tasks such as saving and printing inside an application.

IDE (Integrated Drive Electronics)

A type of PC hard disk, now mostly obsolete, the forerunner of EIDE.

Inkjet

A very popular colour printer technology, which works by squirting tiny jets of ink onto paper with great precision.

Install

To transfer a program or programs from floppy disk or CD ROM onto a PC's hard disk. Most programs need to be installed before they can be used, though a few can be run directly from the floppy or CD.

Intel

The Intel Corporation is the leading manufacturer of processor chips for PCs, including the Pentium and Celeron chips.

Internet

A vast worldwide network of computers, accessible to anyone with a computer, a modem, and a phone line. Provides access to e-mail and the World Wide Web. The Internet grew out of the need of academics to swap information with colleagues all over the world, and of the US military's need for a computer and communications network that couldn't easily be knocked out. As a result it is virtually impossible to censor, since anything placed on the World Wide Web from anywhere is instantly available everywhere in the world.

Intranet

A private miniature internet which allows no or only limited access to the internet proper, for example to allow easy sharing of confidential files within a company or corporation.

IP (Internet Protocol)

A protocol (computer language) which computers use to communicate with and over the internet.

IP address (Internet Protocol address)

A unique number assigned to any computer connected to the internet, including yours, in the format 255.255.255.255. Each of the four blocks of numbers can be any value from 0 to 255. They can either be assigned permanently ("static IP") or per session ("dynamic IP"). Most ISPs assign them dynamically, ie when you connect to the internet.

ISA (Industry Standard Architecture; pr."icer")

A once-common type of PC expansion card, now obsolete; see also EISA, PCI.

ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network)

An early high speed internet connection system mainly aimed at business, now largely obsolete. Requires a special type of modem called a Terminal Adaptor.

ISP (Internet Service Provider)

A company which provides a connection to the internet, or internet services.

IT (Information Technology)

What computers are all about - using technology to manage information. The computer industry is often called the IT industry, and computer departments often refer to themselves as the IT department.

Java

A programming language used to create small programs called applets, often to produce special effects on web pages.

Javascript

A set of program instructions, vaguely similar to Java but not actually related, written straight into the HTML of a webpage instead of as an applet.

JPEG, jpg (Joint Picture [Experts] Group; pr. "jay-peg")

A standard type of compressed graphics file, widely used on the WWW. Particularly good for photographs. See also compression.

Kbps (KiloBits Per Second)

A measure of speed of information flow, usually over a modem. A Kilobit is a thousand bits. See also bps, Mbps.

Kilobyte

Unit of measurement for pieces of information : actually 1024 Bytes (characters), but in practice almost always rounded down to 1000. Often written as just K, eg 250 K is 250 Kilobytes (250,000 bytes/characters - well not exactly, but close enough). See also Megabyte, Gigabyte.

LAN (Local Area Network; pr."lan")

A network of computers connected together, usually in a single department or building. See also WAN.

Laptop

A portable PC, with system unit, screen and keyboard crammed into one small package. They can do pretty much everything a desktop PC can do, but are substantially more expensive because of the extra miniaturisation required. Also called a notebook.

Linux

A rival PC operating system to Microsoft Windows, but unlike Windows it is "open source", which means that anyone can create their own version of it without having to pay royalties. Initially required a lot of technical savvy, but is rapidly being made much more user-friendly and may soon start to challenge Windows' dominance.

Lockup, locked up

An event which causes a computer to get stuck and refuse to do anything is a lockup. The computer is then said to be hung or locked up.

Mac

The Apple Corporation's alternative to the PC, much loved by its devotees but completely incompatible with PCs, though some popular software is also released in Mac format.

Mac address

The unique serial number of an Ethernet card, required for connecting a PC to a network. (Nothing to do with Apple Macs, despite the name).

Macro

A small program used to automate repetitive or complex tasks. The Windows equivalent is a wizard.

Mailbomb

One or more very large emails, sent to someone maliciously to stop them being able to use their mailbox and/or internet connection, because all the available bandwidth is being used up downloading the mailbomb(s). Most ISPs will close down any account responsible for mailbombing. See also DoS (Denial of Service).

Malware

A catch-all term for software installed by stealth onto a PC for malevolent purposes (hence the name). These may include displaying unwanted ads (adware), installing software you didn't ask for, or spying on your activities (spyware) and reporting them back to the culprit so that he can steal your bank account, address book etc.

Mbps (MegaBits Per Second)

A measure of speed of information flow over a network (and if it's measured in Mbps, it's reasonably quick.) A Megabit is one million bits. See also bps, Kbps.

Megabyte

Unit of measurement for pieces of information : approximately 1 million bytes or a thousand kilobytes. Often shortened to Meg or just M. See also Gigabyte, Kilobyte, Byte.

MegaHertz

See MHz.

Megapixel

A million pixels. Often used to measure the quality of digital cameras : the higher the number the better the camera.

Memory

Also known as RAM. Where the computer holds whatever you are currently working on. The contents of memory are lost when the computer is switched off.

MFD (Multi Function Device)

A combined printer, scanner, photocopier and (sometimes) fax machine.

MHz (Megahertz)

Millions of cycles per second. Most often used as a measurement of a PC processor chip's speed and power, with bigger numbers meaning more speed and a higher price. See also GHz.

Micro (Microcomputer)

When desktop computers first appeared in the 1970's, they were often called microcomputers, later shortened to micro, to distinguish them from the so-called minicomputers of the day, which far from sitting on a desk were a good deal bigger than it! There was also a popular home computer called the BBC Micro, now obsolete.

Micro-filter

A device which allows you to use an ordinary phone over a telephone line set up for an ADSL internet connection. Sometimes just called a filter.

Microsoft

By far the largest software provider for PCs, they created Windows, Microsoft Office (which includes Word, Excel, Access and Powerpoint), Internet Explorer and many other widely used programs.

MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface; pr. "middy")

A very popular standard for controlling musical instruments connected to computers. Many soundcards have a built-in synthesizer which can play back MIDI files, though if it's a cheap one they probably won't sound very good. A MIDI file is a set of instructions to play particular notes at particular intervals in particular styles, not a recording.

MIME (Multipurpose Internet Mail Extension; pr. "mime")

An encoding system used in email, mainly for sending attachments. Email was originally designed to just use plain txt, so programs, graphics etc have to be sort of disguised as txt for email systems to be able to handle them. MIME is more powerful than its predecessor, UUENCODE (pr. you-you-encode), but not all systems accept it.

Modem (MOdulator/DEModulator)

A device for allowing computers to communicate over a phone line. May be either an expansion card, or an external device plugged into one of the serial ports.

Monitor

The screen of a PC.

Motherboard

The main circuitboard in the computer - all the other bits and pieces are plugged into it.

Mouse

A device used to move a pointer around on the computer screen. Essential to get the most out of Windows, though it is not quite impossible to use Windows without one.

MP3 (MPeg-1 audio layer 3)

A very popular standard for compressing audio and particularly music files down to a reasonable size with little or no perceptible loss of quality, and the files created using it - "an MP3" is an audio file. See MPEG, Compression.

MPEG (Motion Picture Experts Group; pr. "em-peg")

A set of standards for compressing video and audio files, and the committee that came up with them. Also, often used to mean movie files created to the MPEG standard.

Network

A way of linking several computers together so that their users can share resources such as printers and documents, often via a central computer called a server. See also LAN, WAN, Ethernet.

Network card, Network Interface Card

An Expansion card which lets a PC communicate with a network, required for broadband Internet access. See also Ethernet and NIC

Newsgroup (or just News)

A public area where you can read and post messages on a particular topic or theme, allowing public discussion, either on the Internet or a Bulletin Board. Similar to a forum. Most newsgroups cover a specific topic, and newsgroup users get very annoyed if people post messages which are off-topic, ie not relevant to the topic under discussion. See also Usenet.

NIC (Network Interface Card)

An Expansion card which lets a PC communicate with a network or use a broadband internet connection. See also Ethernet.

Notebook

A portable PC, with system unit, screen and keyboard crammed into one small package. They can do absolutely anything a desktop PC can do, but are substantially more expensive because of the extra miniaturisation required. Also called a laptop.

OCR (Optical Character Recognition)

A program which attempts to convert a scanned image (ie a picture) of txt into txt that can be edited in a word processor. The result is rarely 100% accurate and must be carefully proofread, but it can save a lot of retyping.

OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer)

A company that actually builds computers, as opposed to just retailing them. "OEM software" is ordinary software bought in bulk at a discount by the OEM and pre-installed on a new machines, usually without printed manuals. "OEM software" offered for sale at huge discounts in spam is almost certain to be pirated.

Online

Connected to the internet.

Operating System

Every computer has an operating system, which is a sort of master program that runs automatically when you switch the computer on, and continues running till you switch off. It is responsible for the many routine tasks required to keep a computer running : moving the pointer when you move the mouse, providing icons and menus, running other programs such as a word processor or a game which you may request, controlling the various disk drives, the screen and so on. The most widely used operating system is Microsoft Windows.

Overwrite

Replace a computer file such as a document or picture with a newer version, destroying the earlier version. If you make changes to a document and save it with the same filename, the previous version is overwritten and usually cannot be restored.

Palmtop

A small computer which fits into the palm of your hand. They run similar software to conventional PCs, but (unlike notebook PCs) are more limited in what they can do than desktop PCs, because of the constraints of miniaturisation. See PDA.

Parallel Port

A socket for plugging a printer into the computer. The computer usually refers to the parallel port as LPT1.

Patch

A program which makes updates to computer software, usually to fix bugs which had not been detected when the software went on sale. The best place to look for a patch is on the software manufacturer's website.

PC (Personal Computer)

Originally just short for "personal computer", PC is now an industry standard, partly evolved in the marketplace, partly agreed by a committee of the major players in the computer industry.

PCI (Peripheral Component Interconnect)

A standard for PC expansion cards, currently the most popular.

PCMCIA (Personal Computer Memory Card International Association)

A type of PC expansion card, the size of an ordinary credit card, mainly intended for use with notebooks.

PDA (Personal Digital Assistant)

A small handheld computer used for taking notes on the move, keeping contact information and so on. See also palmtop.

PDF (Portable Document Format)

A popular document format, used mainly for online computer manuals, which retains the look of a printed book onscreen. PDFs are created using Adobe Acrobat, but can be read and displayed by many different programs including Internet Explorer.

Peer-to-peer

A type of network where computers are connected together directly, rather than via a server, allowing them to access each other's hard disk etc.

Pentium

The best known PC processor (or CPU), manufactured by Intel. The latest generation is the Pentium 4, but many new PCs still use the Pentium 3, or AMD's Athlon equivalent.

Peripheral

Anything that plugs into the computer, such as keyboard, printer etc.

Phishing

An internet scam in which a forged message from a bank provides a link for you to go to their website and "confirm your details" - but the website is a fake, and if you do enter your details they will be used to steal all your money. Note that a legitimate email from your bank should be addressed to you personally rather than "Dear customer" etc, and will never ask you to enter your PIN.

Pixel (picture cell)

All computer screen or printed images are made up of pixels, small square dots - the smaller the pixels, the higher the image quality.

Platform-independent

If something is platform-independent, you don't need a particular type of computer or particular software to use it. Perhaps the best example is the internet, which you can access from a PC, Mac or just about any other type of computer, and using a huge range of different software.

Plug'n'play (Plug and Play)

A system where Windows automatically detects any new hardware that is plugged into the PC and adjusts to it without human intervention. Sometimes it even works.

POP3 (Post Office Protocol version 3; pr. "pop 3")

A protocol for transmitting and receiving email, but mostly used just for receiving. (Transmitting is still mostly handled by its less powerful predecessor, SMTP).

Port

A socket on the back (usually) of a computer which allows you to plug in extra hardware such as a printer or modem.

Portal

A virtual gateway between computer systems, or a website that provides links to lots of useful sites on a particular theme, eg shopping or news.

POST (Power On Self Test; pr. "post")

A routine PCs go through when first switched on, before loading the operating system, to make sure the hardware is working properly.

Processor

The nerve centre of the computer : everything flows through it. Also called the CPU. The best known are Intel's Pentium and AMD's Athlon. The most important single specification on any PC is the speed of its processor, usually measured in megahertz (MHz), or gigahertz (GHz).

Program

A program is essentially a list of instructions that tell a computer how to do something. Any word processor, spreadsheet, database, game or any other tool you may use on a computer is a program (often a group of programs). Also referred to as software.

Protocol

Any "language" used by computers to communicate with each other for particular tasks.

Proxy server

A computer used to store copies of popular webpages at an ISP and provide them on request, to save having to fetch them from the website each time.

PS/2

The type of connector used to plug in mouse and keyboard on most modern PCs, now gradually being superseded by USB. PS/2 was originally the name of a PC from IBM with a number of innovative but non-standard features, including special connectors for mouse and keyboard. The PC didn't catch on particularly well, mainly because its unusual architecture meant that it could not accept standard expansion cards, but its mouse and keyboard connectors proved popular and were widely adopted. PS2 (without the /) is often used to refer to Sony's PlayStation 2, a popular games console.

Quicktime

A video compression standard created by Apple for use on both Macs and PCs, and the program which displays such movies.

RAID (Redundant Array of Inexpensive Disks; pr. "raid")

A way of connecting multiple hard disks together so that a computer sees them as one very large, very fast disk instead of many smaller ones. Often called a "RAID array", even though the acronym already contains the word array. Mostly used on network servers.

RAM (Random Access Memory; pr. "ram")

The computer's main memory, which it uses to hold whatever you are currently working on. The contents of RAM are lost when the computer is switched off. Adding more RAM is often the most cost-effective upgrade for an ageing computer.

Read-only

A read-only file has been set so that it cannot be altered or deleted. Also called write-protected. You can make a file read-only in Windows by right-clicking on it and checking the "read-only" box under attributes. Floppy disks can be write-protected by moving a small plastic square in the top left corner. Files on CD ROM are always read-only because you can't change the contents of a CD ROM.

Real Audio, Real Media, Real Video

An audio and video compression system from RealMedia Inc which produces files small enough to play back in real time over an ordinary modem, at the cost of a lot of sound/vision quality. See the Ultraspace Real Audio Page for more information.

Reboot

Restart the computer, either by shutting it down properly and restarting it (a soft reboot), or just switching it off and on again (a hard reboot - should only be used as a last resort).

Registrar

An organisation which retains a register of internet domain names, who owns them, and where they can be found. Domains under the most popular TLDs such as .com, .net and .org can be registered with a number of different competing registrars, but you only need to register with one of them. National domains such as .uk usually have only one registrar.

Registry

A file on Windows PCs which contains all the settings for the PC and its software. Can be edited by the user, but this should only be done as absolutely a last resort, as it is possible to trash the operating system completely if you don't know what you are doing.

Resolution

Loosely speaking, the quality of an image. When printing or working with images, the resolution is usually measured in Dots Per Inch (dpi) - the more dots per inch, the higher the quality of the image but the larger the file needed to store it. In Windows, the screen resolution is how many pixels fit on the desktop, the most popular being 800 x 600 and 1024 x 768 - the former makes images, icons etc look bigger, but the latter means you can fit more of them on the screen.

Rewriteable

A special type of reuseable CD or DVD which you can write to, delete the contents, and write to again, theoretically forever. (A conventional CD or DVD's contents can't be changed once they have been written). However, rewriteable CDs are less reliable and more expensive than write-once CDs, and there are presently several different incompatible formats for rewriteable DVDs.

RGB (Red, Green, Blue)

The three colours used by a computer screen - all the other colours can be made up by mixing red, blue and green. A few printers use this system as well, though most use the alternative CMYK system instead.

ROM (Read Only Memory; pr. "rom")

Memory whose contents are preset and cannot (usually) be changed by the user. See also CD-ROM.

Router

A device used to connect networks together, for example so that several PCs can share one internet connection. A relative of the hub, but more powerful.

Safe Mode

A cut-down version of Windows which you can launch instead of the full version for troubleshooting purposes.

Save

Copy whatever you are working on from memory, which is lost when you switch off the computer, to permanent storage, usually the hard disk. It is a good idea to save frequently when you are working on something important, in case there is a sudden power cut or you make some awful mistake that trashes your document.

S/B Compatible (SoundBlaster compatible)

A common Soundcard format. In practice anything which is described as "S/B compatible" should work with almost all sound cards.

Scanner

A device which makes high-resolution copies of printed images and txt to use on a computer.

Screensaver

A program that blanks the computer screen or displays images if you don't do anything for a few minutes, in Windows for example. Early screens could have images literally burned permanently onto the tube if left displaying the same thing all day. Much less of a problem with modern screens, and these days screensavers are mostly used for security (with a password to return to normal mode), or just for fun.

Scroll, scroll-bar

To scroll something is to move it up or down the screen, so you can see what is above or below the current position, for example at a website. A scroll-bar is a bar on the right-hand side (usually) of a window which allows you to move the txt etc up and down the screen with a mouse. If the window is too wide to fit the screen there will be a scroll-bar at the bottom, so you can scroll the txt left and right too.

SCSI (Small Computer Systems Interface; pr. "scuzzy")

A fast system for controlling hard disks, tape drives, and various other add-ons. Sometimes used for a PC's main hard disk, but more often the main hard disk is controlled by an IDE or EIDE controller built into the motherboard. A SCSI controller would usually be installed as an expansion board. SCSI is a bit faster than EIDE, but more expensive.

Search engine

A website directory which indexes as many websites as it can and allows you to search its database for sites on particular subjects. Because of the immense size and rate of growth of the world wide web, no-one has a complete directory of all sites which exist.

Serial Port

A socket for plugging devices into the computer. Most PCs have two, called COM1 and COM2. Most often used to plug in a modem or mouse; however, on many modern computers a modem is built into the computer as an expansion card, and the mouse has its own separate port.

ServerA computer at the centre of most networks which provides files and other services to other computers. Also known as a file server.

Shockwave

A very impressive technology from Macromedia Inc for making animations, games, sound and all kinds of special effects on a webpage.

Shortcut

In Windows (from 95 on), a type of icon which lets you launch a program quickly, without having to search for it. Often placed on the Windows desktop for convenience. Usually has a small arrow in the bottom lefthand corner, to show it is a shortcut rather than the program itself.

SIMM (Single In-line Memory Module; pr."sim")

A module of RAM for a 486 or Pentium I PC. Replaced by DIMMs on newer computers.

SIR (Serial InfraRed)

A wireless communication system for PCs and peripherals, especially laptops. Only works when the devices are in line-of-sight of each other.

SMTP (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol)

The original method of transmitting and receiving email on the internet. Still often used for transmitting, but has been widely replaced by POP3 for receiving.

Smiley :-) or :)

A group of symbols used to indicate a smile or laughter in an email or newsgroup message (look at it sideways). There are all sorts of variants including :-(for sadness, ;-) for a smile with a wink, and :-o for astonishment. Collectively they are often called emoticons.

Software

The programs that run on a computer. Without software, a computer can't do anything.

SoundBlaster

The best known type of Soundcard, made by Creative Labs. Most modern soundcards are described as "SoundBlaster compatible" (or S/B compatible), meaning that they understand the same commands as the popular SoundBlaster range, and should therefore work with almost all programs.

Soundcard

An expansion card which enables the PC to make sounds more sophisticated than a simple "beep!". Almost all modern PCs are fitted with soundcards; nowadays they are often built into the motherboard instead of being added as an expansion card.

SP2 (Service Pack 2)

A major enhancement to Windows XP, particularly its security vulnerabilities, downloadable as a free patch from Microsoft's website.

Spam

Originally a name for mass postings to Usenet newsgroups advertising products or services, regardless of their relevance to the newsgroup. (The name comes from a famous Monty Python sketch in which every conversation is interrupted every few seconds by people shouting "spam spam spam" at the top of their voices). Now generally used to describe bulk commercial advertising emails (UCE). Sending spam is a violation of most ISPs' AUP.

Spreadsheet

A program used for doing calculations and setting up financial balance sheets, indispensable for accountants and managers. The best known are Microsoft Excel and Lotus 1-2-3.

Spyware

Programs, typically installed by stealth, which record what you do on your PC and send reports to criminals, allowing them to steal your bank details, passwords and so on. See also Malware.

Standalone A computer not connected to any kind of network.

Start Button

A button on the lefthand end (usually) of the Taskbar in most versions of Windows, which you click on to display the Start Menu.

Start Menu A set of menus which appear when you click on the Start Button in Windows, which you can customise to suit your own preferences. Most programs will automatically add themselves to the Start Menu when you install them.

StartUp Folder

An area under Programs in the Windows Start Menu. Any programs placed in this folder will launch themselves automatically whenever you start up Windows.

Storage

The generic term for any method of storing information which is not lost when the computer is switched off; the most common types are hard disks, CD ROMs, and floppy disks.

Suite

A group of programs which carry out different tasks but are intended to work together, such as Microsoft Office.

Surfing

In a computer context, wandering around the World Wide Web (which really annoys the guys with the boards and the big waves). Also called websurfing.

System Tray

An area on the righthand end of the Windows Taskbar which displays icons representing TSRs presently running, usually at least a loudspeaker which represents the volume control for the soundcard, and a clock. Programs in the System Tray are often but not always launched from the StartUp folder.

System unit (or box)

The unit with the disk drives which the keyboard, monitor etc are plugged into. In other words, the actual computer.

Taskbar

In Windows, a bar across the bottom of the screen (usually - you can move it to the top or side if you want to) which contains the Start Button, the System Tray, and icons which represent all the applications currently running. You can switch between applications by calling up the taskbar and clicking on the relevant icon. The taskbar can be set to remain visible all the time (the default), or only to appear when you press the Windows key.

TCP/IP (Transfer Control Protocol/Internet Protocol)

A common protocol (language) which a computer can use to communicate with other computers, particularly on the internet.

Terabyte

Unit of measurement for pieces of information : approximately 1 trillion bytes, 1 billion kilobytes, 1 million megabytes or 1000 gigabytes. That's a lot of data.

Terminal Adaptor

A piece of hardware similar to a modem, required to operate an ISDN internet connection.

TFT (Thin Film Transistor)

A technology used mainly in laptop screens for giving a sharp and vibrant colour display. Much less bulky than the CRT system used in most desktop monitors, which it is now slowly beginning to replace, but also more expensive.

TLD (Top Level Domain)

The part of an internet address between the last . and the end of the address, excluding the path/address of a specific page if present. TLDs include .com, .org, .net, and all the national domains such as .uk for the UK and .fr for France. See also domain, registrar.

Toolbar

An extra set of controls that can be added to many programs to provide extra functionality not present in the standard version, such as the Google toolbar, which lets you do Google searches from your browser without having to go to the website.

Touchpad

A pressure-sensitive pad which replaces the mouse on most laptop computers.

Trojan

A program similar to a virus which is disguised as something harmless like a game, but when launched actually sabotages the computer on which it is running.

TSR (Terminate and Stay Resident)

A program, usually loaded automatically on startup, which remains in memory to provide particular functions such as connection to a network or protection against viruses. In Windows 95/98 TSRs presently running are usually represented by icons in the System tray, such as the small loudspeaker which represents the volume control for the soundcard. A few TSRs are essential, but many are installed automatically by a particular application just to improve its own performance, with no thought for anything else you may be doing, and may actually have a negative impact on everything else. Usually (but not always) launched from the StartUp folder in the Windows Start Menu.

TWAIN (Technology Without An Interesting Name, according to legend)

A standard "language" or protocol which computers use to communicate with scanners.

Ultra DMA, UDMA (Direct Memory Access)

A standard for EIDE disk controllers relating to how fast they can transfer data. Often followed by a number representing the transfer rate in Mbps, eg UDMA100 operates at up to 100 Mbps.

Uninstall

Remove a program from your system. You can't just delete its folder, because almost all programs make changes to various parts of Windows. Many programs come with a special uninstaller, which you should use if it exists. Otherwise, you can uninstall programs (in Windows) from the Control Panel.

Upload

To transfer information (files) from a user PC to a network or the Internet. See also download.

URL (Universal Resource Locator)

An address used to locate something on the internet, most often a web page. All web addresses are URLs.

USB (Universal Serial Bus)

A type of serial port (or connector), used to attach extra devices such as a scanner to a PC. Standard on new PCs from around 1998. USB 2.0 is a faster version of the same thing. Many PCs now use USB to connect the mouse and keyboard.

Usenet

An enormous collection of public newsgroups on the Internet, well over 25,000 at last count, which allow users to post messages discussing particular issues.

User interface

A program's controls, with which the user "interfaces" with the program.

VGA (Video Graphics Array)

An early colour graphics standard for PCs, now used as a sort of lowest common denominator which all monitors and graphics cards understand.

Virus

A program that has been deliberately created to cause computer problems, usually minor ones as a prank, but occasionally very nasty ones indeed, such as erasing your entire hard disk. Viruses were originally designed to attach themselves to programs on a disk, and then "hide" in the computer's memory once the host program is executed, and "infect" every disk they come across. Some types of virus (such as the famous "I love you") propagate by email, disguised as an attachment, which is why you should never open an attachment you are unsure of.

Virus protector

A program which guards against computer viruses, either by lurking in memory as a TSR and checking everything you run for viruses as you go along, or by scanning some or all of the files on either hard or floppy disk at a time you specify. Virus protectors need to be updated frequently to guard against new types of virus.

Voicemail

A voice message recorded on a computer and sent to a specific person by the computer or telephone system. In effect a more sophisticated telephone answering machine.

VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol)

A system for making cheap phonecalls over the internet instead of via the telephone system.

W3C (World Wide Web Consortium)

An influential group of interested parties who agree what is and isn't official HTML. Originally WWWC, but W3C is a lot easier to say.

Wallpaper

A picture or motif on your Windows desktop. To change the Windows wallpaper right-click anywhere on the desktop, select Properties from the pop-up menu, choose the Desktop tab and select a new entry from the list under Background. To add pictures of your own to the list, save them as .bmp (bitmap) files and put them in your Windows folder.

WAN (Wide Area Network)

A sort of group of networks, or more properly LANs, connected together.

WAP (Wireless Application Protocol; pr. "wapp" or "wopp")

A system to enable mobile phones to browse the World Wide Web. In practise the site has to be specially designed and txt only, and only a very few sites have bothered to set up a WAP version.

WAV file, Wave

A basic computer sound recording. WAV files tend to be very large, so sound recordings are often compressed into MP3s on the internet, giving a slightly lower quality but much smaller files.

Webhost

A company which makes webpages available on the World Wide Web, usually as a commercial venture.

Webmail

Email controlled from a website such as Hotmail or Yahoo instead of with a dedicated mail program like Outlook Express or Eudora. Many ISPs allow you to access your email both with a mail program and via the Web, so that you can access your email while travelling.

Webserver

A computer which fetches or stores World Wide Web pages and provides them over the internet on request.

Website

A page or group of pages on the World Wide Web.

Webspace

The storage on an internet server where websites are kept. Webspace can be hired from a commercial provider, or is sometimes provided free with an internet dialup account, though usually with constraints on what you can use it for.

Wi-Fi (Wireless Fidelity)

A method of connecting computers together in a network without cables, using small transmitter/receivers connected to ordinary PCs, printers, broadband modems etc. See 80211 etc.

Win9x

Compatible with or pertaining to both Windows 95 and Windows 98.

Windows

A family of operating systems from the Microsoft Corporation, standard on most PCs. Windows 95, 98 and ME (Millennium Edition) are three generations of the version intended mainly for home use; Windows NT and 2000, developed and released in parallel with the 9x family, were intended more for use in office and network environments, supposedly more robust but usually requiring a more powerful computer. The latest version is Windows XP, intended to bring the two different "flavours" together in a unified whole.

Windows 2000

A version of Windows intended for business users, the successor to Windows NT. Now theoretically superseded by Windows XP, but many businesses are still using it.

Windows Key

An extra key on keyboards made after 1995, located between Ctrl and Alt and bearing the Microsoft Windows logo. Pressing this key in any Win95/98 application should immediately call up the Taskbar with the Start Menu open. (If your keyboard doesn't have a Windows key you can perform the same task by pressing Ctrl-Esc).

Windows ME (Millennium Edition)

The successor to Windows 98, but not widely taken up and now replaced by Windows XP. See Windows.

Windows NT

A version of Windows intended for business use, more stable for networking but less game-friendly than its Win9x cousins. Superseded first by Windows 2000 and now by Windows XP.

Windows XP

The latest version of Windows and generally agreed to be the most stable. Intended to bring together and replace the different 9x and NT versions of Windows (see Windows) - but Microsoft have released two versions, "Home" and "Professional".

Winsock

A program required by Windows to communicate with the internet, usually installed automatically along with internet connection software.

Winzip

The most popular program for compressing files, either for storage or transmission via the internet, widely available as a free download. The compressed files it creates have the extension .zip. See also zip.

Wireless network

A computer network which uses radio transmitters (usually) to move information between computers without the need for physical cables. See Wi-Fi.

Wizard

A Windows feature which presents a user with simple menus or options for what would otherwise be a complex task, and carries them out automatically. Almost all Windows programs are installed via Wizards, and they are also widely used inside Windows programs.

Word Processor

A program used for creating documents, letters etc. By far the best known is Microsoft Word.

World Wide Web (WWW or just "the Web")

The easiest part of the Internet to understand and use, the World Wide Web consists of many millions of pages of txt and images published by anyone and everyone, from governments and large corporations down to the humblest home user, in a standardised hypertext format. A particular person or company's area is called a website. Viewed with a program called a browser. Wandering around the World Wide Web is often called Websurfing or just surfing.

Worm

A malicious program introduced into computers by stealth, similar to a virus.

Write-protected

A write-protected file has been set so that it cannot be altered or deleted without first removing the write protection. Also called read-only. You can write-protect a file in windows by right-clicking on it and checking the "read-only" box under attributes. Floppy disks can be write-protected by moving the small plastic square in the top right corner.

WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get; pr. "whizzy-wig")

Mainly refers to word-processors, desktop publishers and the like. Means that all typeface changes, pictures and so on are drawn on the computer screen exactly as they will appear on the printed page, often not the case with older software.

Zip

A popular standard for file compression developed by the PKWare corporation. Files thus compressed usually have the extension .zip. See Winzip.

Zip drive

A special drive for removable data cartridges, often used for making backups as the cartridges can hold a lot more data than a floppy disk. Now pretty much obsolete, as almost all PCs have CD or DVD writers fitted as standard.