

Crabby demystifies strange Internet terms (part 1)

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Crabby Office Lady

Welcome to part one of my two-part series about odd and wonderful Internet terminology. This week I offer five of my favorites and in a couple of weeks, I'll demystify some more.

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Words pay my mortgage. They provide my daughter with violin lessons. They are the meat & potatoes/hamachi & unagi/beans & rice of my worklife. Although you may not make your living as a writer, you obviously read, and the majority of you communicate by using language. Language separates us from the other primates (that and the ability to take your own sweet time backing out of a parking space when you know someone is waiting).

Every culture uses language in a unique way, and some of those ways are surprising. I did a little searching on the Internet and found these choice sayings:

- **French** "Tu as le cul bordé de nouilles." ("You're sitting in the noodles.") Meaning: You're very lucky.
- **Slovak** "Podobny jeden španielska dedina." ("Like a Spanish village.") Meaning: It's a complicated situation that you'll never understand.
- **Latvian** "Pardo bikses un nopec sulaini." ("Sell your underwear and go buy yourself a stooge.") Meaning: Do it yourself; I'm not your servant.
- **Swedish** "Det är ingen ko på isen." ("There is no cow on the ice.") Meaning: There's no hurry; nothing's happened yet.
- **Afrikaans** "Daar is 'n skroef los by hom." ("He has a screw loose.") Meaning: He doesn't think straight. (And well, meaning he has a screw loose.)

Not only does every country and language have its own sayings, every industry also has its vernacular. When you talk about cars, for instance, you'll use terms like "horsepower" and "torque." When you are a gardener, you'll get all thorny about "nitrogen deficiency" and "powdery mildew." And of course if you're into wine, you'll hear yourself talk about a wine's "mouth feel" or its "tannins" (or that it has a hint of impertinence — my favorite kind of wine).

And as for computers — the list goes on and on. I've done several columns over the past six years that have attempted to demystify words and phrases we come across when working with e-mail, mobile devices, blogs, and so on. This week I bring you, plucked from the Web, some true oddities of the lingua franca of the Internet.

#1: phishing

Phishing scams try to lure you into giving out personal information for identity theft. Any e-mail you get about foreign lotteries, about an online merchant needing you to update your personal information, or about money in Nigeria that someone needs help getting out of the country is a phishing scam. Don't bite the phishing line; you will look phoolish and may never phorgive yourself (and you may end up with a painful hook in your mouth that takes years to heal).

#2: pharming

Pharming is similar to phishing in that it's trying to get personal and private (usually phinancial) information from you. Pharmers set up a phake Web site and make it look like a real site by using copied pages and even images and icons from that real site (this is called "IP spoofing" or "domain spoofing"). And then, just like pholks who are involved in phishing scams, pharmers send you an e-mail, and this message has that site's Web address contained in it. So you, even as sophisticated as you think you are, look at the Web page and come to the conclusion that it *is* the site it says it is, that this is a real request (from your bank, your credit card company, a merchant, or wherever you have an account) to do any number of things: update your password, re-enter your mother's maiden name, type in your Social Security number and so on. This is why pharming is so dangerous and hard to detect: These crooks can target a lot of people at the same time and some of them are very, very good at what they do.

#3: sheepdip

You're surfing the Internet and somebody starts talking about sheepdip. What's going on? In the world of ranching and farming (not pharming), sheep dip is a nice stroll through insecticide used to protect sheep from all sorts of nasty creepy crawly parasites such as lice, ticks, blow-flies, and their ilk. (Members of the Parasite Paradise Foundation need not send me fervent e-mail, explaining to me that parasites are people too, OK? I am speaking for the sheep here.)

In the Information Age, a sheepdip (one word) is where media such as floppy disks (remember those?) or CD-ROMs are checked for viruses before popping them into a computer. It's usually one computer that sheepdips, so it's this one machine's responsibility to suffer before any others do. (Therefore it's not connected to a network). The sheepdip is the king's food tester, as it were. And no, you cannot sheepdip files you want to download; this practice is only for physically removable media.

#4: Pierre Salinger syndrome

Ah, that great Oracle of the Misinformation Age: the Internet. Don't get me wrong; I can barely remember life without this global network of computers talking to computers. Although the Internet was invented in 1969 for the U.S. Department of Defense, by 1996 the number of regular folks like you and me using it was in the tens of millions. That may seem like a lot, but today it's widely believed that almost 1.5 BILLION people all over the world are surfing daily, finding and forwarding rumors almost — *almost* — as fast as Hannah Montana tickets sell out.

In 1996, the average person — office worker, teacher, student, even journalist — had little idea how great an impact the Internet — its truths, its lies, its plausible expression — would soon have on all our lives. And this has what to do with Pierre Salinger, the former White House press secretary and journalist? In 1996, TWA flight 800 crashed into the Atlantic Ocean near Long island, New York. Pierre (who probably cringed at this memory to his dying day), gave publicity to a story that an errant US Navy missile caused the crash. We all found out later that his "source" was a widespread Internet hoax, but his impassioned conviction gave his name to the affliction suffered by folks who believe that what the Internet says is absolutely true.

#5: honey monkey

My daughter loves to go to the zoo. However, she steers clear of the primate area, because one time, when she was about 3 years old, I lifted her up onto a viewing ledge so she could look into the glass enclosure at the cute little macaques. Within two seconds an aggressive male ran up to the wall, pounded on it and bared its teeth at her (and I nearly jumped through the window to give that monkey a piece of my mind).

That monkey was a bad, bad little monkey. Honey monkeys, on the other hand, are good, good little monkeys. A honey monkey, in computer-speak, is a fairly new way of sniffing out Web sites that try to do bad things to the people visiting them. A honey monkey is a virtual computer, meaning it's a simulated computer running on a real computer — a "box-within-a-box" — that looks and acts just like a real computer. It's set up to be a guard, a patrol of sorts. It logs onto Web sites just like a regular computer would do, and then can detect any harmful code from those sites. It's like an undercover agent, poking around the bad guys' house to catch them in the act.

NOTE A little background: Before this system came about, there was another one called "honeypots" that also sought to catch the evil-doers but only by luring them instead of doing what the honey monkeys do, going out to seek and destroy. Honeypots are more passive, while honey monkeys are aggressive (my daughter, a big fan of Winnie the Pooh, can attest to that).

You may have noticed that all these terms share a message: The Internet is a wonderful resource for all sorts of things, factual or not. Be careful out there. You never know who will try to bite you.

"Language is a virus from outer space." — William S. Burroughs

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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