

# Keep your English up to date

e-

Professor David Crystal

In a vote, in 1998, the American Dialect Society looked for "the new word that was most likely to succeed." And they had an accolade - "the word of the year". And that particular year, it wasn't a word at all, it was 'e-', e hyphen, the prefix, meaning electronic of course, as you'll find it in e-mail for instance, these days, a lot.

Well, why did they think it was going to be such a successful development? Well because in the mid-1990s they had noticed, the American Dialect Society had noticed how many people were starting to use this e- prefix and applying it to all kinds of circumstances. And in the 1990s you got all these developments: e-books (electronic books); e-voting (electronic voting); you could get a loan from a company by e-mail, and it would be an e-loan. There were e-newsletters, e-securities, e-shopping, hundreds more.

And people after a while began to play with the word - you will have heard this too: you know about retail and retailing. Well now you can have e-tail and e-tailing, because that's retail shopping over the internet.

And of course it didn't take long before people started to complain about the way in which it was over-used. In fact a couple of years later, one of the big internet magazines said "this is a word, this is a prefix that has to go! Everybody is using it too much." Well, it hasn't gone - it's here to stay. E-speak is the future!



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