

Internet, Intranet and Extranet

by Mary K Swanson

Based on definitions from Steven Telleen, who coined the original terms, and other authorities on the Internet, I submit the following practical explanations of common terms:

Internet: The physical networked structure that underlies the worldwide, omnipresent information exchange; indicates the complete, growing structure of interrelated physical networks that carry signal for the World Wide Web.

World Wide Web: Refers to the entire virtual space for information exchange created by the Internet. Also: **WWW**; **Web**.

internet: A connected group of two or more networks. The term refers to a physical structure of linked networks that may or may not link to the Internet at large. (The Internet is an internet, but an internet is not THE Internet.; an internet can be connected to, or not connected to THE Internet.) Also: **internetwork**.

network: A collection of devices and connectors that create a physical connection to allow communication between users, usually differentiated by being reached by using a common network address. (The Internet is a network, an internet is a network, but for purposes of discrimination, a network is a group of devices linked by a common network addresses, either separate or part of an internet, and separate or part of THE Internet.)

subnet: A portion of a network defined by the subset of a network address to which it belongs. (This concept is somewhat analogous to the four-digit zip code addition that specifies which part of that zip code area the address belongs.)

intranet: (1) A body of knowledge common to a particular organization over a network, internet (internetwork), and/or the Internet that is denied to all others; (2) the group defined by such access.

extranet: (1) A subset of a body of knowledge common to and available to a particular organization that is available to a group outside the organization; (2) the group defined by access to this knowledge subset.

Office networking

If my integration of definitions from Telleen and others is correct, then the following statement is reasonable:

“This office’s network is linked to three other networks to make up our company internet (physical structure). Our company internet carries the information exchanged and generated by people within our intranet, including those who can become part of our internet by a virtual (VPN) link. Our customers can reach us through an extranet that includes access to some information that is also available to our intranet, some of which is housed within our internet and some housed on servers accessed over the Internet (whole world internet). Our employees can access information over the Internet from the World Wide Web only if we authorize it.”

Changing terms

Telleen is a good source of standard definitions for these terms, but what will we do when is is dead? Will the definitions stop evolving? If not, what will be our source of the changing definitions?