

# Headline English

2011, week 46 *Learn English through reading on current world affairs*

## 1 **The impact of the web**

2 original at

3 <http://www.economist.com/blogs/babbage/2011/08/web-turns-twenty>

4 It was on August 6th, 1991, that Tim Berners-Lee, a British physicist at  
5 the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, in Geneva, created the  
6 first-ever web page, that is a page sharing information over the internet  
7 containing hypertext links. This event marked the beginning of a new era  
8 for the internet. The web (which in its narrow, technical sense, should not  
9 be confused with the internet, i. e. the international network of  
10 computers) allowed for information on a computer network to be  
11 organized in a new way, by means of "hyperlinks".

12 Over the past 20 years, the web has brought numerous benefits. At a  
13 keystroke, it has become possible to find all sorts of obscure information,  
14 thanks to Google, Bing, Ask and other search engines. Wikipedia may not  
15 be the most reliable of sources, but at least it provides a quick run-down  
16 on practically anything you need to know in a hurry. Compared with  
17 printed encyclopaedias and public libraries, the web has democratised the  
18 collected wisdom of ages in a way unimaginable a few decades ago.

19 But it has had its dark side, too. It gave birth to cybercrime. It destroyed  
20 jobs in the bricks-and-mortar world, turning them into online jobs and off-  
21 shoring them. Likewise, for all the new freedoms and certainties the web  
22 has created, numerous old ones have disappeared. Consider copyright.  
23 Once it provided authors, artists and musicians with a living. Illegal  
24 downloading from the web has put an end to that.

25 You also have to wonder whether something is wrong when so many  
26 people spend so much of their time these days in front of a computer  
27 screen, instead of going out into the real world to experience life's actual  
28 (as opposed to virtual) adventures. Ironically, for all the labour-saving  
29 tools the web has given us, and all the personal connections it has allowed  
30 us to make, we seem to have become lonelier and more isolated than  
31 ever. That is a rather sorry state of affairs.

## Questions

- 1) What is, according to the article, the difference between the web and the internet (in the narrow technical senses of both of the words)? (The vocabulary section contains an explanation of the word 'hyperlink'.)
- 2) What advantages has the web brought us according to the article?
- 3) Paraphrase 'the web has democratised the collected wisdom of ages' (lines 17 to 18).
- 4) What have, according to the text, been the negative impacts of the web?
- 5) What is the 'bricks-and-mortar world' (line 20)?
- 6) What is, according to the article, ironic about the impact of the new technology?
- 7) What impact has the web (and the internet in general) had on you? Can you imagine a life without it? Do you think its contribution has been positive? Do you share some of the concerns expressed by the author of the article?

## Vocabulary

**confuse** (line 9) – to fail to distinguish between; associate by mistake; confound

**hyperlink** (line 11) – a word, phrase, picture, icon, etc, in a computer document on which a user may click to move to another part of the document or to another document

**run-down** (line 15) – an overview, a general outline of a subject or situation; survey or summary

**lonelier** (line 30) – the comparative of *lonely* that is affected with, characterized by, or causing a depressing feeling of being alone; lonesome, destitute of sympathetic or friendly companionship, solitary, lonesome

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> or <http://www.ldoceonline.com/>

Přejeme Vám mnoho studijních úspěchů.

Tým jazykové skupiny Spěváček:

