



Doing the web stuff right since 2000

The plain English web glossary

Every term we are likely to use in a meeting with you, without the jargon

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The web industry runs on jargon, some of it necessary and a lot of it decorative. This is every term we are likely to use in a meeting with you, in plain English. If someone uses a term on you that is not here, email us and we will add it.

THE CLICKINGMAD TEST

If a term on our own site ever confuses you, that is our failure, not yours. Ring us and say so.

301 redirect

A permanent signpost telling browsers and Google that a page has moved. Done properly during a rebuild it protects your rankings. Skipped, it is how sites lose years of search value overnight.

AEO

Answer engine optimisation: making your content the source that AI tools such as ChatGPT and Google's AI Overviews quote when they answer a question. The successor conversation to SEO, and increasingly the same discipline done properly.

AI Overview

The generated answer Google now shows above the normal results for around half of searches. Being cited in one brings traffic. Being absent from one makes you invisible for that search.

Algorithm

The set of rules a search engine uses to decide what ranks. It changes constantly, which is why anyone promising a permanent position is guessing.

Alt text

A written description attached to an image, read aloud by screen readers and read by search engines. Small effort, disproportionate value.

Analytics

The measurement of who visits your site and what they do there. Useless as a pile of numbers, valuable the moment it answers a business question.

Backlink

A link to your site from someone else's. Search engines treat good ones as votes of confidence. Bought ones are how sites get penalised.

Bounce rate

The share of visitors who arrive and leave without doing anything. High is not always bad: someone who found your phone number and rang it counts as a bounce.

Cache

A stored copy of a page kept so it loads faster next time. The reason a change sometimes does not show up until the cache is cleared.

CMS

Content management system: the software, such as WordPress, that lets your team edit the site without a developer. The difference between updating a price in minutes and filing a ticket.

Conversion rate

The percentage of visitors who do the thing you want, usually enquire or buy. The single most important number in this glossary.

Cookies

Small files a site stores in your browser to remember you. The reason for the consent banner.

Core Web Vitals

Google's measurements of how fast and stable a page feels to a real visitor. They influence rankings and, more importantly, patience.

Crawler

The software search engines send to read the web. If a crawler cannot reach or understand your pages, nothing else in SEO matters.

CRO

Conversion rate optimisation: improving the share of existing visitors who enquire, rather than buying more visitors. Usually the cheapest growth available.

CTA

Call to action: the button or line that tells a visitor what to do next. Pages without one leak enquiries.

CTR

Click-through rate: of the people who saw your link, the share who clicked it. Falling sharply on searches where AI answers appear.

DNS

The internet's address book, pointing your domain name at your website and your email. Boring until it is misconfigured, at which point everything stops.

Domain authority

A third-party estimate of how much weight your site carries in search. A useful rough gauge, not a score Google itself uses.

Ecommerce

Selling directly through your website, with baskets, payments and stock. A different discipline from a brochure site.

GA4

Google Analytics 4, the current version of Google's measurement tool. Powerful, unloved, and usually misconfigured, which is why we audit setups.

Hosting

The computer your website lives on. Cheap hosting is why sites crash on the day the local paper mentions them.

HTTPS

The padlock: an encrypted connection between visitor and site. Non-negotiable since browsers started labelling everything else "not secure".

Indexing

A search engine adding your page to its library so it can appear in results. A page that is not indexed does not exist as far as Google is concerned.

Keyword

The words a customer actually types into a search engine. The gap between what you call your product and what customers call it is where enquiries go missing.

Landing page

A page built for one audience and one action, usually the destination of an advert. Sending ad traffic to your home page is paying for visitors and then losing them.

Local pack

The map with three businesses that Google shows for searches with local intent. For most local firms, being in it matters more than any blue link.

Meta description

The two lines of text under your link in search results. It does not affect rankings, but it is your advert, and it decides whether people click.

Migration

Moving a site between platforms, hosts or agencies. Done carefully it is invisible. Done carelessly it takes the rankings with it.

Organic traffic

Visitors who arrive from unpaid search results. The compounding asset that SEO builds, as against the tap that paid advertising turns on and off.

Responsive design

A site that rearranges itself to work on any screen size. The baseline since most UK traffic went mobile, not a feature.

Schema

Code that labels your content so machines know your address is an address and your reviews are reviews. Increasingly how AI tools verify who you are.

SERP

Search engine results page: everything you see after pressing enter, including ads, maps, AI answers and, somewhere among them, the traditional links.

Sitemap

A machine-readable list of every page on your site, handed to search engines so nothing gets missed.

Staging site

A private copy of your website where changes are built and tested before anyone real sees them. The reason our launches are quiet.

UX

User experience: how easy and pleasant the site is to actually use. Bad UX is rarely reported and always punished, silently, by people leaving.

WCAG

The international accessibility guidelines for the web. Level AA is the standard regulators and courts point at, and the one we build to.

WordPress

The world's most used CMS. Excellent when built well and maintained, and the source of most of the hacked sites we get asked to rescue when it is neither.

Still translating something?

Ring us and ask. Explaining things plainly is most of the job.

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