

An easy to understand guide to technical jargon

A

Analogue Lines: Single Analogue lines are generally usually used for faxes, single phone lines, modems, alarm lines or PDQ machines and are generally not connected to a telephone system. Multi Analogue lines are usually used as back up to ISDN30 lines on telephone systems or as the main lines on older small key-telephone systems or direct lines connected by sockets in a small office.

Anti-virus: A software program that protects the internal company computer network from malicious software. Often run in association with a firewall and a spam filter.

Application/applet: A software program. Examples include word processing programs, spreadsheets etc. Applets are more basic cut-down versions of applications often used for e-commerce e.g. Internet banking.

ATM: Asynchronous Transfer Mode. A networking protocol allowing data to be transmitted rapidly. Most commonly deployed on large corporate networks and international telecommunications links.

B

Bandwidth: A measure of the data capacity of your connection, or how much information can be squeezed down the line. Measured in bits per second.

Bounce: Returned packets of data, see Internet Protocol (IP), are said to have bounced. Email bounce back due to mistyped addresses is common.

Bit (kb, Mb, Gb): The smallest unit of information on a computer, and the basis of the logic that underpins all modern day systems.

Bits per second (bps): The amount of data transmitted from one device to another per second. Common abbreviations are kbps (Kilobits per second – a thousand bits) and Mbps (Megabits per second – a million bits). See bits.

Bytes (kB, MB, GB): A unit of storage capable of holding a single character, a byte is normally equal to 8 bits. Common divisions are kilobytes (1,024 bytes), megabytes (1,048,576 bytes), and gigabytes (1,073,741,824 bytes). The correct abbreviation for bytes is a capital B. A lowercase b indicates bits.

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C

Co-location: Placing your server, usually a Web server, in a dedicated facility to ensure it stays up and running, and is kept safe and secure. This removes the risk of it being unplugged.

Contention ratio: The number of other organisations sharing your bandwidth. Usually expressed as a ratio e.g. 20:1 means you might have to share your connection with up to 19 others. The bandwidth offered is the maximum available and actual speeds will often be much lower.

Cookie: Short files storing personal data and used to create customised web pages. Turning cookies off means you will have to re-enter your details every time you revisit a website. Irritating for a sole user of a password protected PC but an essential security procedure if accessing over a shared terminal or from an Internet cafe.

D

Data centre: A managed facility containing racks of servers monitored by technical staff. ISPs generally run their own data centres or lease space and staff in one. Essential to provide effective co-location and hosting services.

Disaster recovery: A term for technologies and services that ensure the IT functions of a business are interrupted for the shortest time possible in case of events such as fire or flood. At the most basic level this is storing back-up copies of data on tapes or servers at an alternate location. ISPs generally provide a range of services – often backing up systems remotely over an Internet connection.

DNS: Domain Name Server. The World Wide Web runs on numbers. Domain Name Servers are the equivalent of Directory Enquiries converting these numbers back into names so that they're easier for people humans to remember.

Domain name: A name linked to one or more IP addresses. Domain names are used within URLs. For example in www.fvdata.co.uk – fvdata.co.uk is the domain name.

DSL (ADSL/SDSL): Digital subscriber line – the most common type of Broadband connection as it can be run over existing phone lines, rather than over specially laid cable, or wireless connections. The various letters to be found in front of DSL indicate whether the connection is Asymmetric – where it's quicker to download than send data, or Symmetric – where the upload and download speeds are the same.

E

E-commerce: A general term for conducting business online. One of the few survivors from a trend in the 1990's of prefixing the letter 'e' onto common activities. Another survivor is email.

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F

Failover: A backup system to ensure critical IT systems keep running.

Fibre network: A network where data is transmitted as pulses of light over glass fibres. This is a faster alternative to sending electrical signals over copper wires, which have traditionally formed telephone lines. Mainly used for long distance and data rich communications.

H

Hardware: The physical equipment over which the computing system functions. Normally paired with software, which directs its' operations.

Host: To provide the infrastructure over which services are run. A common hosting agreement is for ISPs and telecoms companies to host the websites and applications of other firms on their own machines, rather than just provide space for the business' server in their rack. This provides benefits including 24 hour monitoring and resilience.

Hub: A common connection point for multiple devices on the same network. Passive hubs pass the data from one device to many others, whilst active hubs (often known as switches) are like mini telephone exchanges, connecting the appropriate devices with one another when needed.

I

Internet Protocol (IP): Internet Protocol allows you to address individual packets of data (discrete chunks of information) and send them via the Internet without a physical connection with the receiving computer.

ISDN Lines: Digital Lines.

ISDN2 standard is a single ISDN2 circuit that delivers two digital exchange lines and used in data transfer when connected to a PC/Server, ISDN faxes and PDQ Machines, routers and videoconferencing units.

ISDN2 system delivers at least two digital exchange lines/channels and is available in multiples of two lines, up to a maximum of 30 (ISDN30 is recommended for more than 8). A direct dial number range can work over the circuit and the service is mainly used to connect to ISDN2e compatible phone systems.

ISDN30 is a single ISDN circuit that delivers a minimum of 8 and up to 30 digital exchange lines/channels. Equivalent to a 2Mb circuit, ISDN30 lines are primarily used for voice lines connected to compatible systems.

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L

LAN: Local Area Network, a network of computers confined to a small area, for example an office. Many LANs can be connected together to form a wide area network (WAN). An example is the corporate network of a high street bank, with each branch having its own LAN and being part of the WAN. The most common protocol to transmit data over a LAN is Ethernet.

Latency: The delay between sending the data and it being received. Alongside bandwidth this will define the speed and capacity of your network.

Leased line: A permanent telecommunications connection between two points. This might include a local telephone exchange and a business with heavy telecoms traffic.

M

Malware: Short for malicious software and includes viruses, trojan horses and worms.

N

NOC: The Network Operations Centre. The physical space from which a telecommunications network is run.

P

Packet: A discrete chunk of information transmitted over a network, usually incorporating the destination IP address.

Ping: A method of determining whether an IP address is open. A small packet of data is sent to an address with the instructions to send a reply straight back. Often used to troubleshoot Internet.

POP: Point of presence – an access point to the Internet. Typically owned by ISPs the availability of a POP in your area will determine the availability of various telecoms services.

Protocol: Set of rules by which various Internet devices communicate between themselves to transmit data e.g. IP and FTP.

R

Redundancy: Indicates the presence of back-up systems to take over in the event of systems failing.

Remote user: Remote refers to anything not connected directly to your computer. Remote users include a laptop user in reception, a sales person on the road and home workers. Technologies such as VPN allow users to be connected into a network.

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S

Server: The computer on a network which manages all the network resources. Often there are separate servers to manage files, printing, email, network traffic and databases.

T

Transfer protocol: The software language of the Internet. The main two are File Transfer Protocol (FTP) for moving entire files and Hyper Text Transfer Protocol (HTTP) for download only. Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) covers how web pages are displayed.

U

URL: Uniform Resource Locator. The address in a browser e.g. <http://www.fvdata.co.uk>.

V

VoIP: Voice over IP. A term applied to both the hardware and software that allows phone calls over the Internet or using IP protocols. The advantages include cheaper calls and the ability to integrate calls with computing applications.

VPN: Virtual Private Network. A secure and encrypted method of connecting computers securely over the Internet or shared networks.

W


WLAN: Wireless LANs are becoming popular. These dispense with wires and instead communicate via radio waves.

WiFi: Any product certified by the Wireless Fidelity Alliance - a guarantee that different pieces of wireless LAN kit work together.

X

XML: eXtensible Mark-up Language - a method for sharing data across different computer systems and applications. Digital devices in the future should be able to create and view XML files allowing data to be swapped.

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