

COMPUTER JARGON – Applet to Zip Files

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

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

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).

Browser A program used for viewing World Wide Web (www) pages on the Internet. The most widely used is Microsoft's Internet Explorer.

Cache (pronounced "cash") 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 a cache on your hard disk, so it won't need to download it from the Internet again.

CD-ROM (*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 700 Megabytes in total.

Cluster Data stored on a disk is spread across a number of clusters, small physical areas on the disk. How big they are depends on the way the disk is formatted - generally a few kilobytes each.

Cookie A small data file stored on your computer by a website, in theory to allow it to "remember" your preferences, but in practice 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.

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.

Default A default setting is one you haven't changed - what a program will do (or use) if you don't tell it any different. "Accept the defaults" means leave any settings as they are.

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.

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

Disk A 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.

DOS (*Disk Operating System*; pronounced "doss"). DOS was the standard operating system for PCs until Windows 95 came out. Will run on any PC controlled by typing in text commands and has several serious limitations, but requires a much less powerful computer than Windows 95, and has a huge library of software available for it.

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

dpi (*Dots Per Inch*) A measure of picture quality often used to measure printer capabilities. The higher the number, the better the quality.

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

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.

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.

Email (or e-mail) (*Electronic mail*; pronounced "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 text. 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 text message is tiny compared to a picture).

exe (or .exe) (*EXEcutable*; pronounced "exie" or "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.

FAQ (*Frequently Asked Questions*). A document on a website or in a newsgroup that gives answers to common problems and questions. Look for an FAQ if you have a problem with something before you email or call for phone support.

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.

FTP (*File Transfer Protocol*). A way of transferring files to or from an Internet server. Often how you upload webpages to the Internet.

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 pictures with 16 or fewer colors. See also jpg, compression.

Gigabyte (or Gig) Unit of measurement for pieces of information: approximately 1 billion bytes, 1 million kilobytes, or 1000 megabytes. The gigabyte is the largest measure in common use today. Sometimes shortened to "Gig" or just G.

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.

HTML (*Hypertext Markup Language*) The system used for creating World Wide Web pages, ordinary text with commands for special effects like pictures, color and links enclosed between < > symbols. You can add the various HTML commands to ordinary text 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.

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

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.

Internet The 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.

ISDN (*Integrated Services Digital Network*, a high speed Internet connection system mainly aimed at business, now being superseded by the much faster ADSL. 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

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*; pronounced "jay-peg") A standard type of compressed graphics file, widely used on the WWW. It's particularly good for photographs.

Kbps (*Kilobits Per Second*) A measure of speed of information flow, usually over a modem. A Kilobit is a thousand bits.

Kilobyte Unit of measurement for pieces of information, actually 1024 Bytes (characters), but in practice almost always rounded down to 1000. Often written as **K**, e.g. 250 K is 250 Kilobytes (250,000 bytes/characters--not exactly but close enough).

LOL (*Laughing Out Loud*) Internet slang.

Mbps (*Megabits Per Second*) A measure of speed of information flow over a network (and if it's measured in Mbps, it's pretty quick.) A Megabit is one million bits.

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.

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.

Mouse, serial A serial mouse is one that plugs into one of the computer's serial ports, rather than having its own special connector (usually a PS/2 connector), which is more usual on recent PCs.

Newbie (*New beginner*) Internet slang for someone who hasn't been using computers or the Internet for long.

OEM (*Original Equipment Manufacturer*) A company that actually builds computers, as opposed to just retailing them.

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.

Parallel Port A socket for plugging devices into the computer. Originally intended just for printers, but is also sometimes used for other add-on devices such as scanners. The computer usually refers to the parallel port as LPT1.

Patch A program that makes updates to computer software, usually to fix bugs that 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.

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

Pixel (*picture element*) All computer screens or printed images are made up of pixels, small square dots - the smaller the pixels, the higher the image quality.

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*; pronounced "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 that allows you to plug in extra hardware such as a printer or modem.

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.

RAM (*Random Access Memory*; pronounced "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.

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).

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 reusable CD or DVD which you can write to, delete the contents, and write to again, theoretically forever. (A conventional CO or DVDs 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.

Save To copy whatever you are working on from RAM 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.

Scanner A device that makes high-resolution copies of printed images and text 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 that allows you to move the text 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 text left and right too.

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 that 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 modem computers a modem is built into the computer as an expansion card, and the mouse has its own separate port.

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

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 :-0 for astonishment. Collectively they are often called emoticons.

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

System Tray An area on the right-hand end of the Windows Taskbar that displays icons representing ISRs presently running, usually at least a loudspeaker that 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.

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.

Twain (*Technology Without An Interesting Name*, according to legend) A standard "language" or protocol which computers use to communicate with scanners.

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.

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 new type of serial port (or connector), faster and more versatile than its predecessors. Used to attach extra devices such as a scanner to a PC. Fitted on new PCs from around 1998. USB 2.0 is a faster version of the same thing.

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.

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 "flavors" together in a unified whole.

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.

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 text and images published by anyone and everyone, from governments and large corporations down to the humblest home user, in a standardized hypertext format. A particular person's or company's area is called a website. Viewed with a program called a browser. Wandering around the World Wide Web is often called Web surfing or just surfing.

Zip A popular standard for file compression developed by the PKWare Corporation. Files thus compressed usually have the extension .zip.

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