New Comprehensible Edition

The Technobabble Dictionary

no/technobabble@viatel

No ATM, no DNS, no IDS. At Viatel we believe in talking with our customers in a straightforward language that we all understand. No bull.

ADSL: ay-dee-ess-el. See Broadband

Technobabble Dictionary: An easy to understand guide to internet jargon. The business benefits of technology for business managers who hate bull.

www.viatel.com

Technobabble, (tĕk'nöbăb'ăl) n.
1. Nonsensical, incoherent, or meaningless talk from an electronic device
2. The specialized or technical language of the IT trade and profession

Few professions are quite so blessed with jargon as IT seems to be. Even its very name is an acronym, and those who work within the field often seem to enjoy baffling the rest of us rather than explaining clearly what the problem is, or what IT can do for you.

As IT is more closely adopted into the working practices of our businesses, such jargon can start to get in the way of the productivity and financial dividends that IT is supposed to deliver. IT starts to become a burden rather than a benefit.

This booklet has been written to throw open the doors on technobabble and let us all start making decisions based on understanding rather than bafflement.

Lucy Woods, CEO of Viatel

ADSL: ay-dee-ess-el. See **Broadband** and **DSL**

Anti-virus: Not a humbug sucking relative, but a software program that protects the internal company computer network from malicious software. Commonly run in association with a **Firewall** and a **spam** filter.

Application/applet: A **software** program. Common examples include word processing programs, spreadsheets etc. Applets are more basic cut-down versions of applications often used for **e-commerce** e.g. Internet banking.

ASP: ay-ess-pee. Application service provider, these **host** applications, such as financial packages, supply chain management databases for companies and lease expensive software packages to reduce initial capital outlay, but do not provide the **Internet** connection.

ATM: ay-tee-em. Asynchronous Transfer Mode. A networking protocol allowing data to be transmitted rapidly, see **transfer protocol**. Most commonly deployed on very large corporate networks and for international telecommunications links.

Attachment: A file or document that has been included with an email. Opening attachments from unknown sources is one of the most common ways of contracting a **virus**, aside from spending three months in the Bangkok Hilton.

Bandwidth: A measure of the data capacity of your connection, or how much information can be squeezed down your line. Similar to plumbing, a sewer pipe will carry more water than the small bore pipes that supply your taps, hence the common expression "You need a fatter pipe". Measured in **bits per second.**

Bounce: Returned packets of data, see **Internet Protocol (IP)**, are said to have bounced. Email bounce back due to mistyped addresses is particularly common.

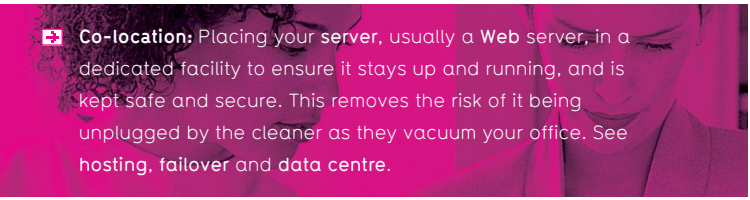
Broadband: An 'always-on' **Internet** connection in contrast to **dial-up**. Broadband comes in more flavours than ice-cream. Speeds range upwards from 256 kbps, but standard offerings at present go up to 2Mbs. To tailor the speed and cost you can choose how many other companies share your line (the **contention** ratio). Further variety comes with asymmetric and symmetric connections – see **DSL**.

Browser: Software allowing you to access the **World Wide Web**. The browser translates **HTML** into meaningful sounds and pictures. The two most popular browsers are Microsoft's Internet Explorer and Netscape's Navigator.

Bit (kb, Mb, Gb): The smallest unit of information on a computer, and the basis of the logic that underpins all modern day systems. See **bytes**.

Bits per second (bps): The amount of data transmitted from one device to another per second. Common abbreviations are kbps (Kilobits per second - a thousand bits) and Mbps (Megabits per second - a million bits). See **bits**.

Bytes (kB, MB, GB): A unit of storage capable of holding a single character, a byte is normally equal to 8 **bits**. Common divisions are kilobytes (1,024 bytes), megabytes (1,048,576 bytes), and gigabytes (1,073,741,824 bytes). The correct abbreviation for bytes is a capital B. A lowercase b indicates **bits**.

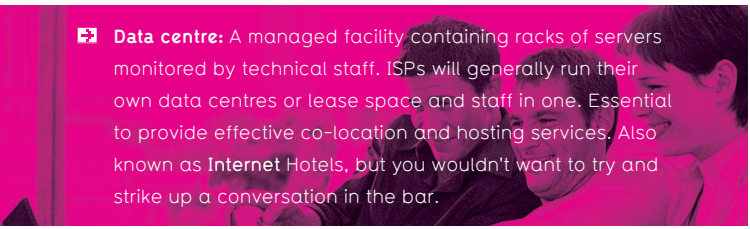


Co-location: Placing your **server**, usually a **Web** server, in a dedicated facility to ensure it stays up and running, and is kept safe and secure. This removes the risk of it being unplugged by the cleaner as they vacuum your office. See **hosting**, **failover** and **data centre**.

Contention ratio: The number of other organisations sharing your **bandwidth**. Normally expressed as a ratio, 20:1 means you might have to share your connection with up to 19

others. The **bandwidth** offered is the maximum available and actual speeds will often be much lower. Essentially the same as trying to travel by car on the M25; on a busy day everybody slows down.

Cookie: Short files storing personal data and used to create customised **web pages**. Turning cookies off means you will have to re-enter your details every time you revisit a website. A tiresome bother if you're the sole user of a password protected PC but an essential security procedure if accessing over a shared terminal or from an **Internet** cafe. As a rule one should avoid cookies with your cafe.



Data centre: A managed facility containing racks of servers monitored by technical staff. ISPs will generally run their own data centres or lease space and staff in one. Essential to provide effective co-location and hosting services. Also known as **Internet** Hotels, but you wouldn't want to try and strike up a conversation in the bar.

DHTML: dee-aitch-tee-em-el. Dynamic HTML, simply web content that changes every time it is viewed. See **transfer protocol.**

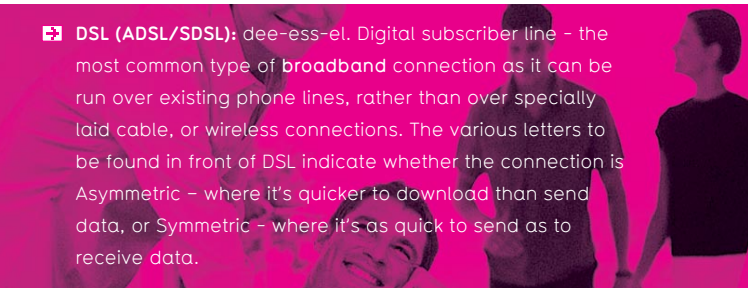
Dial-up: A type of **Internet** connection. The advantage of dial-up services is that they work over standard phone lines or even mobile phones, the disadvantages being they are slow and are not "always on". This means that to send or receive **emails**, or to surf the **web** you must first log in, a 30 second process accompanied by the whistles and twirps reminiscent of hyperactive dolphins.

Disaster Recovery: An umbrella term for technologies and services that ensure the IT functions of a company are interrupted for the shortest time possible in case of an unforeseen event such as fire, flood or yak stampede. At the most basic level this is storing back-up copies of data on tapes or servers at an alternate location. **ISPs** generally

provide a range of services - often backing up systems remotely over your **Internet** connection. See **Failover**.

DNS: dee-en-es. Domain Name Server. The **World Wide Web** runs on numbers. Just as you might phone Bob on 020 876 etc., the **IP address** for www.viatel.com is rendered as 135.196.66.2. Domain Name Servers are the equivalent of Directory Enquiries converting these numbers back into names so that they're easier for humans to remember.

Domain name: A name linked to one or more **IP addresses**. Domain names are used within **URLs**. For example in www.viatel.com/index.html - viatel.com is the domain name.



DSL (ADSL/SDSL): dee-ess-el. Digital subscriber line - the most common type of **broadband** connection as it can be run over existing phone lines, rather than over specially laid cable, or wireless connections. The various letters to be found in front of DSL indicate whether the connection is Asymmetric – where it's quicker to download than send data, or Symmetric - where it's as quick to send as to receive data.

e-commerce: Not a colloquialism from Yorkshire but a general term for conducting business online. One of the few survivors from a nineties trend of prefixing the letter 'e' onto common activities. Another survivor is **email**.

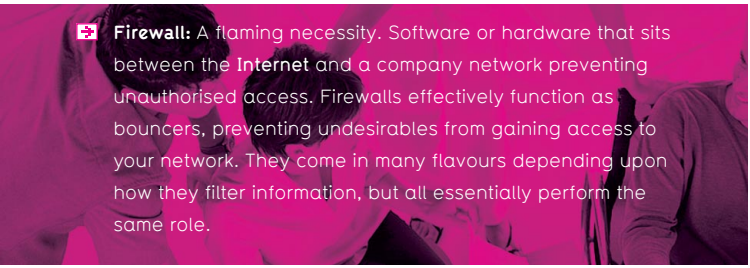
Email: Electronic mail - communications sent over the **Internet**. Generally your **Internet Service Provider** will set you up with a **mailbox** and also software to scan incoming **emails** for **viruses** and **spam**. One of the most productivity boosting technologies to emerge in the past ten years, and an excellent way of keeping in touch with your customers, friends and all manner of fraudsters. See **Spam**.

Encryption: See **PKI**.

Ethernet: See **LAN.**

Failover: A backup system to ensure critical IT systems keep running. Such measures are said to improve **resilience** and **redundancy**.

Fibre network: A network where data is transmitted as pulses of light over glass fibres. This is a faster alternative to sending electrical signals over copper wires, which have traditionally formed our telephone lines. Mainly used for long distance and data rich communications, these fibre links are very expensive to maintain and most firms tend to lease capacity on others' networks. Some larger firms, especially international operators actually own the fibre-optic network.

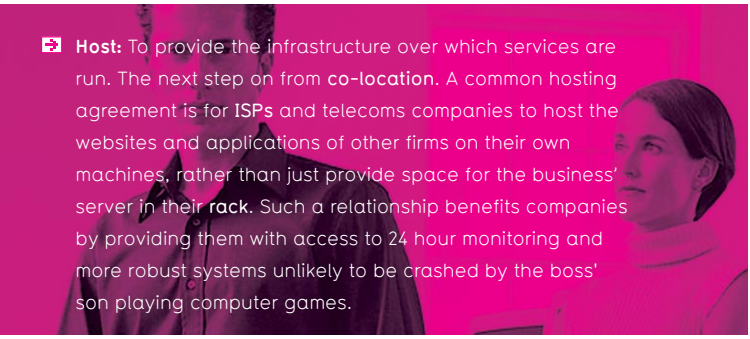


Firewall: A flaming necessity. Software or hardware that sits between the **Internet** and a company network preventing unauthorised access. Firewalls effectively function as bouncers, preventing undesirables from gaining access to your network. They come in many flavours depending upon how they filter information, but all essentially perform the same role.

FTP: eff-tee-pee: The sixth tent in a hippie commune. See **transfer protocol.**

Hacker: A computer enthusiast who delights in obtaining unauthorised access to others' digital property. Although glamorised in films such as 'The Matrix', it is rare for a hacker to have flawless skin and attract beautiful women, though many do possess long black leather coats.

Hardware: Nothing to do with B&Q. The physical equipment over which the computing system functions. Normally paired with software, which directs its operations.



Host: To provide the infrastructure over which services are run. The next step on from **co-location**. A common hosting agreement is for **ISPs** and telecoms companies to host the websites and applications of other firms on their own machines, rather than just provide space for the business' server in their **rack**. Such a relationship benefits companies by providing them with access to 24 hour monitoring and more robust systems unlikely to be crashed by the boss' son playing computer games.

HTML: aitch-tee-em-el. See **transfer protocol.**

HTTP: aitch-tee-tee-pee. The furthest tent from the gates in a hippy commune. See **transfer protocol.**

Hub: A common connection point for multiple devices on the same network. Passive hubs simply pass the data from one device to many others, whilst active hubs (often known as switches) are rather like mini telephone exchanges, connecting the appropriate devices with one another when needed.

Hyperlink: The useful underlined blue words in documents or on websites that link you to more information.

Internet: The Internet is a massive interconnected network of computers, it differs from the **World Wide Web** which is a layer of software that runs on top of it and is based on **HTML**. Pedants may extract pleasure from pointing out that the two are not the same, however this line rarely wins the ladies.

Internet Protocol (IP): eye-pee. Internet Protocol is the digital equivalent of the postal service, though more reliable. It allows you to address individual **packets** of data (discrete chunks of information) and send them off across the **Internet** without establishing a physical connection with the receiving computer.

IP address: See **DNS.**

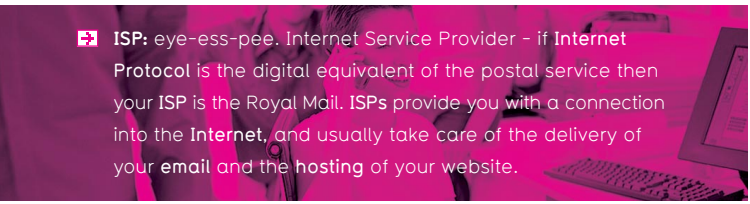
IP Sec: eye-pee-sek. A type of encryption applied to data sent over a **VPN** to keep it safe from prying eyes. Generally used to secure confidential company information.

IP transit: The leasing of capacity on another operator's network for running **IP** services – see **Fibre network.**

IP VPN: See **VPN.**

IDS: eye-dee-ess. An intrusion detection system, the quiet man of **Internet** security. Similar to, and used in combination with, Firewalls. In contrast to a **Firewall** which functions like a bouncer, an IDS works rather like its MP namesake, staying discreetly in the background. An IDS doesn't necessarily prevent attacks, but instead may trigger an alarm and record the activity. Unlike Mr Smith it is very effective at preventing backstabbing attacks from within the system.

ISDN: eye-ess-dee-en. Integrated Services Digital Network is a **dial-up** technology, which uses a dedicated digital phone line for faster data transmission. Increasingly replaced by 'always-on' **Broadband** especially **DSL**, which tends to be cheaper and faster.



ISP: eye-ess-pee. Internet Service Provider - if **Internet Protocol** is the digital equivalent of the postal service then your **ISP** is the Royal Mail. **ISPs** provide you with a connection into the **Internet**, and usually take care of the delivery of your **email** and the **hosting** of your website.

LAN: lann. Local Area Network - a network of computers confined to a small area - generally an office. Many LANs can be connected together to form a wide area network or WAN. An example would be the corporate network of a high street bank, with each branch having its own LAN and being part of the WAN. The most common **protocol** to

transmit data over a LAN is ethernet - see **transfer protocols** for more on how these work.

Latency: The delay between sending the data and it being received. Together with **bandwidth** this will define the speed and capacity of your **network**.

Leased line: A permanent telecommunications connection between two points. Generally the local telephone exchange and a business with heavy telecoms use. It is the motorway to the standard telephone wire's 'B' road.

Mailbox: This is the space assigned to you into which your emails are sent. It can be hosted externally by an **ISP**, or locally on your **server** or PC.

Mail server: See **server.**

Malware: Short for mailicious software, includes things such as **viruses**, **trojan horses** and **worms**. All of which circulate freely on the **Internet** and through **spam** email, and try to subvert your computer to their programmers' will. See **Virus**.

Network: A system of computers interconnected to share information. See **LAN** and **Internet**.

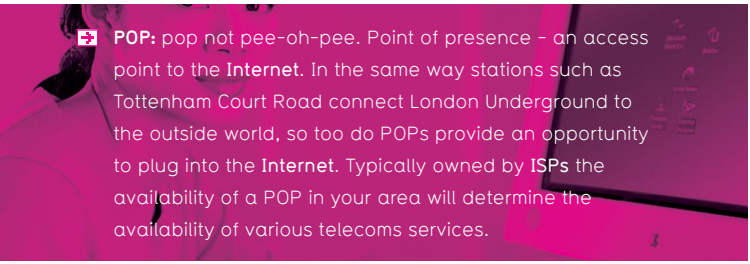
NOC: knock. The Network Operations Centre. The physical space from which a telecommunications network is run. Full of **hubs** and interconnecting wires. Similar to the bridge of the Starship Enterprise but with less lycra and far more beer guts.

Peer to peer: Known to it's friends as P2P, this is a type of network architecture where all computers are equal, with equivalent capabilities and responsibilities. Like Marxism the fans of this system enjoy cultivating beards.

Packet: A discrete chunk of information transmitted over a **network**, usually incorporating the destination address. See **IP.**

Ping: A method of determining whether an **IP** address is open or not. This is a small packet of data sent to an address with the instructions to send a reply straight back. Often used to troubleshoot problematic **Internet** connections. Rather like shouting "Can you hear me?"

PKI: pee-kay-eye. Public Key Infrastructure. A variety of technologies all designed to validate and authenticate parties involved in transactions occuring over the **Internet**. Unfortunately there's no commonly agreed system yet, and most agree this is holding up the development of **e-commerce.**



POP: pop not pee-oh-pee. Point of presence - an access point to the **Internet**. In the same way stations such as Tottenham Court Road connect London Underground to the outside world, so too do POPs provide an opportunity to plug into the **Internet**. Typically owned by **ISPs** the availability of a POP in your area will determine the availability of various telecoms services.

Protocol: Set of rules by which various **Internet** devices communicate between themselves to transmit data. For example **IP, ATM, FTP**. See **transfer protocol**.

Rack: An expensive set of shelves. This is the metal cabinet in which various **servers** sit and which the IT department guards jealously. The flickering array of lights is one of the few Star Trek innovations to make it into the real world.

Redundancy: Nothing to do with the dreaded P45. This simply indicates the presence of back-up systems to take over if it all goes wrong.

Remote user: In networks, remote refers to anything not connected directly to your computer. Remote users can

therefore be considered as anything from a laptop user in reception to a road warrior in Germany. New networking technologies such as **VPN** allow these users to be connected into the corporate network securely and inexpensively over the **Internet**.

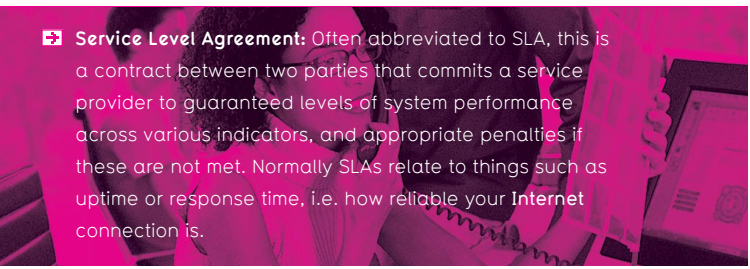
Resilience: See **Failover.**

Router: A device that forwards data to the correct destination. Effectively a set of railway points across two or more networks, forwarding data off one and onto another and ensuring your data stays on track. Routers communicate amongst themselves to determine the best path for forwarding the data. Commonly these act as gateways between two **LANs**, a **LAN** and a **WAN**, or a **LAN** and the **ISP's** network.

SDSL: See **DSL.**

Search engine: A program designed to seek out keywords in documents, files and web pages. The most common type of search engines are programmes such as Google and Altavista which search the **World Wide Web**.

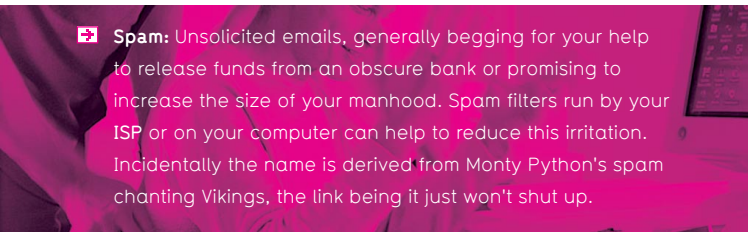
Server: The daddy computer on a **network** which manages all the network resources. Generally these are kept in **racks** and guarded by the IT manager. Often there will be separate servers to manage files, printing, email, network traffic and databases. Servers can generally be accessed by all computers on the network, so for instance any user can save files onto the file server or access their **mailbox**.



Service Level Agreement: Often abbreviated to SLA, this is a contract between two parties that commits a service provider to guaranteed levels of system performance across various indicators, and appropriate penalties if these are not met. Normally SLAs relate to things such as uptime or response time, i.e. how reliable your **Internet** connection is.

Software: Not a range of comfy slippers advertised within Daily Mail supplements but the programs and routines that control the functioning of the **hardware** and direct its operation.

Software patch: If you get a puncture you pop a patch on it. Software patches are simply pieces of code to repair holes or bugs in **applications** and operating systems. It is important to impose a strict patching policy to ensure your systems stay secure. See **Virus**.



Spam: Unsolicited emails, generally begging for your help to release funds from an obscure bank or promising to increase the size of your manhood. Spam filters run by your **ISP** or on your computer can help to reduce this irritation. Incidentally the name is derived from Monty Python's spam chanting Vikings, the link being it just won't shut up.

Switch: See **Hub.**

Transfer protocol: The software language spoken across the **Internet**. This comes in more dialects than Chinese, but the two main ones are: File Transfer Protocol for moving entire files onto and off the **Internet** and Hyper Text Tranfer Protocol for download only. HTTP defines how messages are formatted and transmitted, and what actions Web **servers** and **browsers** should take in response to various commands, i.e. when you type in a **URL**, what happens next. HTTP's close relative is **HTML** or Hyper Text Markup Language, this covers how web pages are displayed and formatted.

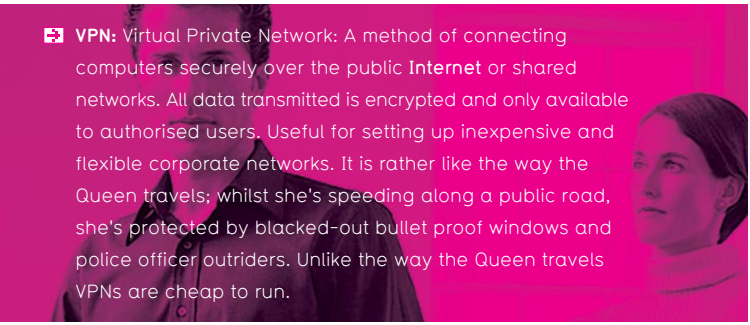
Trojan horse: See **Virus.**

URL: you-arr-el. Uniform Resource Locator. Interestingly this can help you locate a woggle and scout cap but is capable of far more. It is the address you tap into your browser, for instance: http://www.viatel.com. The first part

instructs the browser to use HTTP protocol to fetch the webpage from the **Web**, whilst Viatel is the **domain name**.

Virus: A malicious program that runs on your computer without your knowledge or permission. Variously known as **trojans, worms** or plain old viruses dependent upon their behaviour. The effects of viruses can vary from annoyance, pop-up messages, to complete system failure. Common methods of entry include via **email**, or through unpatched security breaches. A **Firewall**, **anti-virus** application, and regular **patching** are the best defence. Penicillin is no protection.

VoIP: vee-oh-eye-pee or vuh-oy-puh. Voice over IP (**Internet Protocol**), commonly pronounced vee-oh-eye-pee. A term applied to both the **hardware** and **software** that allows you to make phone calls over the **Internet**. The advantages are cheaper calls and the ability to integrate telephone calls with your PC applications.



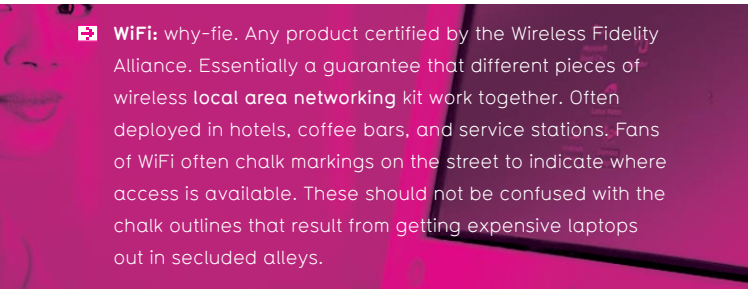
VPN: Virtual Private Network: A method of connecting computers securely over the public **Internet** or shared networks. All data transmitted is encrypted and only available to authorised users. Useful for setting up inexpensive and flexible corporate networks. It is rather like the way the Queen travels; whilst she's speeding along a public road, she's protected by blacked-out bullet proof windows and police officer outriders. Unlike the way the Queen travels VPNs are cheap to run.

WAN: See **LAN.**

WLAN: Increasingly wireless **LANs** are becoming popular. These as the name indicates dispense with wires and instead communicate via radio waves. As radio waves travel through walls etc. it is important to consider the security of the network and to ensure your Firewall covers both the wired LAN and the wireless LAN.

Web page: A document on the **World Wide Web**, every page has a **URL**.

Web server: See **server**.



WiFi: why-fie. Any product certified by the Wireless Fidelity Alliance. Essentially a guarantee that different pieces of wireless **local area networking** kit work together. Often deployed in hotels, coffee bars, and service stations. Fans of WiFi often chalk markings on the street to indicate where access is available. These should not be confused with the chalk outlines that result from getting expensive laptops out in secluded alleys.

World Wide Web/www: See **Internet**.

Worm: See **Virus**.

XML: ex-em-el. XML stands for eXtensible Mark-up Language and is a way of sharing data across different computer systems and applications. Basically any digital device in the future should be able to both create and view XML files allowing data to be swapped from one application to another. Just received a party invite as a word document - no problem it'll transfer into your diary automatically.

/help is at hand

Do you **really** know what you're buying when the IT department submits an invoice for a new router and VPN? At last the lid is lifted on the murky world of technology jargon. The Technobabble dictionary is the definitive guide to IT purchasing for business managers left bemused and baffled by Internet goobledegook.

Viatel is a pan-European provider of communications services; helping businesses of all sizes access the Internet, securely connect offices and employees, and run business applications. We think differently, listening to our customers' needs, and delivering a service that is right for them. If you'd like assistance improving the way your business communicates contact one of our team or visit the website at www.viatel.com

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