


The world of technology is moving so quickly that no matter how updated you keep your computer system, there will always be new products and options that you do not have. Rather than swap computers on a weekly basis, the tech mavens have created plug-ins and add-ons. A few of the features that plug-ins and add-ons entitle you to are 3-D worlds on the web, digital voice capacity, advanced information searches, and free web telephone systems.

The options are limitless, but for the sake of this article we are going to focus on some of the programs that enhance your Internet experience. However, remember that the fun doesn't stop there — with a little web surfing you can also find lots of fun plug-ins for standard software programs like Adobe Photoshop or Microsoft Word.

Simply, plug-ins and add-ons are helper software programs that extend the capabilities of your existing computer and **browser**. Each time a new file format is developed, a plug-in has the capacity to allow your browser to view those files without updating the entire system. When a browser sends a file request to an Internet server, the file that comes back can be written in any number of formats (jpeg, Quicktime, pdf, etc.). If your browser doesn't have these capabilities, or plug-ins, your computer can't read the file.

For example, on www.colleges.com if the Macromedia Shockwave/Flash plug-in isn't installed on your system, you'll see a plain graphic image when you view the virtual campus. However, **download** Flash and you'll get the full graphic benefits of the program — floating clouds, pop-up menus identifying buildings as your mouse passes over them, etc. Because Macromedia Shockwave/Flash is utilized on Colleges.com, we've linked the download for this plug-in right on our home page .

Just to get the technical definitions clear, "add-ons" are actually programs that, unlike "plug-ins," tend to work outside the browser environment. The browser calls on and opens a separate program to do certain jobs (such as streaming media, or reading a document that has been formatted in some

language other than HTML). For example, the RealPlayer add-on allows you to see streaming video in a separate application from your browser. Add-ons allow you to use and benefit from these technologies and access a greater variety of files.

TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

Bandwidth — Describes the information-carrying capability of your connection. High bandwidth means faster downloading times.

Browser — A program that allows you to see information on the World Wide Web.

Download — When you retrieve a file from an Internet server, you have "downloaded" that file.

Stuffed — A compression format typically used by Macintosh that allows files to be easily transmitted over the Internet. (Suffix: .sit)

Utility — A type of program that performs a basic operation such as FTP (file transfer protocol), compression or decompression, etc.

Zippered — A compression format typically used by PCs that allows files to be easily transmitted over the Internet. (Suffix: .zip)

As a true web-head, you'll want to understand all the extended capabilities that plug-ins and add-ons offer. As **bandwidth** increases, and Internet activity becomes quicker, you will be seeing more and more options for faster interactivity on the web. You'll need to install the appropriate plug-ins and add-ons to take advantage of what developers have to offer.

For the novice computer user, remember that downloading plug-in and add-on programs from the web to your computer does not automatically give you the program functionality. You have to install the software just like you would install any other application onto your computer. One other thing to keep in mind is that many downloaded installers need to be "unstuffed" or "unzipped" before you can use them. The files are "stuffed," or compacted to save you time during their download. If your computer

does not have a program with "unstuffing" capabilities, you can download **utilities** to handle this. There are free, downloadable versions of WinZip for PCs, at www.winzip.com; and Stuff-It Expander and Drop Stuff for Macs, at www.aladdinsys.com.

The following is a quick reference for some of today's most popular plug-ins. To find more, go to any search engine and type in "plug-ins."

Adobe Acrobat Reader allows you to open, read, and print PDF (portable document format) files in your browser. (www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readermain.html)

Macromedia Shockwave/Flash offers added quality to interactive multimedia, graphics, and streaming audio. Considered the web standard for vector graphics and animation, it allows you to experience animation and entertainment on the web in a whole new way. Companies like CNN and Warner Brothers Records use Shockwave as an integral part of their sites. (www.macromedia.com/shockwave/download)

Net2Phone Turn your PC into a phone. Using Net2Phone you can call home directly from the computer any time you need a break. Calls within the U.S. are only 1 cent a minute — that sure beats AT&T's prices! (www.net2phone.com)

Plugins.com This site is worth a visit for some general plug-in resources. (www.plugins.com)

Powermarks A nifty plug-in for getting organized and bookmarking your favorite spots. (www.kaylon.com/power.html)

Quicktime A common format for audio and video downloads so you can watch movies or listen to music over the web. (www.apple.com/quicktime)

RealPlayer This add-on program allows you to stream very large audio and video files over the web. You can be working on a term paper and have local, national, or international music, news, or sports playing in the background. You program the channels of your choice. (www.real.com)