

Simple definitions for Technology Terms

In this day and age where technology is changing as fast as you get to the store to purchase the latest and greatest gadget on the market, it is easy to fall behind on technical terminology. So here are some terms and their plain English means:

URL: URL is short for "Uniform Resource Locator." The acronym URL is used to describe a web address. For example, the URL for the homepage of this website is <http://www.oacaa.org>

Domain: When people talk about a website, they often use the word domain as a short version of "domain name" -- the identifying name for a website, also known as a URL (for example, oacaa.org and amazon.com). But if you are talking with someone about your IT infrastructure and they say "domain," they often mean your local network. Most nonprofits are using a Windows network domain, a form of a computer network in which all user accounts, computers, printers and security principals are registered with a central database (called a directory service) located on one or a cluster of central computers, also known as domain controllers. Active Directory is the Windows component that provides that central database. A key benefit of a domain network is the higher level of security and control over the computers in your organization.

App: App is short for "application software." An app is essentially a piece of software with limited functionality, usually developed for a special purpose. Apps can also be plug-ins that add functionality to existing technology. The term predates the rapid rise of smartphones, so you may also here the term app used in the older broader manner: Any computer software that enables something other than the work needed to run the computer itself. System software is not an app.

Cloud: "The cloud" refers to services and technologies that allow computing to take place over the Internet in real time. You probably already use cloud technologies without even knowing it; common web-based services like Gmail, Facebook, DropBox, and Google Docs allow access from virtually any computer with an Internet connection. Cloud computing lets users utilize services without maintaining server storage or external or internal storage devices (ie: Flash Drives, SD cards, etc.)

Open Source Software (OSS): Open source software (OSS) is software whose source code--the software behind the scenes--is available for modification or enhancement by anyone. Quite often open source software is "free" and does not require licensing fees. OSS is free—you pay nothing to access to the software, but making customizations to it and maintaining upgrades and security patches will require ongoing effort by a technically skilled staff. The most popular Content Management Systems in use today are open source software solutions.

Content Management Systems (CMS): CMS is a computer application that supports the creation and modification of digital content. The CMS manages the entire lifecycle of pages, from creation to archival. The functionality of a CMS can be broken down into several main categories: content creation, content management, publishing, and presentation. CMS provides an easy-to-use platform to create content, without the need to know complex code.

RSS: RSS is short for "Really Simple Syndication." RSS is a web feed format that is used to publish frequently updated content like blog entries. Subscribing to an RSS feed lets readers get timely updates from websites or view the feeds from several sites in one place without having to visit each individual website to check for updates.