

A Veteran's Guide to the Internet



Department of
Veterans Affairs

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Introduction

This booklet offers basic information about the Internet. You will learn what the Internet is, why you might want to get connected to it and how. You also will learn to use some of the Internet's most popular features. These include sending and receiving e-mail, conducting research and finding Internet sites. In short, you will learn how to use the Internet's power to meet your personal information and communication needs.



What is the Internet?

The Internet or World Wide Web (WWW) is an international network of computers that are linked through modems, satellites and telephone lines. The system was originally developed for military use during the Cold War. Its intent was to give

Western forces a reliable means of transmitting electronic communication signals in the event of a catastrophe, such as war.

Why would I want to use the WWW?

Like many other systems developed for military purposes, the WWW has since found its way into civilian use. Consider this: You are about to buy an automobile. One way to compare models and prices is to drive to dealerships all over town and speak with salespeople. A more convenient and efficient way, however, is to use the WWW to access automotive sites. These sites can provide a wealth of information, ranging from photos of vehicles to comparative information about models and prices.

Let's take another example. Suppose you want to reach a family member or fellow veteran who lives in a faraway city. Contacting the person by telephone might be costly, and a letter might take several days to be delivered. You can use the WWW to send e-mail, which is delivered within minutes or hours and can be read on the computer screen.

Or suppose you are hard of hearing and want to order merchandise or ask a store to correct a billing error. Using the telephone to contact customer service might prove difficult. You may consider, once again, using e-mail for your inquiry.

What do I need to access the WWW?

You need a modem and an Internet service provider.

The modem. If you own a relatively new computer, it probably has a modem. This device uses your telephone line to let your computer exchange information with other computers equipped with modems. Pay special attention to the modem's speed. The higher the speed, the faster the modem can transmit information.



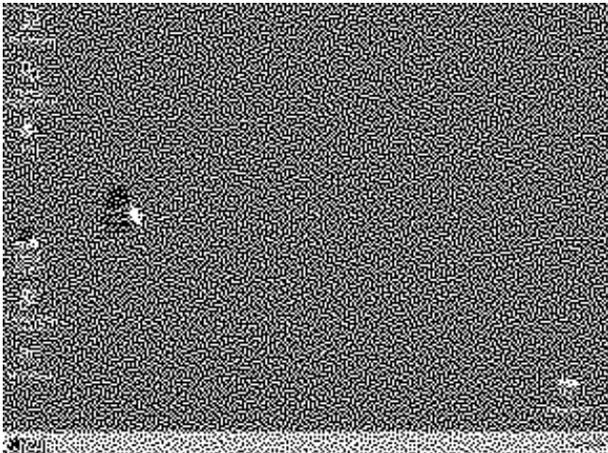
- The Internet service provider. Take several precautions when choosing your Internet service provider (ISP). This is a company that charges you a fee for allowing you to access its server as a gateway to the WWW. Popular service providers include your telephone company as well as

America Online, EarthLink Network and Microsoft. They typically charge \$20 per month. Some providers offer free trial hookups lasting up to 30 days, at which point you can decide whether you like the service enough to pay for it.

- ISP contracts. Some ISPs allow you to use their service on a month-to-month basis; others require that you sign contracts for 12 to 36 months. You may decide that a long-term contract is not in your best interest. This may be true if you later need to cancel the service or switch to another ISP before the end of the contract.
- You also should inquire about the reliability of the service itself. Some less expensive service providers might lack sufficient equipment to handle the volume of Internet traffic generated by their customers. The problem may slow down your access to the Internet, and the service might have to shut down temporarily in response to the volume of traffic. For these reasons, it is a good idea to choose a large service provider that has the personnel and the server capabilities for handling large numbers of Internet users.
- Finally, you should ask prospective service providers whether they offer space for customers to create their own WWW sites. This feature can be useful in the event that you want to set up your own personal page on the Internet.

How do I connect to the WWW?

- Your ISP will provide you with software for configuring your computer to communicate with the provider's server. The ISP also will provide you with a user I.D. and password to access the Internet as well as an e-mail address to communicate with other users. Don't forget to jot down and store your user I.D. and password. Also, remember that your user I.D. and password are case sensitive; that is, if the information is written in small letters, that's the exact way it must be entered to gain access to the WWW.
- Choosing a browser. The ISP also will provide you with software for at least one browser to view pages or screens on the Internet. The two most popular browsers are Internet Explorer and Netscape. Some computer manufacturers also include software for American Online and other browsers for your system.



Browser terms in Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer

Navigator Terms

Internet Explorer Terms

Bookmarks

Add frequently visited site to a list so you can have quick and easy access to them later



Favorites



Location Field

Go to a Web page by typing the Web-page address (URL)

Address Bar

Reload

Make sure you have the latest version of the current Web page.



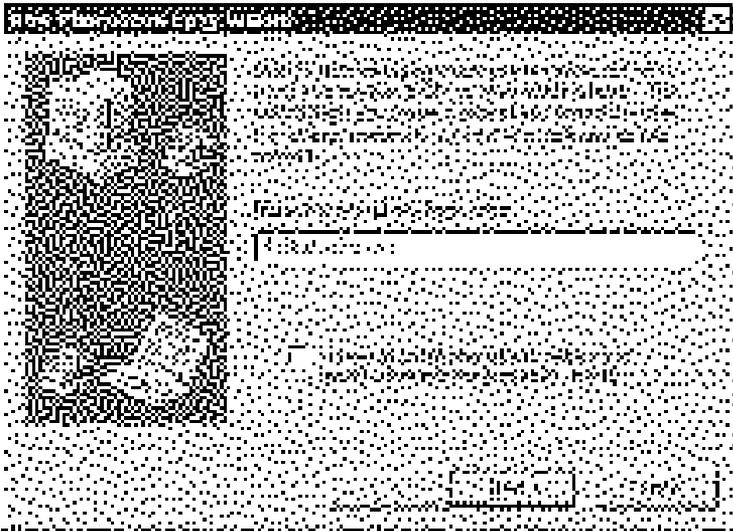
Refresh



Personal Toolbar

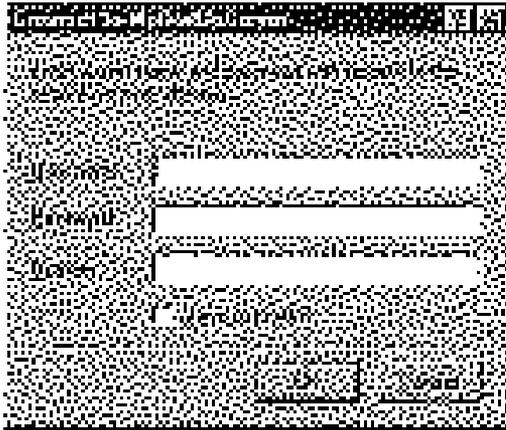
Add shortcuts to Web pages and even to folders on your computer for quick access

Links bar



- Dialing up the service. Typically, the ISP setup procedure adds to your screen an icon (or graphic image) that you can double click to dial up the service and gain access to the WWW. Double clicking the icon causes a small form or box to pop up on the screen. The form includes space for your user name and your password. The form also includes a box that you can click or check to tell your computer to remember your password. That prevents you from having to type in your password each time you access the Internet.
- If the user I.D. and password are valid, you will be taken directly to the opening screen of your browser. If the password or user I.D. fails, you probably entered the wrong letters or numbers or forgot to use lower case or capital letters as required by your ISP. In that case, you may be

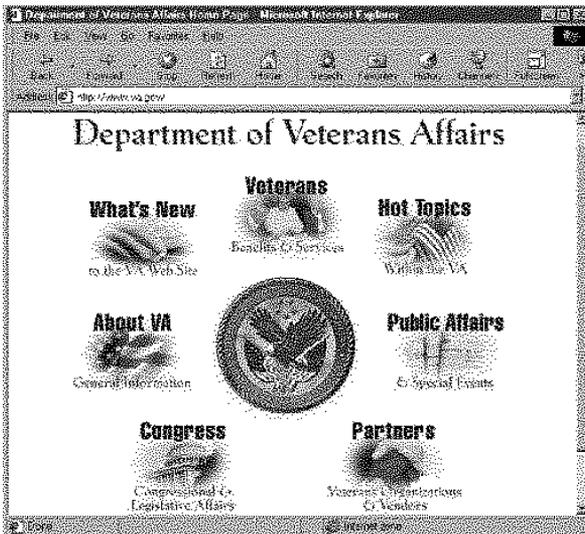
asked to enter your user I.D. and password manually. That's why you should store this information in a safe place.



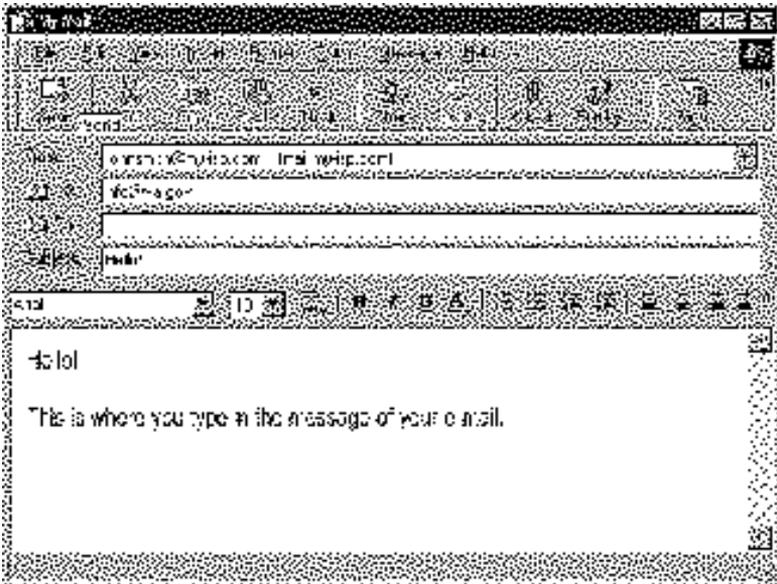
- Understanding Web browsers. What appears on the screen following a successful dial up depends on which browser you are using. If you are using the Internet Explorer browser, the first page or screen you will see will be that browser's home page. If you chose Netscape's browser, you'll probably now see Netscape's home page. Finally, if your telephone company is your ISP, the first screen you'll see is the company's home page.
- Changing the home page. You can change the home page. Here's a Netscape example for making the changes. Click on Edit from the toolbar in the menu at the top left corner of the screen; then click Preference. In the Home Page box, go to the line that says "Location:" and type in the

address of the page you'd like to see whenever you access the WWW. For example, if you want your browser to always start on the Veterans Administration's home page, type in the following address: <http://www.va.gov>.

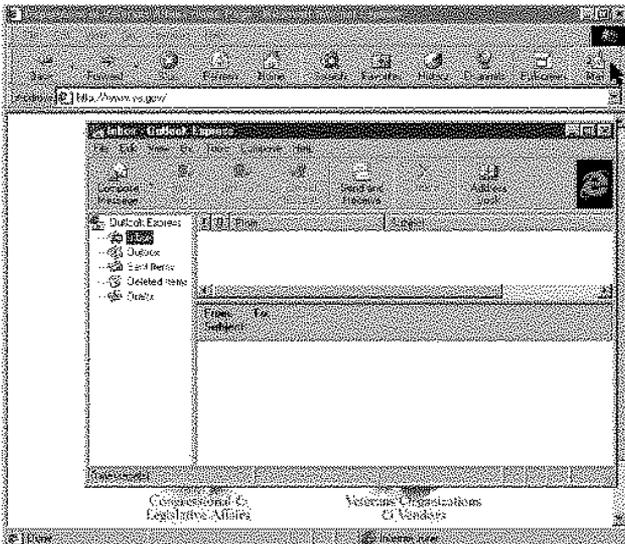
- Interacting with your browser. The opening screen of your browser is likely to include lots of text, graphics and buttons that you can click to move from one screen or image to another. The screen is also likely to include a vertical scroll bar on the right. Clicking and holding the arrow at the bottom of that scroll bar takes you to the bottom of the screen. Likewise, there may be a scroll bar across the bottom of the page. This scroll bar allows you to scroll horizontally across the screen. The scroll bars are necessary in the event the computer screen isn't large enough to show all information on the screen at once.



- Understanding e-mail. One of the coolest features of the WWW is the user's ability to communicate through e-mail with others who also have access to the Internet. Your e-mail address consists of a unique user name, followed by the @ symbol, followed by the name of your ISP, followed by a dot or period, followed by one of the following suffixes — com, net, org, edu, mil or gov. These suffixes tell whether the domain is commercial (com), network (net), nonprofit group (org), educational institution (edu), military (mil) or a government agency (gov). You need not be concerned about these suffixes except to remember that one must be included in any e-mail address.



- Once you fill in the e-mail address, click your tab button, which takes you to the line that says RE: Here, you have the option of writing a brief title to alert the recipient about the subject of your e-mail or message. Click the tab button again and your cursor moves to the white space where you will type your e-mail message. It can be as long as any letter you might write. Once you finish typing, move your cursor to the top of the e-mail box and click send.
- Checking your e-mail messages. To check to see if you have email messages, click the e-mail icon on your browser once again. The e-mail box pops up. Any e-mail sent to you will appear on the top line of your e-mail in-box. Click on that line, and the e-mail message itself will appear in a box underneath your e-mail box.



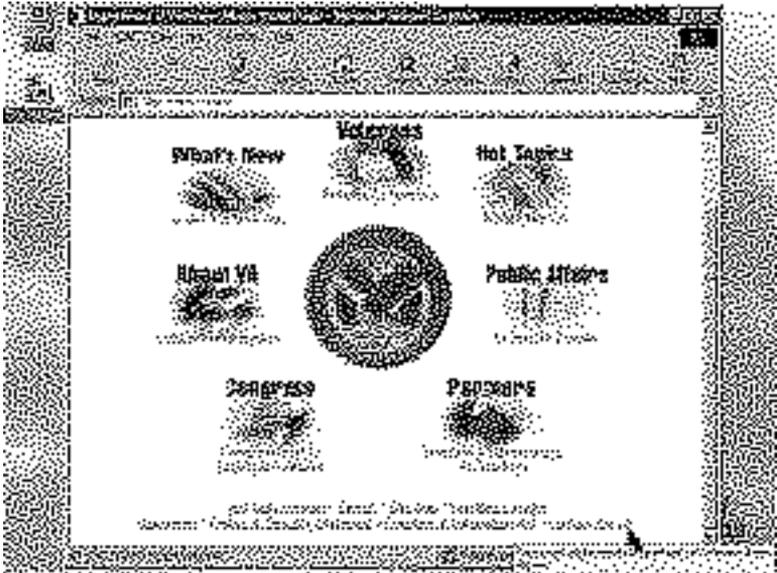
- About hypertext. This is text that's usually highlighted in blue in your browser. The color is a signal that the text can be clicked with your mouse. Once you click the text, you are taken to a new page or screen in the same way that turning a page or several pages in a book takes you to a new section or chapter. The hypertext system is extremely convenient in that it prevents you from having to navigate through several pages or screens of information in order to get to the page or screen that you want.

<http://www.va.gov>
myaddress@myisp.com

How do I go to a new URL address?

- Once you enter your chosen home page, you can visit any site on the Internet by typing the site's WWW address. You type this address on the line that says "Location:" at the top of your browser. The address follows a special format, just as your e-mail address follows a special format. The first part of the URL is http; it stands for Hypertext Transfer Protocol. It's the standard under which computers exchange documents on the Internet. On the same line following http, place a colon, followed by two forward slashes (//) as in http://. Next type the letters www, followed by a period, followed by the address of the person, company or institution whose site you want to reach, followed by another period, followed by one of several suffixes - com, net, org, gov, mil or edu. As noted

earlier, these suffixes indicate whether the site is a commercial entity, a network, a nonprofit organization, government agency, the military or an educational institution. The complete URL might look something like this: “<<http://www.va.gov>>”.



- **Bookmarking/Favorites.** Once you begin to use the Internet, you will discover many interesting sites that you will want to revisit during future sessions. Two features in Netscape and Microsoft Explorer will come in handy. Bookmarking is used in Netscape. Favorites is used in Internet Explorer. Here's how to use them.

Netscape's Bookmarking

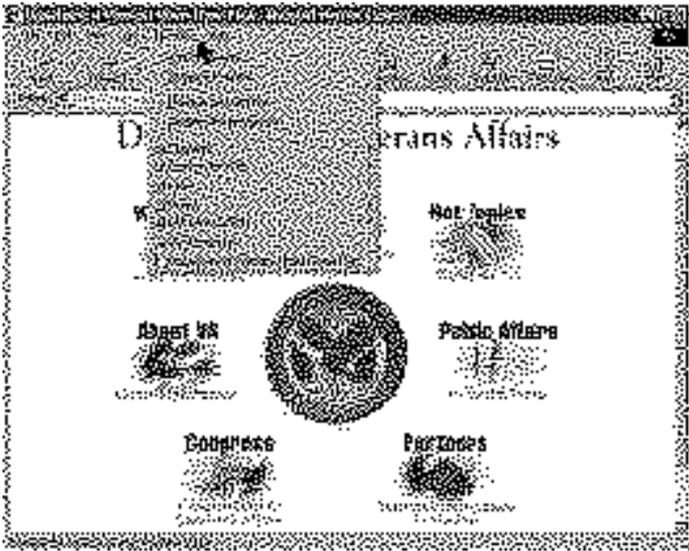
Go to the page you want to save in the Bookmark. The Bookmark feature is located in the main menu at the top left side of your browser.

Click on the Add Bookmark option in the drop down menu. This will store the name of that page in your bookmark. The next time you want to access the page, just click Bookmark. The drop down menu will show the name of the site that you added. You no longer have to type the URL in the address box to access that site. Just Click on the name you added to your bookmark and the browser will move directly to that site.

Explorer's Favorites

Go to the page you want to revisit later. The Favorites feature is located in the main menu at the top left side of your browser. Click on the Add to Favorites option in the drop down menu. The next time you want to access the page, click Favorites. The drop down menu will appear and show the name of the site that you added to your list of favorites. Whenever you want to go back to

that site, you will not have to write the name of the URL in the address box. Just Click on Favorites and the drop down menu. The name and the browser will move directly to that site or page.



Printing from the Internet

- Printing information from a page. To print what you see on the screen of a WWW page, click the print icon. Or click File in the menu at the top of your browser, then choose print from the drop down menu. A print dialog box appears, offering you several print options. After choosing from these options, click the OK button in the print dialog box. Your printer should begin printing the on-screen material.

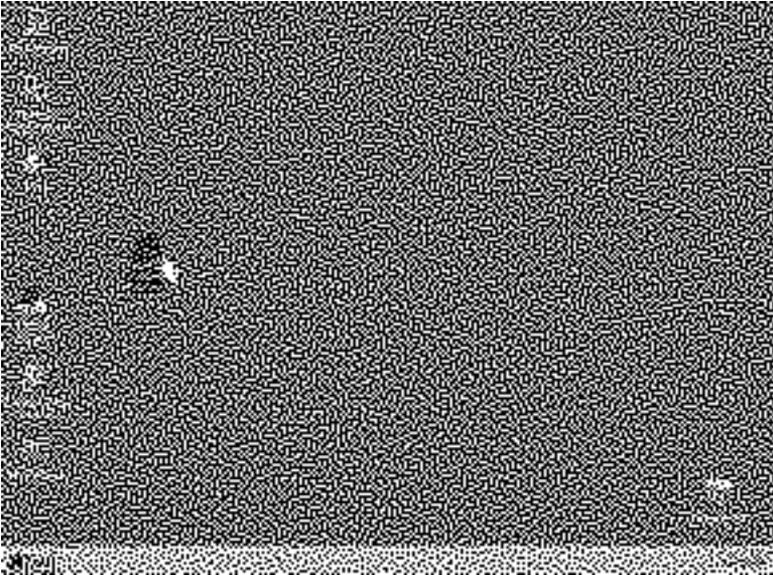
Why do I need to use search engines?

- A search engine helps you find information about specific subjects. The WWW consists of numerous search engines. To find some of them, click the Search toolbar of your browser. Type in a key word or key words about your topic in the search box. Then click the search button. Your browser will eventually show a list of WWW sites about the topic you have chosen. Choose a site on the list and click on the name on the list. After visiting that site, you can click the left arrow button at the top of your browser to return to your home page or to perform more searches.
- The best way to find which search engine meet your needs, choose each one and perform a search. You will discover that some engines turn up more specific and detailed information than others. Your experience with search engines might tell you that it's best to use AltaVista, for example, when you wish to perform comprehensive searches and choose another engine when you need less detailed information about the topic.

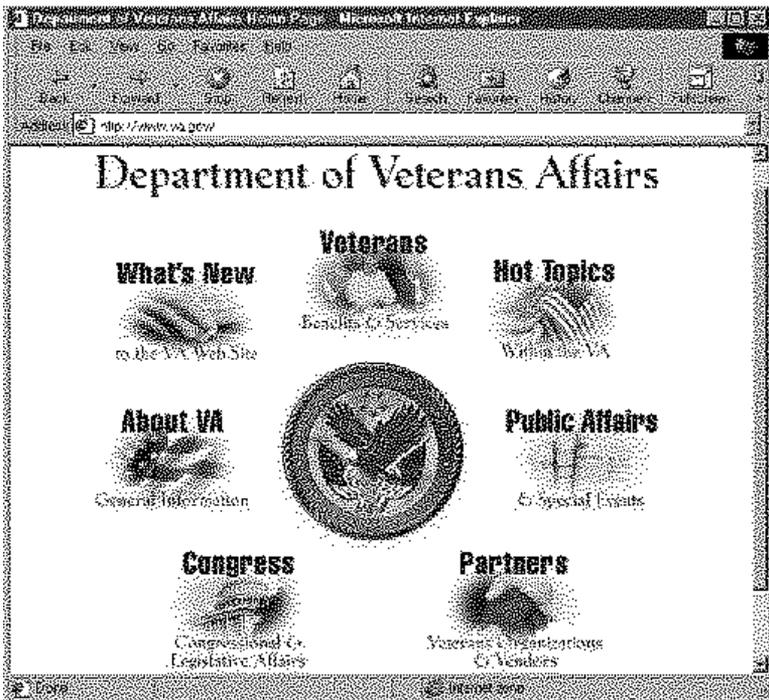
Conclusion

- Now that you have reviewed basic steps for getting connected to the Internet, let's use the Veterans Administration's home page as a model for reviewing what you have learned.

- We start by connecting to the WWW. First, we double click the browser icon on our computer screen. Doing so takes us to a box from which we can connect to the WWW. Unless we have instructed our browser to save our user I.D. and password, we will be asked to enter both. We will remember that passwords and user I.D.s are case sensitive, meaning we must type them exactly the way they appeared when the ISP assigned them to us.



- If our dialup is successful, we eventually will reach the WWW through our browser. What we first see on the screen will be determined by whether we used a default home page or changed the opening screen to a page of our choosing, such as “http://www.va.gov”.



- If we did not choose to customize our opening screen or home page, we can reach the VA’s page in one or two other ways. If we already have bookmarked the page, we can simply click on Bookmark from the menu bar, then from the drop down menu, we can click the line that causes the browser to jump to the VA’s home page. If we have

not already bookmarked VA's home page, we must go to the line that says "Location:" and type: `http://www.va.gov` and our browser will take us to the site.



- Once we reach the VA's page, we can click the graphics and hypertext on the screen to access specific information. We can use the arrows on the top right side or at the bottom to scroll the pages horizontally or vertically. In addition, we can use the printer to print articles and screen images. And, at some point, we will sign off the Internet.

Signing off the Internet

- At some point, you will want to exit the Internet. Some ISPs automatically disconnect you if their systems detect no activity for a certain number of minutes. If you don't move your mouse cursor for five minutes, for example, the service might automatically disconnect you from the Internet. You might still see an Internet page on your screen, but you will discover that nothing happens when you click an image, button or hypertext on the page. This feature prevents users from inadvertently tying up Internet lines when they forgot to disconnect.

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- In order to disconnect from the Internet in a normal manner, click File from the menu bar at the top your browser, then click exit from the drop down menu. Once you exit and return to a regular computer screen, a dialog box might pop up and say, “There are open modem connections. Would you like to close them?” Click “yes.”
 - Signing off the Internet the correct way helps you to keep your computer and Internet software operating in an ideal manner. Always remember to sign off the Internet before switching off your computer. Doing so will assure you of hours of trouble free visits in cyberspace. Enjoy your trip!

Glossary

This glossary contains brief definitions of some key words, phrases and acronyms that you are likely to encounter during your Internet voyages.

Address

See e-mail address and Web page address

Attachment

A computer file that is attached to an e-mail message and sent electronically to an Internet user. Such attachments range from other documents to photographs

Bookmark

A Netscape Navigator system of allowing a user to store a Web site and quickly return to that site without having to type the full Web address. This system allows users to create a list of bookmarks of their most frequently visited Web sites. See also "Favorites"

Browser

An application that lets users access information or pages on the World Wide Web

Chat

A means of communication where two users at different locations can interact by typing messages on their computer screens. What each user types will appear almost instantly on the other's screen. This method of communication differs from an e-mail message, which is sent and stored on a recipient's machine to allow the recipient to retrieve and read the message at a convenient time. For more information, see "E-mail"

Cyberspace

The system of computers and networks that make up the Internet

Download

A method of copying a file from a remote computer down to your computer

E-mail

Short for electronic mail. An address system used to send messages to another Internet user. The e-mail address always contains an @ sign between the user's e-mail name and the name of the company or agency that hosts the user's e-mail account. Following is an example of an e-mail address: johndoe@va.gov

Favorites

This is Microsoft Internet Explorer's name for a Bookmark (Netscape's name). Both names have identical meaning in that each allows users to store Web site addresses and quickly return to a site without having to first type the full Web address

Handle

A user's nickname or screen name

Home Page

The opening or main page of a Web site

Hypertext

An image or word on a screen that can be clicked with a mouse to automatically link the user to another document or page

Hypertext Markup Language (HTML)

The programming language used to build or develop pages for the World Wide Web. The language instructs Web browsers how to display various elements of a document, such as text, paragraphs or images

Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP)

The first part of the standard method of naming Web addresses and transferring documents on the Internet

Icon

A graphic symbol on the computer screen. The symbol may suggest the function that will be carried out once the symbol is

• clicked. Clicking a picture of a small envelope, for example, might take the user to the e-mail function

• **Internet**

• A system of computers that are connected together into a huge global network through modems, satellites and telephone lines. These connections allow the computers to transfer and receive information and share it with Internet users

• **Intranet**

• A private version of the Internet that allows people in an organizations, such as a company or agency, to view and exchange information through a Web browser or other tools

• **Link**

• An image or word that can be clicked to connect or link the user with another document, page or Web site

• **Modem**

• A device that allows computers to transmit or receive information over telephone or cable lines

• **Network**

• A set of computers connected by telephone lines, cables or satellites

• **Page**

• See Web page

• **Password**

A secret code that might be needed to access an Internet site

Search Engines

Systems that give users easy access to huge databases. Users type in a key word, phrase or a quote in the subject field and the search engine retrieves information about the subject from a database

Scroll bars

Vertical or horizontal bars that contain up and down arrows to allow the user to move to the top or bottom or to the left or right of a page

Server

A computer that is connected to the Internet and serves as the host for Web pages. Users gain access to the server or host computer in order to view the Web pages

Text file

A file that containing only textual characters, such as alphabets

URL (Uniform Resource Locator)

A standardized way of naming Web addresses. Users type or enter the full URL in order to go to a site or surf the Web. See “Web Page Address”

Username

A unique name (along with a password) that might be required in order to view a Web site or retrieve information from the site. See “Password”

Web Page

A screen of information available on the Web

Web Page Address

An address to a Web site. The address follows certain rules and must include certain prefixes, suffixes and punctuation marks. An example of a Web address is as follows: `http://www.va.gov` The last part of this address (“gov”) indicates that the Web address belongs to a government agency. Other Web address suffixes include: “com” (for company); “edu” (for educational institution) and “org” (for not-for-profit group). See also “URL”

World Wide Web (WWW)

A network that provides users with hyperlinks to information on the Internet. See “Hypertext”

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