



THE INTERNET: WHAT'S OUT THERE

This is the first in a series of articles about the Internet. I don't know how many articles just yet, so there's no point in asking. I'm explaining these concepts so you'll know what's going on when you send an E-mail or look up something on Google, and understand some of the jargon. You need to understand these parts and pieces to make sense of things like E-mail, search engines, and Web pages.

Parts and Pieces

Customer. That's you. A person (in most cases.)

Client. Your computer or mobile device, like a tablet computer or smart phone.

Content Provider. A company that provides you with information (data), sometimes free, sometimes not. Examples of content providers are Netflix and YouTube (videos), Google, (E-mail and searching services), and the Wall Street Journal (news).

Server. The content provider's computer(s) that hold the information they're providing you. Content providers own thousands of servers housed in huge buildings called server "farms."

The Internet. The combination of wires, cables, fiber optics, satellites, routers and so on that connect all the **clients** (your computer) and **servers** (the content providers' computers).

The Cloud. A metaphor for all the servers connected to **the Internet** and the Internet itself. (This will become clearer when we explain how information gets from a server to a client—from the content provider to you—in a future article.)

Internet Service Provider (ISP). The company that connects the **clients** in your house to **the cloud**. The ISP usually provides a router, too. (More about that in another article).

This picture tells the story

Mavis and Ted (**customers**) pay Verizon, their **Internet service provider**, to connect their computer and iPad (**clients**) to **the Internet**. Mavis is watching a video from Netflix (**content provider**) on her computer. The video is stored on Netflix's **servers** in **the cloud** that are connected to the **Internet**. Meanwhile, Ted is reading an op-ed piece from the Wall Street Journal (**content provider**) on his iPad (**client**). The text and pictures are stored on the Journal's **servers** in **the cloud** connected to the **Internet**.

To give you a better idea of the scope of what's going on, consider that thousands of people are watching any one of thousands of videos from Netflix, all "on demand."

Thousands of people are also reading the Wall Street Journal. And they're clicking on links to read different articles, watch embedded videos, and even visiting different content providers' Web pages that are "linked" within the Journal's articles. And it all happens in a fraction of a second.

