English Learning for Curious Minds

Member-only content
Transcript & Key Vocabulary

Episode #053
The Dark Web
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[00:00:04] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:00:11] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to talk about the Dark Web.

[00:00:18] When you hear the phrase, the Dark Web, you might think of all sorts of things.

[00:00:24] Bitcoin, people buying fake credit cards, drugs, guns, and all sorts of not very nice things.

[00:00:34] Or you might think that it is the last place for free expression on the internet, a place where governments and the authorities can't **interfere**[1] in your own business and where your privacy is actually respected.

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[1] to involve yourself in a situation when your involvement is not wanted or is not helpful

[00:00:51] Today we are going to talk about what the Dark Web actually is, how it works, why people use it, and whether it's actually always as bad as the media might make it out to be.

[00:01:08] This is normally the part where I tell people that they can become a member of Leonardo English, but as this is a member only episode, I don't need to do that.

[00:01:18] All I will do is say, thank you very much for your membership.

[00:01:22] You make Leonardo English possible and you are the reason that I do the show.

[00:01:29] Okay, then let's talk about the Dark Web.

[00:01:33] I imagine you've heard the phrase Dark Web or dark net more and more over the past few years, but despite all of the news articles you might have read about it, it is misunderstood by many, and lots of people would **have a hard time**[2] explaining exactly what it is.

[00:01:58] For starters, the Dark Web isn't really a place or location on the internet.

[00:02:06] A more accurate way of thinking about what it is is that it is a way of using the internet, an anonymous way of accessing the internet that means that nobody can see who you are.

[00:02:23] To explain how this actually works, let's just start with the normal internet.

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[2] have difficulty

[00:02:30] If you have a website, Leonardoenglish.com for example, you can just access the website through whatever **browser**[3] you want: Google Chrome, Firefox, Safari, internet Explorer, or whatever it might be.

[00:02:45] And it's easy.

[00:02:47] There's not much to do.

[00:02:49] It's easy for you, but this does come at their cost.

[00:02:55] And this cost is your privacy .

[00:02:58] Your internet service provider, the company that provides your internet, it can see pretty much all of your activity.

[00:03:08] It knows the websites you visit, when you visited them, and a large number of ISPs, the internet service providers, they will sell on your data to advertisers, so these advertisers can try and sell you things.

[00:03:26] So your internet usage is really not very private at all.

[00:03:31] And yes, even if you are using incognito mode or private **browsing**[4], your internet company can still see what you're doing.

[00:03:42] For you, this might not matter very much.

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[3] a computer programme that makes it possible for you to read information on the internet

[4] to look at information on the internet

[00:03:45] I have no doubt that all members of Leonardo English are **upstanding citizens**[5], and you might say, 'who cares? I'm not doing anything interesting or wrong. So what does it matter if my internet company can see that I've visited leonardoenglish.com and listened to a few podcasts?'

[00:04:08] But if you are someone who really didn't want anyone to be able to see what you were doing, either because you just believed that they shouldn't or because what you were doing was illegal, well, this is where the Dark Web comes in.

[00:04:29] With the Dark Web, there are **layers**[6] of **encryption**[7] that mean that your identity and **browsing** history is hidden from everyone.

[00:04:42] Without getting too technical, this is achieved by something called onion routing,

[00:04:50] How this works in practice is that the data is sent through different **layers**, and each **layer** can only see the **layer** before and the **layer** after, meaning that it is very difficult to actually identify the sender and receiver of the data.

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[5] good and honourable (law-abiding) citizens

[6] a level of material, such as a type of rock or gas, that is different from the material above or below it, or a thin sheet of a substance

[7] the process of changing electronic information or signals into a secret code (= system of letters, numbers, or symbols) that people cannot understand or use without special equipment

[00:05:13] One **parallel**[8] that I think is useful to think about this is with organised crime gangs, where, if you're in the gang, you might only know the identity of the person above you and the person below you so that if the police catch you, you don't know who the big bosses are.

[00:05:34] There are, of course, some differences, but I think this is a useful **analogy**[9].

[00:05:40] How it works isn't that important though, at least for the purposes of today's episode.

[00:05:47] The important thing is that the end result is that you are completely anonymous.

[00:05:54] Nobody can see what websites you've visited and the websites that you are visiting can't see who you are.

[00:06:03] These websites are normal websites from the point of view of they are just **constructed**[10] like any other website.

[00:06:12] But you can always tell that they are a Dark Web website by a very simple sign.

[00:06:20] They all end in the same way, the address all ends in the same way.

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[8] something very similar to something else, or a similarity between two things

[9] a comparison between things that have similar features, often used to help explain a principle or idea

[10] built, made

[00:06:25] It's not .com, it's not .co.uk and it's not .DarkWeb or something like that.

[00:06:33] It is dot onion.

[00:06:36] If you happen to find a website that is a dot onion, that website will only be accessible, you can only get to it, via a special type of **browser** that allows you to access websites on the Dark Web.

[00:06:52] The most famous one is a **browser** called Tor T O R, or the onion router.

[00:07:01] Interestingly enough, this was actually developed by the United States Navy in order to protect online communications between its information officers.

[00:07:13] It certainly wasn't **intended**[11] to be used as a way to **enable**[12] some of the things that it now **enables**.

[00:07:22] So we've figured out how to get onto the Dark Web, how we access these mysterious dot onion websites.

[00:07:30] It's that you download your Tor **browser** and you are ready to go.

[00:07:35] But once you are there, what can you actually do?

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[11] planned

[12] to make someone able to do something, or to make something possible

[00:07:40] Well, given that it is completely anonymous, and governments can't easily **trace**[13] the activities of people on the Dark Web, this naturally has meant that it has attracted people who want to remain anonymous.

[00:07:58] And these people **broadly**[14] fall into three categories.

[00:08:04] Firstly, people who want to remain anonymous for **ideological**[15] reasons, they don't think that it is right that **third parties**[16] should be spying on them.

[00:08:19] Secondly, people who want to access the internet in countries with **authoritarian**[17] governments, who want to access services that aren't available through the normal internet and who want a safe place to communicate without the government being able to see what they are doing.

[00:08:42] And thirdly, people who are actually doing pretty illegal stuff.

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[13] to find the origin of something

[14] in a general way, without considering specific examples or all the details

[15] based on or relating to a particular set of ideas or beliefs

[16] a third person or organisation less directly involved in a matter than the main people or organisations that are involved

[17] demanding that people obey completely and refusing to allow them freedom to act as they wish

[00:08:47] They have **migrated**[18] activity that might happen on street corners and dark, **shady**[19] rooms, online.

[00:08:58] Much like how you might buy books, clothes, even groceries online now, because it is more convenient and saves you time, if you were the sort of person that wanted to buy something that wasn't quite as legal as books, clothes, or groceries, then the Dark Web is the place where you can find and buy almost anything.

[00:09:26] From drugs to guns, stolen credit cards to fake passports, there is practically nothing that isn't for sale on the Dark Web.

[00:09:38] However, one question you might have is about payments.

[00:09:42] If you want to stay anonymous, how can you actually pay for stuff?

[00:09:48] A credit card wouldn't work because that could be tracked by the government and it would defeat the entire **purpose**[20] of **covering your tracks**[21], of trying to be anonymous.

[00:09:59] And you probably wouldn't want to send cash in an envelope because what if the seller just said they didn't receive it?

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[18] moved to a different place

[19] sheltered from direct light from the sun

[20] why you do something or why something exists

[21] hiding where you have been

[00:10:07] You couldn't go to the police and say that your parcel of drugs or fake passports hadn't arrived.

[00:10:16] The answer, if you weren't aware, is Bitcoin.

[00:10:20] A proper discussion of Bitcoin is probably a subject for another episode, but it has one major selling point that makes it attractive for users of the Dark Web.

[00:10:33] And that is that it is anonymous, it can't be **traced**[22] just like the Dark Web itself.

[00:10:42] So, purchases on the Dark Web happen primarily through Bitcoin or other non-**traceable**[23] cryptocurrencies.

[00:10:53] E-commerce, buying and selling stuff on the Dark Web wouldn't really have been possible without it.

[00:11:01] Now, as you would expect with people who make a living through illegal means, there is quite a lot of **dodgy**[24] behaviour reported by users of the Dark Web with some sellers just running off with buyer's money and then setting up another shop 10 minutes later.

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[22] to find someone or something that was lost

[23] possible to find or follow, especially using technology

[24] dishonest

[00:11:24] Because everyone's identities are hidden, this means that it is a lot easier to do this than it would be on the normal internet.

[00:11:35] And like we said before, you can't go to the police and say that someone hasn't delivered the stolen credit card numbers that you had paid them for.

[00:11:45] However, there are certainly reports of lots of sellers on the Dark Web actually behaving in a way very similar to how people would behave on the internet, on the normal web.

[00:11:59] They know it's important to keep your customers happy because that's the only way they'll come back.

[00:12:06] And so, instead of not delivering the illegal goods and running off with the money, they might send an extra gift or make sure that they message the buyer to leave a positive review.

[00:12:20] They would do the kinds of things that any good eBay or Amazon seller would.

[00:12:28] So business is business, no matter whether you are selling very legal household appliances or very illegal **firearms**[25] or heroin.

[00:12:40] The customer always comes first.

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[25] guns that can be carried easily

[00:12:43] This e-commerce, the online shopping on the Dark Web happens in different places, in different markets, different websites all over the Dark Web.

[00:12:55] But the most famous one was called Silk Road, named after the trading path between East and West where everything was bought or sold, where you could buy almost anything.

[00:13:11] You may have heard of the name of Silk Road, because its founder, a man called Ross Ullbright, also known as Dread Pirate Roberts, was finally arrested by the FBI.

[00:13:28] Ullbright is now serving five **concurrent**[26] life sentences in an American prison, so it's unlikely that he will ever get out.

[00:13:38] But before he was put **behind bars**[27], he was the founder and **mastermind**[28] of Silk Road, the largest online drugs market in the world, where, apparently, people could buy any types of drug that they wanted.

[00:13:58] Silk Road became so big that it reportedly did over a billion dollars of sales in its two year existence.

[00:14:08] All these sales were in Bitcoin, of course.

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[26] happening or existing at the same time

[27] in prison

[28] to plan a difficult activity, often a crime, in detail and make certain that it happens successfully

[00:14:12] So there is obviously a lot of bad stuff on the Dark Web.

[00:14:17] Guns, drugs, stolen credit cards, child pornography, which to state the obvious, is horrible and should be **condemned**[29].

[00:14:29] But there is also quite a lot of the Dark Web that, in my opinion, at least, does serve a valid **purpose**.

[00:14:38] It is used by lots of journalists, for example, to receive **encrypted**[30] information from sources.

[00:14:48] As I said earlier, in countries where the governments really can't be trusted to not be always **snooping**[31] on people's internet **browsing**, it does provide privacy for those people to live their lives, to communicate with other people about completely legal things in a way that their governments can't overhear.

[00:15:13] And not all websites on the Dark Web are bad and full of criminal activity.

[00:15:20] One website that exists on the Dark Web, which also has a far more popular version on the main internet is one that you probably use and you will definitely have heard of.

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[29] criticise something or someone strongly, usually for moral reasons

[30] to change electronic information or signals into a secret code (= system of letters, numbers, or symbols) that people cannot understand or use on normal equipment

[31] to look around a place secretly, in order to discover things or find out information about someone or something

[00:15:34] It's Facebook.

[00:15:36] Facebook has a Dark Web version, meaning that people who live in **authoritarian** countries, or who don't want their governments **snooping** into their internet history, they can access Facebook completely anonymously, at least from the point of view of anyone being able to see what pages they were accessing.

[00:16:00] Another service that exists on the Dark Web is one that I imagine you will also have heard of, but you probably haven't used, and that is WikiLeaks.

[00:16:12] Whatever you might think of some of the things that have been published by it, it is a service that believes in people's rights to **expose**[32] government corruption and **malpractice**[33], basically governments doing bad things.

[00:16:30] And having a completely **encrypted** site on the Dark Web means that **whistleblowers**[34], people who want to submit information that they believe should be in the **public domain**[35], but don't necessarily want their name to be attached with the publication of it, the Dark Web allows them to do this.

[00:16:53] So these types of sites serve a valid **purpose**.

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[32] to make public something bad or dishonest

[33] failure to act correctly or legally when doing your job, often causing injury or loss

[34] a person who tells someone in authority about something illegal that is happening, especially in a government department or a company

[35] if information is in the public domain, it is available for everyone to see or know about

[00:16:58] Just look what happened during the Trump Ukraine scandal.

[00:17:03] There was a **whistleblower** who went through the official channels, but their identity was revealed by lots of **far right**[36] news outlets and individuals, and even Donald Trump and members of his administration said that the identity of the **whistleblower** should be revealed.

[00:17:25] Now I'm sure that this has made a lot of potential **whistleblowers** think twice about doing so, knowing that a similar thing would likely happen to them.

[00:17:38] So WikiLeaks on the Dark Web means that everything is encrypted, their identity can be completely hidden, and the fact that no one can see their **browsing** history means no one knows they've even gone on WikiLeaks.

[00:17:55] And the fact that this means that people can submit information, hold governments accountable without fear of **reprisals**[37], fear of things coming back to them, that has to be a good thing in terms of **transparency**[38].

[00:18:12] Now I want to add two linguistic points to conclude today's episode.

[00:18:19] Firstly, because they are interesting on their own.

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[36] extreme right wing political group

[37] (an example of) activity against another person, especially as a punishment by military forces or a political group

[38] a situation in which business and financial activities are done in an open way without secrets, so that people can trust that they are fair and honest

[00:18:24] And secondly, because they are interesting from an English learner's point of view.

[00:18:29] So to start, it is called the Dark Web, but lots of people **misinterpret**[39] and misunderstand the 'dark' here.

[00:18:41] Dark can mean bad, illegal, nasty, but of course it also means without light.

[00:18:49] Hard to see.

[00:18:51] And the dark of Dark Web is **the latter**[40].

[00:18:55] Dark doesn't mean bad in itself, it just means that it is the part of the web that you can't see.

[00:19:05] And secondly, a lot of people, including TV shows and newspapers, they confuse the Dark Web with the Deep Web.

[00:19:16] So Dark Web, Deep Web.

[00:19:19] They do have similarities, but they are very, very different.

[00:19:24] And it is an important **differentiation** to make because you see statistics like 97% of the web is below the surface, it's on the Deep Web, and some people think this

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[39] to form an understanding that is not correct of something that is said or done

[40] the second of two people, things, or groups previously mentioned

is the same as the Dark Web and **jump to the conclusion**[41] that the majority of the internet is just people selling illegal things.

[00:19:49] Of course, this is incorrect.

[00:19:51] The Deep Web is just the web pages, the pages on the internet, that aren't visible to Google and search engines.

[00:20:01] Mainly hidden pages that are accessible through logging in to accounts and so on.

[00:20:09] So your Leonardo English dashboard, for example, what you see when you log in, that is part of the Deep Web, but it's certainly not on the Dark Web.

[00:20:21] And if you are going to go to that webpage **on the hunt for**[42] fake credit cards or drugs, I think you would find yourself quite disappointed.

[00:20:31] I should say that obviously this podcast and Leonardo English does not support any of the illegal activity that happens on the Dark Web.

[00:20:42] However, there certainly is an argument to be made for more privacy on the internet.

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[41] to guess the facts about a situation without having enough information

[42] looking for

[00:20:49] At the moment, we are all in a bit of a **Faustian pact**⁴³ where we accept, consciously or unconsciously, that the price of such easy internet access is a lack of privacy.

[00:21:05] At least the Dark Web offers a way for people who live in or **authoritarian** countries with governments that they can't trust to **browse** the internet with a little bit more privacy.

[00:21:19] And that, in my view, at least, has to be a good thing.

[00:21:24] Okay then that is it for today's episode.

[00:21:28] I hope that it has been an interesting one and at least you know now a little bit more about the Dark Web than you did 20 minutes ago.

[00:21:38] As always, I would love to know what you thought of the show.

[00:21:42] You can email, hi@leonardoenglish.com.

[00:21:46] I've just got a couple more things to say before we end.

[00:21:50] Firstly, we will be doing our first members Q&A live session later on this month, so keep an eye on your inbox for that one.

[00:21:59] It is going to be a lot of fun and I hope that you will be able to make it.

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⁴³ A pact whereby a person trades something of supreme moral or spiritual importance, such as personal values or the soul, for some worldly or material benefit, such as knowledge, power, or riches

[00:22:03] Secondly, as you may have seen, you can now request an episode in your Leonardo English dashboard.

[00:22:11] We want to make podcasts about the topics that you want to listen to.

[00:22:16] So if there is anything in particular that you think we should do an episode on, please do submit the request.

[00:22:25] Okay then, you've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:22:31] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Interfere	to involve yourself in a situation when your involvement is not wanted or is not helpful
Have a hard time	have difficulty
Browser	a computer programme that makes it possible for you to read information on the internet
Browsing	to look at information on the internet
Upstanding citizens	good and honourable (law-abiding) citizens
Layers	a level of material, such as a type of rock or gas, that is different from the material above or below it, or a thin sheet of a substance
Encryption	the process of changing electronic information or signals into a secret code (= system of letters, numbers, or symbols) that people cannot understand or use without special equipment
Parallel	something very similar to something else, or a similarity between two things
Analogy	a comparison between things that have similar features, often used to help explain a principle or idea

Constructed	built, made
Intended	planned
Enable	to make someone able to do something, or to make something possible
Trace	to find the origin of something
Broadly	in a general way, without considering specific examples or all the details
Ideological	based on or relating to a particular set of ideas or beliefs
Third parties	a third person or organisation less directly involved in a matter than the main people or organisations that are involved
Authoritarian	demanding that people obey completely and refusing to allow them freedom to act as they wish
Migrated	moved to a different place
Shady	sheltered from direct light from the sun
Purpose	why you do something or why something exists
Covering your tracks	hiding where you have been
Traced	to find someone or something that was lost
Traceable	possible to find or follow, especially using technology

Dodgy   dishonest

Firearms   guns that can be carried easily

Concurrent   happening or existing at the same time

Behind bars   in prison

Mastermind   to plan a difficult activity, often a crime, in detail and make certain that it
                                happens successfully

Condemned   criticise something or someone strongly, usually for moral reasons

Encrypted   to change electronic information or signals into a secret code (= system
                              of letters, numbers, or symbols) that people cannot understand or use on
                              normal equipment

Snooping   to look around a place secretly, in order to discover things or find out
                              information about someone or something

Expose   to make public something bad or dishonest

Malpractice   failure to act correctly or legally when doing your job, often causing injury
                              or loss

Whistleblowers   a person who tells someone in authority about something illegal that is
                                happening, especially in a government department or a company

Public domain   if information is in the public domain, it is available for everyone to see or know about

Far right   extreme right wing political group

Reprisals   (an example of) activity against another person, especially as a punishment by military forces or a political group

Transparency   a situation in which business and financial activities are done in an open way without secrets, so that people can trust that they are fair and honest

Misinterpret   to form an understanding that is not correct of something that is said or done

The latter   the second of two people, things, or groups previously mentioned

Differentiation   the act of differentiating

Jump to the conclusion   to guess the facts about a situation without having enough information

On the hunt for   looking for

Faustian pact   A pact whereby a person trades something of supreme moral or spiritual importance, such as personal values or the soul, for some worldly or material benefit, such as knowledge, power, or riches

We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

You can email us at hi@leonardoenglish.com.