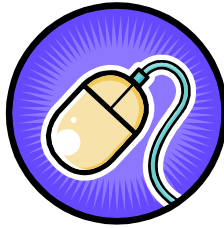


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# CHRISTIANS IN CYBERSPACE

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# Quick Introduction for Novices

## What is Cyberspace?

Cyberspace is a catchall term for the many different ways people communicate with their computers. It is a "space" in the sense that for many people the Internet is an imaginary world that they enter through their computer.

## What is the Internet?

The Internet is a worldwide network that serves as a "phone system" for computers. Just as the telephone system allows any two people with a telephone to communicate, so the Internet allows any two computers (or computer users) with Internet access to communicate.

The Internet provides for numerous kinds of information exchange. The most important kinds are listed below:

- **E-mail:** A worldwide electronic post office
- **World Wide Web:** A giant library of information and electronic shopping mall
- **Newsgroups:** Bulletin boards where people post and exchange information
- **Chat Rooms:** A meeting place for people to have live conversations through their computers

New services are being developed continually. Internet radio is becoming popular, and Internet television is expected in the future. Phone calls can be made over the Internet. Other new services will likely appear in the future.

## The Wild, Wild Web

The World Wide Web, otherwise known as "The Web," is the most popular part of the Internet. Electronic documents, known as "web pages," from all over the world can be examined using a computer program called a "browser". These documents can contain graphics, sound, animations, and even movies. They also contain built in cross-references to other web pages, which makes browsing from document to document very easy. A user can spend hours following one cross-reference after another.

The Web is a popular way to publish information because:

- People can obtain the information immediately, rather than waiting for something to be mailed
- People can access the information at any time of day or night
- Information can be kept very current
- There is no duplication or postage cost for the producer.

There is little control over the quality of information found on the Web. Printing a book requires substantial effort. Even so, many books contain poor content. By contrast, producing a Web document is quite easy. Consequently, many of the documents found there contain frivolous, useless, or erroneous information.

Rarely do web sites charge for access. For example, there are a few magazines and newsletters available on-line for which you must pay a subscription fee, but this is still quite rare.

## **Communication over the Internet**

One unique aspect of the Internet is the capability for personal communication. Unlike watching TV, there are circumstances where you or your child can engage in conversation with a stranger. Unlike encounters in public places, however, the Internet can be private and anonymous. People can easily mask their true identity and intent. Thus parents need to pay special attention to those parts of the Internet which involve interpersonal communication.

There are several ways to communicate over the Internet. E-mail is the most familiar. E-mail is a quick, convenient, and inexpensive way for people to keep in touch. It is rapidly replacing the long distance phone call as the communication medium of choice for separated friends and family, as well as for missionaries in foreign countries. E-mail also has several disadvantages: It requires a computer and computer skills, works best only for text, encourages quick, sloppy, shallow communication, is not very private, and is a new channel for junk mail.

E-mail is usually exchanged between individuals. Chat rooms, on the other hand, are gathering places for groups of people in public conversation. Things you type in a chat room are immediately broadcast for all other

participants to read. Things others type are shown immediately on your computer.

Newsgroups, contrary to their name, have little to do with news. They are more like bulletin boards where you can post messages and read messages posted by others.

Audible phone calls over the Internet are increasing in popularity. They are free, but the quality is still poor and the person you are calling must be already logged on to the Internet to receive the call.

### **Obtaining computer programs and files**

In addition to "browsing" (viewing) documents on the Internet, you can copy files and computer programs to your computer. This is called "downloading." You can find free software to download from the Internet. You can purchase commercial software and download it immediately to your computer. Many books, manuals, and other documents are available for download as well.

However, much material on the Internet is copyrighted. You should be careful to download only things for which you have permission.

### **Life on the Web**

The Internet is affecting many aspects of our lives. You can shop, bank, invest, look for a house, check the weather, read the newspaper, have groceries delivered, get medical advice, and much more. A computer is not required - car radios and cell phones with Internet capability are available. Researchers are working on connecting even home appliances to the Internet. It will become harder and harder to avoid the Internet the future.

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## **The Problem Illustrated**

*The following are all true stories.*

### **A Deacon and a Bible Study Teacher**

Jake (not his real name) was a good guy. He had been active in his church for many years. He was a deacon, helping the church to reach out to young families. Previously, he taught a Sunday morning Bible study. He had a beautiful wife, Sarah, and two small children. Then he began to spend time on the Internet - sometimes late at night after everyone had gone to bed. He got curious and began visiting erotic chat rooms. There he met a woman from another state who was also married and had a child. They began to "chat" regularly on the Internet. Last year Jake left his wife and kids and moved in with his new Internet girlfriend. Eventually he divorced Sarah. Now she is a single mother trying to make sense out of the shock and heartache.

### **The Pastor's Study**

Joe (not his real name) had been a pastor for several years. He worked on his computer in the privacy of his office. After he got a modem he began locking his door and spending more and more time "working" on his computer. A staff member became suspicious and caught him viewing pornography. A check of the computer's history revealed that Pastor Joe had been viewing hard-core pornographic sites for almost a year. Joe was confronted and resigned as pastor. As of this printing, there are 60,000 pornographic web sites on the Internet. In addition to many free sites, sites that charge a fee are doing \$1 billion worth of business a year, about 20 percent of the total business being done on the web. This part of the web has been growing at 40 percent a year.

### **The Sequestered Housewife**

Barbara (not her real name) had a happy marriage and two happy children. But Barbara was lonely. Her husband traveled frequently with his job. One day, he bought a computer and hooked it up to the Internet. He thought perhaps this would give her something to do while he was away. Before long

his children began to report that Mommy was spending long hours locked up in the bedroom on the computer. Sometimes she would not even come out to prepare meals for them. Barbara's husband checked the history file on the computer and discovered that she had in fact developed an Internet relationship with another man.

## **The Vulnerable Children**

There are over 600 hate sites on the web, some specifically designed to attract children. Pedophiles and other sexual predators are also a lurking danger on the internet. An FBI agent posing as a teenage girl logged into a chat room limited to 23 children. The 22 other "youths" all turned out to be adults seeking improper contact with her. A man broadcast live video of himself molesting a child and invited e-mail suggestions from those watching. The Internet has become the medium of choice for child pornography, and for perverted people seeking relationships with children.



## **The Dangers**

### **The content is extreme**

The content is far worse than that on cable TV or in movies and magazines. All forms of extreme perversion are on open display.

### **It is used in private**

People use computers alone behind closed doors - in their office at work or in their bedroom at home - where there is great temptation and little accountability.

### **The danger is immediate**

The worst of the Internet is always just a click away. You can go from legitimate research to terrible sin in an instant.

## **The risk is pervasive**

Bad content on the web is not only easy to find, it is hard to avoid. Mistype a legitimate address by one letter and you might find yourself accessing something immoral, placed there on purpose to snare you. Search for innocent words and you might find links to wicked sites. Unsolicited e-mail can contain all manner of offensive content.

## **Users are anonymous**

Electronic communication with people you don't know is "talking to strangers" in the fullest sense. The Internet allows people to pretend to be anything they want. That "12-year-old girl" striking up a conversation with your daughter might in fact be a middle-aged man.

## **The web is captivating**

There is so much useful and interesting information and so much potential for good. The Internet can consume vast amounts of time, and in some cases money. The possibilities seem endless, and that can blind you to the danger.

## **The Internet is multifaceted**

Web pages, FTP, newsgroups, chat rooms, MUDs, e-mail, pornography, gambling, satanism, hate sites, cheat sites, fake sites, Internet radio - there is no one magic tool or strategy to confront it all. To make matters worse, the Internet is growing and changing almost daily. New services and new sites are being added constantly.

## **The Internet is uncontrolled**

It is easy to put false or misleading information on the web, or maliciously to attribute fraudulent information to the wrong source.



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## Biblical Warnings



### **No one is above temptation**

Proverbs 7:26 says, "Many strong men have been slain by her [the harlot]." David, the man after God's own heart, committed adultery. Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, let women turn his heart from the Lord. Samson, the strongest man who ever lived, ruined his life through immoral relationships. 1 Corinthians 10:12 warns, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest

he fall." Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

### **Secret things are a special danger**

Proverbs 9:17 says, "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But the dead are there." Even mature Christians are susceptible to secret sins. Ezekiel 8:12 says, "Hast thou not seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chamber of his imagery? for they say, The Lord seeth us not."

### **The devil actively traps people**

1 Peter 5:8 says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." You may sincerely intend never to go seeking wicked things on the Internet, but be assured that someday the devil will bring it to you. The strange woman "lieth in wait at every corner" (Proverbs 7:12) to catch a young man.

### **Electronic relationships are distorted**

People say things in e-mail and chat rooms that they would never say in person. People develop relationships that would never happen in normal social settings. In Exodus 33:11 God says that "face to face" is the way friends speak. Paul wrote lengthy letters to the Corinthian church but left some problems to be handled in person (1 Cor. 11:34). In 2 John 12 the apostle John spoke of a need not just to write but to speak to his audience

"face to face." E-mail is useful for communicating with people you already know, but beware of the relationships that develop solely through the computer.

### **Exposure to evil is harmful to your spirit**

In 2 Peter 2:8, Peter says that by merely "seeing and hearing" the sin of Sodom, Lot "vexed his righteous soul." Even if you are not seeking evil, it harms your spirit to be constantly exposed to it."

### **Evil thoughts are sin**

Don't accept the devil's lie that "just looking" is OK. Christ said, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Peter told Simon, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22).

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## **Suggestions**

### **Remove the element of secrecy**

1. Have two people determine half of the password each so neither can get on-line without the other knowing.
2. Place your computer in an open part of your house where other family members can easily see what is being done.
3. Use monitoring software and have someone check it to hold you accountable.
4. Don't use the Internet when you are home alone or after everyone has gone to bed.
5. Kids should never use the Internet unsupervised.

## **Remove the immediacy**

1. Take steps to make the bad stuff harder to find.
  - **Best:** You have a filtered ISP that is not easily bypassed.
  - **Better:** A password can override the filter, but your spouse (or another person) has half the password.
  - **Better than nothing:** A password you know can override the filter.
2. Use a filtered search engine so you don't even see the bad links.

## **Remember that privacy is an illusion**

1. Your ISP knows what you look at.
2. Your browser keeps a history of what you look at.
3. Every site you visit knows you were there.
4. The Internet passes information through many computers on their way to you, and every computer along the way can know.
5. God knows. Hebrews 4:13 reminds us, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

## **Avoid all forms of evil**

The Internet is not the only place you will encounter inappropriate images. Magazine racks, newspaper ads, TV commercials, and billboards can all present a constant drain on your spirit. Don't needlessly expose yourself to any of it. Psalm 101:3 says, "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes." And Job 31:1, "I made a covenant with mine eyes." Don't become desensitized to evil.

## **Avoid temptation**

Joseph stayed away from a dangerous situation. Genesis 39:10 says he refused even "to be with her [Potiphar's wife]." Delete suspicious looking e-mail without reading it. Use filtering and blocking software to help you minimize encounters with tempting materials. Use high quality search engines to minimize tempting links. Stay out of chat rooms.

## **Concentrate on your relationship with your spouse**

Proverbs 5:19 advises men to find their joy and fulfillment in their own wife only. The principle also applies to singles - do not do anything that will damage a future relationship.

## **View others as individuals, not objects or fantasy personalities**

When a man sees a photograph of a woman, or a woman strikes up a conversation in a chat room, remember that an individual is involved, not an object or an abstract personality. In describing David's sin with Bathsheba, God reminds us that she was "the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah" (2 Samuel 11:3). Every woman is somebody's daughter, potentially somebody else's wife. How do you want people looking at your daughter or your wife? How do you want other women to talk to your husband?

## **Children must have parental supervision**

Nearly everyone knowledgeable about the Internet, including secular people, recommends that children not use the Internet unsupervised. This applies to children of all ages including (perhaps especially) teenagers. The dangers are too numerous and the technical solutions too imperfect to take chances.

Make sure your Internet access is protected with a password you are sure your kids don't know. Never let them browse the web alone, at your house or at a friend's house. Monitor their emails. Don't let them go into chat rooms alone. Don't underestimate your kid's technical expertise or susceptibility to temptation. Place the computer in a public room of your house to make it easy to supervise. Educate your kids about the dangers and establish clear guidelines.

## **Guard your testimony**

Even if you never access anything inappropriate, what will people think if they know you use the Internet in an unsafe way? Do not give anyone reason to question your integrity. Set a good example for your children and for fellow Christians. David said, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way" (Psalm 101:2).

## **Know yourself**

When you recognize a weakness, deal with it strongly. If pornography is an area of special weakness for you, don't have the Internet in your home! "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out" (Matthew 18:9). There are a growing number of public places like libraries where you can obtain Internet access if you really need it.

## **Take steps in advance**

Daniel "purposed in his heart" not to defile himself (Daniel 1:8). Proverbs 22:3 says, "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished."

## **Take the threat seriously**

Are we being alarmist? Even the government and other secular authorities are sounding the alarm about the dangers of the Internet. As the previous testimonies show (see *The Problem Illustrated*), long-time believers are falling prey to these temptations. And the Internet is a more serious danger than the other worldly temptations a Christian faces (see *The Danger*).

Are we infringing on people's liberty? No Christian has a liberty to sin. Even of innocent things Paul wrote, "all things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient" (1 Corinthians 6:12). He wrote that it is good not to do any thing "whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Romans 14:21). He gave a warning to "consider thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

All of the suggestions listed may not be appropriate for you and your family, but surely this is an area where Christian people must be particularly sober and vigilant (1 Peter 5:8).

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## **Biblical Perspectives**

### **Just Say No?**

Some will suggest that, given the dangers present on the Internet, perhaps we ought to "just say no" and refuse to have anything to do with it. For some people, this might indeed be the best approach. The fact that "everybody is doing it" doesn't mean that you and your family have to. Just as many people get along without the "indispensable" television, so many people can probably get along without the Internet.

That may sound extreme to some, but so were Christ's words in Matthew 18:9 when he said, "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out." You can afford to give up the whole world if it means the saving of your soul (Mark 8:36).

On the other hand, the Internet is beginning to pervade society. It is much more than just an entertainment medium. Many people are required to use it in their jobs. Business is done there. Your kids will probably see it at school and at friends' homes. It may well become impossible to avoid. Whether you use it or not, you can't afford to be ignorant about it.

### **Not in my back yard?**

Short of a complete refusal to use the Internet, is there anything that can be done? One possibility is to use the growing number of public places where you can access the Internet. For example, many libraries now provide public Internet access. You can gain many of the benefits of the Internet without having it in your home.

Unfortunately, many libraries refuse to use any type of filtering or blocking software, out of censorship concerns. The public location might provide some deterrence to bad behavior but it won't stop you from stumbling across the worst of the Internet.

## **Salt and Light**

Christians are called to strike a careful balance between two competing ideas. On the one hand, we are to be strangers and pilgrims here (Hebrews 11:13), with our affections and treasures above (Colossians 3:2, Matthew 6:20). The fact that "everybody's doing it" should not be a concern to the Christian. We must avoid participation in evil regardless of the personal cost involved.

On the other hand, Christ said, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from evil" (John 17:15). He instructed us to be light and salt, on public display rather than hidden away where we can do no good (Matthew 5:13-16). A Christian family cannot withdraw from society without losing contact with the very people it is supposed to be ministering to. The Internet may well be the Mars Hill of our day, and we need some modern day Pauls to stand up in it and proclaim the truth of God's Word.

Nevertheless, it is important to realize that when we venture out onto the Internet, we are entering pagan territory. Mars Hill is not a place a Christian goes for entertainment or companionship. "For what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14). This principle goes far beyond just the Internet, to address our attitudes towards TV, videos, even the mall. "Love not the world", John wrote, "neither the things that are in the world." (1 John 2:15) The world in the abstract doesn't sound tempting. But the world's things are another matter. Far too many Christians have their lives wrapped up in the world's things. The Internet is one of the world's things, and there is no protection software that can prevent worldly thinking.

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# Protection Software

## Philosophy

1. No filter will ever provide perfect protection. Things will always slip through. There are many reasons why this is so. Here are a few:
  - No filtering company will share your family's standards exactly. Many don't even come close to a Biblical standard.
  - It is hard for computers to evaluate the content of images. No program in the world can reliably recognize bad content in pictures.
  - The size and scope of the web make it nearly impossible to keep up with. Some filters are days or weeks behind in evaluating new sites.
  - Web sites constantly change. An acceptable site today may contain something objectionable tomorrow.
  - Bad advertisements, as on TV, can appear in the most innocent of places.

There will simply never be a substitute for parental supervision of kids and accountability for adults. "Be sober, be vigilant." (I Peter 5:8). No piece of software can do that for you.

2. Any filter, even a weak one, is far better than nothing at all. There is no reason to encounter evil needlessly when a filter can keep much of it away. Many people scoff at filters until they begin personally stumbling across bad content. Listen to the advice of people who have been there and spare yourself that exposure to evil.

The following sections describe the various types of filtering software available, with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each.



## **Who does the filtering?**

Filtering can be done at one of three places:

1. You install software on your home computer that performs filtering for you. This type of filter is known as "client side" filtering. These filters are the most flexible but the most easily circumvented.
2. Your Internet service provider (ISP) does the filtering for you. Such "server side" filters are difficult to circumvent, but you have little control over the filtering.
3. Your ISP provides unfiltered access, but you channel all requests through a third party "proxy" which filters the requests for you. As with ISP filters, you have little control over the filtering.

## **How does the filter work?**

Filtering can be done in one of three ways:

1. "No-list" filters maintain a list of known bad sites which you are prohibited from visiting. New sites and sites which change can slip through.
2. "Yes-list" filters maintain a list of approved sites, and all others are blocked. There is very little chance of a bad site getting through (unless a good site goes bad). However, many good sites are unreachable until added to the list. Yes-list filters are good for frequently visited sites but very difficult to use for research and browsing.
3. "Rule-based" filters scan each web page as it comes in for bad content. New and changed pages can't slip through, but pictures can.

## **What else can be blocked?**

Some software will allow you to turn off or restrict services like FTP and Chat Rooms so that they cannot be accessed at all from your computer.

## **Outgoing content filtering**

This software checks the content of everything you type, in e-mails and sometimes in other programs such as word processors as well. This software is often recommended for children, because it prevents them from typing their address, phone number, or other private information in an e-mail to a stranger. Unfortunately, such checking is inconvenient and ineffective,

because computers are poor at understanding English text. For example, some programs will not let you type "is expected" because it contains the letters s-e-x.

## **Monitoring Software**

Monitoring software creates a record of computer use for accountability. This can take many forms. For example, many e-mail systems automatically keep a copy of all outgoing e-mails. Many browsers keep a record of all sites visited. Programs can take "snapshots" of the computer screen at random times. Knowing there is some kind of accountability is one of the best deterrents to bad behavior.

## **Filtered Search Engines**

A growing number of search engines will filter your search requests for you to minimize the chance of finding objectionable links. Regardless of what other steps you take, using filtered search engines is wise.

## **Recommendations**

Dozens of products and services are on the market, and they are constantly changing. Any list of recommendations made here is likely to be out-of-date by the time you read it. Different families have different standards and needs. Consequently, it is important for you to research for yourself the software that is best for your family.

Some guidelines are given in the following section. Listing a filter here is for example only and does not constitute an unqualified endorsement.

## **To Read More**

The Bob Jones University Press has published a white paper providing good general guidelines for parents from a fundamental Christian perspective. It contains a frequently updated list of protection software. However, there are no reviews or recommendations. It can be found on the Web at:

<http://www.bjup.com>

Volumes of information are available on the Internet. Do a search at any major search engine for "child Internet safety."

## Filter Comparison Chart

	Filter quality	Accidental exposure risk	Browsing convenience
Client Yes-list	Excellent - you approve everything	Moderate - you have to personally determine site quality, which may result in viewing some bad sites by accident.	Low - you can't go anywhere new without changing the list.
Client No-list	Moderate - new sites sneak through	Moderate	High - most good sites are allowed, any accidentally blocked sites can be allowed on the spot.
Client Rule-list			
Moderate - sites with only bad pictures sneak through	Moderate	High - most good sites are allowed, any accidentally blocked sites can be allowed on the spot.	
ISP yes-list	Very good - someone has approved everything	Very low - every site has been pre-approved	Low - many good sites are left off the list and take a day or two to add.
ISP no-list	Moderate - new sites sneak through	Moderate	Moderate - any good sites blocked by mistake take a day or two to get unblocked

*See the glossary and text for definitions and explanations of the entries in the table.*

## Some examples of filters

	Yes-list	No-list	Rule
Client	Internet Safety Kit WizGuard	CyberPatrol CyberSitter Surf Watch	WebChaperone Dick Tracy
ISP	CharacterLink	Mayberry HedgeBuilders ClearViewNet	None

## Glossary

### Blocking Software

Software you install on your computer that limits the web sites you are allowed to view.

### Browser

A computer program that is used to access the World Wide Web.

### Cable Modem

A device for connecting to your ISP over a cable TV line instead of a phone line.

### Chat Room

An Internet service whereby groups of people can have live conversations (typed) over the Internet. Everything you type appears almost instantly on the computers of everyone else listening.

### Client

Your home computer.

### Cyberspace

A collective term for the many things people do with their computers, particularly the ways they use them to share information.

### Download

To electronically copy a computer file from another computer to yours using the Internet.

### Email

Electronic mail. Mail messages send by computer in electronic form.

### Filtering Software

Software you install on your computer which limits the web sites you are allowed to view.

**FTP**

File transfer protocol. A method of transferring computer files from one computer to another.

**Home Page**

A World Wide Web title page, a starting point for viewing a collection of documents.

**HTML**

HyperText Markup Language, the computer "language" in which web pages are written.

**HTTP**

HyperText Transfer Protocol. The method the Internet uses to transfer web pages to your browser for viewing.

**Hypertext**

An electronic document which contains built-in cross-references to other documents.

**Internet**

A world wide interconnection of computers that allows the computers and their users to exchange information.

**ISP**

Internet service provider. The company which provides your computer with a connection to the Internet. The Internet equivalent of a phone or cable TV company. In fact, many phone and cable TV companies are also ISPs.

**Link**

A cross-reference in a Web document to another Web document.

**Modem**

A piece of computer hardware which connects a computer to a phone line.

**Monitoring Software**

Software which creates a record of all Internet usage on your computer, for accountability.

**MUD**

Multi-user dungeon. An on-line multiplayer fantasy game where users interact with each other, similar to a chat room with a game environment.

**Newsgroup**

An online topical discussion group, similar to an electronic bulletin board, where people post information for all to read.

**No-list**

A filtering method which maintains a list of known bad sites which you are prohibited from viewing.

**Page**

See Web Page.

**Proxy**

A program which runs on your behalf on another computer.

**Rule-list**

A filtering method which scans each web page for bad content according to a set of rules.

**Search Engine**

An index, like a "yellow pages" to the web. Unfortunately, there is no one master index. There are dozens, all slightly different and none entirely complete.

**Server**

The computer your home computer is connected to which gives you Internet access. Few people have their computers connected directly to the Internet. More commonly, you connect to a larger computer called a server which connects to the Internet for you.

**Site**

See Web Site.

**URL**

Uniform Resource Locator. The Internet equivalent of an address. Every web page has its own address.

**USENET**

A collection of newsgroups found on the Internet.

**Virus**

A computer program which intentionally does harm when it is used.

**Web Site**

A collection of web pages which represent a company, organization, or individual.

**Web Page**

A single hypertext document that can contain text as well as graphics, sounds, animations, and video.

**The Web**

Short for the World Wide Web, the giant library of hypertext documents which form the most popular part of the Internet.

## **WWW**

The World Wide Web.

### **Yes-list**

A filtering method which maintains a list of approved sites, and all others are blocked.



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