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A Non-Techie's Guide to Website Jargon

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Just when you think you've got the jargon down pat, do you sometimes find that web designers or web developers have a language only they can comprehend? Technology is always changing and the list of terms and phrases that are very specific to the website industry grows and is amended as new technology develops. It is important to stay current with the language of technology so that you can communicate effectively with a web designer or developer. When researching or beginning to work with a web firm, it is imperative that you understand the lingo so you can not only truly understand a designer or developer's experience and approach, but also evaluate whether or not they are a good fit for you.

This reference guide contains an alphabetical list of some of the most common web terms. Consult the guide when you encounter a word you are unfamiliar with. Use the terms so you become familiar with them and you'll become more and more comfortable speaking the language of the web.



Above The Fold Term that refers to what the user will see without having to scroll. It is based on a newspaper term that refers to content on the top half of the paper – “above the fold.”

Adwords A Pay-Per-Click method of advertising on Google by paying for clicks on specific “ad words.”

Algorithm The mathematical calculation used by search engines in determining the order in which web pages are ranked in search results.

Analytics or Google Analytics An application developed by Google that provides website owners the ability to track specific website statistics such as number and source of visitors, keywords searched, and top pages viewed.

Anchor Text Anchor text are hyperlinks on the same web page, normally used to help navigate long pages by clicking – thereby instantly jumping to a new section – rather than scrolling.

Back End The side of your website that is not visible to visitors; it is where content is managed.

Backlink Backlinks are links from other sites back to your own. Backlinks have a huge impact on your site’s search rankings. Lots of backlinks from high-ranking sites can greatly improve your search engine results, especially if those links use keywords in their anchor text.

Bandwidth A measure of the speed of data transfer between computers, measured in Kbps (Kilobits per second) or Mbps (Megabits per second).

Blog (short for Web Log) A type of web page that holds posted items such as stories, journals or personal pages by “bloggers.” Blogs are used to communicate personal, professional and news-type information and are an additional way to refresh your website content from time to time and to help raise your search engine ranking.



Bounce Rate The percentage of people who leave the site from the same page they entered the site, without clicking through to any other pages. This can be a good indicator of how good a website's navigation is, as well as an indicator of the quality of the site's content.

Breadcrumbs A trail of your progress through a website, often visible in the navigation area of the site, which allows you to retrace your steps within the site.

Browser Also called a web browser, it is software that allows a user to view web pages in the internet. The most common browser is Google Chrome.

*As you navigate through websites, pages load faster when loaded from the **cache** than if retrieved from the server.*

Cache The space on your computer where copies of web pages you have visited are stored. As you navigate through websites, pages load faster when loaded from the cache than if retrieved from the server.

Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) Allow you to control the presentation of information within a website, to make each page in the site consistent in terms of typefaces, colors, text sizes, borders, link colors, and design elements.

Click-Through When a user selects a hypertext link to visit another web page, the action is called a click-through. Click-through statistics are important, since they show action taken by the web visitor.

Content The information available on a website, typically in the form of images, words, sounds or video.

Content Management System (CMS) A tool which allows the web owner, often without knowledge of HTML, the ability to create, modify, re-organize or remove information from a website.

Conversion Rate The relationship between the number of visitors to the number of actions (or sales) taken by those visitors. If 4 out of 100 visitors make a purchase on a site, the conversion rate is 4%.



Cookie A piece of code saved to the hard drive of a website visitor that stores information to personalize the site upon their return. Cookies can be used to retrieve passwords, save preferences or otherwise customize the site experience. Cookies can be blocked by individual users through their browser settings.

Cross Linking Linking content between pages within the same site.

Domain Extensions used in domain names that provide general information regarding the type of site or its country of origin. In the US, the most common domains include .edu (education), .gov (government agency), .net (network related), .com (commercial), .biz (business), and .org (nonprofit and research organizations). Outside the US, domains indicate country: .ca (Canada), .uk (United Kingdom), .au (Australia), .jp (Japan), or .fr (France).

Domain Name A unique name that identifies a site on the internet.

Download Transferring a file from a remote server to the user's computer.

E-commerce Short for electronic-commerce, represents the buying and selling of products and services via the internet.

Encryption The securing of information that is transmitted across non-secure sites. Users sharing personal or banking information should ensure that data is encrypted to protect their identities.

File Transfer Protocol (FTP) A common way of uploading and downloading files over the internet.

Flash A multimedia technology developed by Macromedia that is often embedded in HTML pages for style and functionality, commonly in the form of animations.

Focal Point The spot on a web page that the eye is naturally drawn to. This could be an image, a banner, text, Flash content, or just about anything else. Your focal point should be the most important aspect of your website.

Font The typeface used in designing your website. The font style can be serif or sans-serif and can be italic or bold/face, book weight or light.

Front End The side of your website that is visible to users.

Graphic Interchange Format (GIF) A format for compressed graphic files that allows them to be transmitted quickly over the internet.

Graphical User Interface (GUI) Uses an input device to allow you to interact with a web application without having to enter code.



Hits The number of files, such as graphics or HTML files, that are downloaded from a web server. Hits are used to measure traffic, but are not the same as visits or page views. If a page has five graphics it will count as six hits (five graphics plus one HTML file), though just for one visit.

Home Page The main page or starting page of a website, which typically contains a table of contents, links to other pages in the site, and navigation tools.

Hosting / Hosting Plan The rented space on an Internet server where your website files live.

Hyperlink A link from one web page to another, either on the same site or another one. This text or images are highlighted in some way by underlining or a different color or font weight to make them stand out as links to hypertext.

HyperText Markup Language (HTML) The computer language used to create web pages that are readable by a web browser. Different “tags” are used to define how images and text are displayed.

HyperText Transfer Protocol (HTTP) The standard system by which data is transferred between servers and browsers.

Internet A collection of computers all across the world that connect to form a large network. These computers communicate with one another, allowing for the exchange of e-mails, viewing of web pages and transfer of files. When you connect to the internet, your computer becomes part of the internet.

Intranet Similar to an internet, an intranet is a collection of computers connected together into a network. However, access is restricted to specific computers, so is often used by companies to maintain privacy.



Internet Protocol Address (IP Address) A unique number assigned to your computer when you access the internet, which allows data to transfer from the internet to your computer. IP addresses can be static or dynamic.

Joint Photographic Experts Group (JPG or JPEG) A compressed graphics file format often used in web pages due to its small size. It is named for the industry committee that developed it.

Keyword A word or phrase typed into a search engine query in order to locate web sites that have similar content.

Keyword Density A measure of how frequently a specific keyword is used within a web page's content. If "internet" is repeated 5 times within the 100 words on the web page, it has 5% keyword density.

Landing Page The page where a visitor first enters a website. Oftentimes, a special landing page is created as a promotion or to cause a specific action from the website visitor.

Meta Tags HTML commands such as title, description and keywords that are added by the web designer to the coding of a website and are used by search engines to classify pages for searches.

Multimedia The use of more than one type of media within the content of a website, such as text, sound, video or animations.

Navigation Tools Links, buttons, or clickable images that allow users to explore a website. They are typically located at the top or bottom of each web page.

Page Views A page view is each time a visitor views a page on your website. Used to measure site traffic along with hits and visits.

Pay Per Click (PPC) A method of advertising on the internet whereby you pay only when someone clicks on your link or your advertisement.

Plug-In Third party code that extends the capabilities or functionality of a website without having to redo the core coding of the site.

Portable Document Format (PDF) A "device independent" file format developed by Adobe to allow any document to be distributed with its original formatting regardless of the device on which its viewed or printed. Requires Acrobat Reader, available for free download from Adobe.

Ranking The position at which a website appears on a search engine's search results page.

Reciprocal Link A link between two sites intended to drive traffic from one site to the other.



Search Engine A directory of web pages on the internet that allows users to search for specific keywords or phrases and find web pages that match their interests. Results are displayed in order of relevancy and appear as hyperlinks.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) The technique used to achieve higher ranking in search engine results, by enhancing the content and structure of the pages, incorporating metatags, and proactively submitting pages to search engines.

Serif Small decorative flourishes on the ends of some of the strokes that make up letters and symbols in a typeface font. An example of a serif typeface is the Times New Roman font. Sans-serif does not have these details or flourishes. An example of a sans-serif typeface is the Arial font.

Server A computer on a network that shares information, emails or web pages with other computers on the network.

Shopping Cart The functionality on an e-commerce website that allows customers to collect items for purchase until they are ready to pay and check out.

Sitemap A complete index of all of the pages in a website, which can be used as a visual reference or as a submission to search engines.

Social Media Marketing (SMM) The use of social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) to deliver messages to and create relationships with customers, as well as to drive traffic to websites.

Spiders seek new pages, capture updates to existing pages and identify obsolete pages.

Spiders Automated software robots sometimes referred to as “crawlers” that continuously roam the internet to collect data for indexing. The data is used by search engines to deliver relevant search results. Spiders seek new pages, capture updates to existing pages and identify obsolete pages.

Splash Page A special page that sometimes precedes a website’s home page, intended to deliver a specific message or to help direct traffic to specific areas of the site.



Tags Formatting codes used in HTML documents that provide instructions needed by web browsers to display web pages correctly.

Universal Resource Locator (URL) The specific address for a resource or website on the internet. URLs are entered into web browsers in order to visit specific websites.

Unique User An individual website visitor, who may visit one or more pages of a site. This measure, when used in conjunction with page views, can provide insight on the effectiveness of the site. Many visitors with few page visits suggest a site that is not delivering what it should. Few visitors with high page visits indicate a good site with a need for more promotion to drive traffic.

Upload The transferring of files from a local computer to a remote computer or server.

Web Designer A person who designs web pages or web sites.

Web Server A computer that hosts a website, allowing the web pages to be sent to a user's web browser.

WYSIWYG An acronym for "What You See Is What You Get," which describes a page editing program which allows the user to create or modify web pages without the knowledge of HTML or other coding languages.





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