

Crabby demystifies even more e-mail terms

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Crabby Office Lady

The world of computing is filled with terms and phrases that are baffling, if not etymologically strange. I've tackled some of them in previous columns. Let's add to that list.

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I've done my fair share of identifying and explaining a good number of e-mail and computer terms. In fact, I already have two columns devoted to just that:

- [Demystify e-mail terms and get on with your life](#)
- [Crabby demystifies e-mail protocols](#)

However, there is always room for just a tad more knowledge in our definition-crammed heads, and there is no lack of terms and phrases that require definition. For this iteration of the demystifying theme, I'll cover three categories of e-mail terminology: Ways of getting online so that you can send and receive e-mail, nasty things people (not yours truly, of course) do with e-mail, and general terms that I haven't covered before.

Getting online

You can connect to the Internet or to e-mail servers to get online using a variety of methods. The following are some terms that should clear up a few questions that my readers have sent to me regarding these access methods.

Bandwidth

Refers to how quickly information travels to and from your computer. It's usually expressed in bits per second (bps), kilobits per second (Kbps), or megabits per second (Mbps).

Broadband

A term that represents high-speed, high-capacity Internet and data connections. Broadband uses wide-bandwidth channels for sending and receiving large amounts of information. Broadband is generally taken to mean bandwidth higher than 2 Mbps. Both Cable and DSL connections use broadband.

Dial-up

Describes when a modem is used to connect to the Internet via a network. When you have a dial-up connection, you're using your telephone. It's the slowest — and cheapest — way to connect to the Internet.

DSL

Stands for Digital Subscriber Line. DSL is a technology that brings high-speed (or high-bandwidth) transfer of information over ordinary copper telephone lines. A DSL line can carry both data and voice signals, and the data part of the line is continuously connected. So you can use your computer and your phone at the same time.

Nasty things

Where there's a will, there's a way. Pranksters, criminals, and your garden variety hooligans will always exist and will always be looking for ways to scam you out of your money and wreak general havoc for the fun of it. Having a little bit of knowledge about the ways these punks can paralyze you, your computer, and your checkbook can go a long way.

Virus

A software program whose sole intention is to cause problems for your computer. A computer virus behaves similarly to a human virus: It causes mischief by inserting itself into an existing living organism (in this case, your computer). It's usually disguised as something else, and it's often transmitted as an e-mail attachment or a download.

Worm

A self-replicating computer program, similar to a computer virus. The difference is that a virus attaches itself and becomes a part of another program, but a computer worm, just like the soft-bodied invertebrate animal, is self-replicating. It propagates through the Internet and through e-mail and can be very destructive to the computers that are infected, by altering, installing, or destroying files and programs.

Flame mail

A "flame" is an intentionally crude, rude, or offensive e-mail message, newsgroup post, or mailing list message. "Flame wars" occur when a series of flames are sent back and forth between two or more people.

Spoofing

Attempting to gain access to a Web site or e-mail account by posing as an authorized user.

Phishing

A form of Internet fraud that aims to steal valuable information such as credit cards, social security numbers, user IDs, and passwords. For example, you could get an e-mail message you assume to be from your bank, asking you to log on to their Web site and verify your account name, password, bank account number, etc. But the Web site, which looks completely legitimate, is a fake. It's a "spoofed" site. (I read that phishing is spelled the way it is because hackers have a tendency to replacing "f" with "ph.") Phancy that!

Harvesting

An illegal practice of using an automated program to scan Web pages and collect e-mail addresses for use by spammers and phishers.

General terms

Above the fold

Portions of an e-mail message (or Web page, newspaper, or any written or typed content, actually) that is visible without scrolling down the page or screen. In newspapers, the most important content is above the fold so that readers can see it right away without having to unfold the paper. It's kind of tricky to predict where the fold is in e-mail messages because there are so many variables that you can't control, such as your recipients' screen resolution and font size.

Alias

A generic term used to identify an e-mail account. Everyone at Microsoft has an e-mail alias, and their e-mail address is <your alias>@microsoft.com

Attachment

An image, a video or audio file, or any other sort of data file that is sent along with an e-mail message as an "attachment."

Bounces

Messages that can't reach their destination, and are returned to you, the sender. There are hard bounces (due to invalid e-mail addresses) and soft bounces (due to temporary conditions, such as full inboxes.)

Message header

Message headers provide a list of technical details, such as who the message came from, the software used to compose it, and the e-mail servers it passed through on the way to you, the recipient. These details can be useful for identifying problems with e-mail or identifying sources of spam.

Subject line

Crabby's second biggest e-mail etiquette pet peeve (the first being the Bcc box). The Subject line is where you put the, um, subject of your e-mail message. Sending messages without anything in the subject line is like writing a book without a title: Just don't do it.

Your turn

Do you have other e-mail terms on your "what the...?" list? If so, send them to crabby@microsoft.com, I'll round them all up and pop them into another "demystifying" column.

Tip of the week

V.M. of South Dakota sings the praises this week of her unsung hero, Ctrl+D. When you're using Word, Ctrl+D opens the Format menu nice and speedy. However, if you have a drawing object selected, Ctrl+D duplicates it. I'd say that's one multi-talented keyboard shortcut.

Now there's a hot tip to keep you warm during the long, cold winter in the Badlands.

"No one has a finer command of language than the person who keeps his mouth shut." — Sam Rayburn

About the author

[Annik Stahl](#), the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Did this article help you?** feedback tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.

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