Web has language of its own

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Like law and medicine, the Internet has a language all its own. Many words related to the Internet are familiar even to those who don't use computers on a regular basis, and have become forever embedded into our lexicon — e-mail, Web site, download.

However, there are thousands of other terms out there that are a mystery to all but the most Internet-savvy users. Even I don't know them all yet, and I'm a Web editor! That's why I thought today would be a good time to explore some of the Internet vernacular's treasures.

• WIDGET — I know that in the real world, 'widget' is a placeholder name for a hypothetical or as-yet-unnamed manufactured article. On the Internet, however, a widget, according to NetLingo.com, is "an application that sits on top of a Web site and offers users additional interactive features." Some examples of widgets are photo slideshows or video in a news story, a stock ticker or weather forecast on your computer's homepage or an animated pet on a social networking page.

• PODCAST — Maybe it's because for the past few years I've been a poor college student/recent college grad who can't afford an iPod or MP3 player, but this one has always been a bit of an enigma to me. When I looked up the definition of 'podcast' (n.) and 'podcasting' (v.) I learned that it's quite simple. A podcast is a free, audio or video file that can be downloaded and listened to/watched on a computer or MP3 player, or burned onto a CD, says NetLingo.com. The word itself was created by combining 'broadcast,' with 'iPod.'

• HTML — Yet another term I heard for years without ever being sure what it meant. I recently got a crash course in HTML and realized, not only is it useful, it's not that complicated, depending on what you're doing. HTML is short for HyperText Markup Language, and is the computer language used to create documents on the Internet. According to Webopedia.com, "HTML defines the structure and layout of a Web document by using a variety of tags and attributes." There are hundreds of HTML tags, but some of the basic ones are to make a word bold, to change the color of the text, and to add a link.

• RSS FEED — RSS stands for 'Really Simple Syndication' or 'Rich Site Summary,' according to NetLingo. A format for distributing and gathering content from a variety of Web sources, RSS allows Web site owners and independent publishers the ability to easily share information. According to Techterms.com, a Web site for, say, a newspaper, can set up an RSS feed to have its stories distributed across the Internet.

• FIREWALL — In the real world, a firewall is a fireproof wall designed to prevent the spread of fire from one building or room to another. In the virtual world, a firewall serves a similar purpose, although it's not flames that it's preventing. As Techterms.com says, "A computer firewall limits the data that can

pass through it and protects a networked server or client machine from damage by unauthorized users."
Basically, a firewall is a line of defense against the big, bad world of hackers and identity thieves.

I hope you found this little tutorial helpful. Obviously, I didn't touch on even a fraction of the thousands
of Internet-related terms out there, but there's always next time!

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