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COMPUTE
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COMPUTING DOC'S SURVIVAL GUIDE #1 - BASIC VOCABULARY

OVERVIEW

Too often we are intimidated by the jargon of computers. Here are some of the most common terms that you will hear and see.

Bios (Basic Input/Output System)

Contained in *ROM*, this is where a lot of the most common computer operating functions are located.

BIT

The smallest unit of computer storage; has two possible values, usually thought of as 0 and 1.

BAUD

A unit of signaling speed. Your *modem* is rated in baud. Usually baud closely approximates bits per second (rate of information flow). For example a 56K-baud modem sends and receives data at about 5,600 *bytes* per second (about four pages per second).

Bus

The "highway" for the data inside the computer to move on. Connects the cards to the motherboard.

BYTE

The amount of computer storage necessary to hold one character (such as the letter 'A'); usually 8 bits. A *kilobyte (KB)* is approximately one thousand bytes (actually 1,024 bytes); a *megabyte (MB)* is approximately a million bytes (actually 1,048,576 bytes); a *gigabyte (GB)* is approximately a billion bytes (actually 1,073,741,824 bytes).

CARD

Sometimes called a "daughter card"; this is a circuit board that fits in a slot on the motherboard. Common cards are for *modem*, *serial port*, *parallel port*, graphic adapter, and sound.

CD (Compact Disk)

A secondary storage device that uses small laser disks as a removable medium. Most are read-only (CD-ROM), but increasingly more have both read and write capabilities.

CHIP

A solid-state integrated circuit containing millions of tiny transistors. There are memory chips (*RAM* and *ROM*), *CPU* chips, graphics chips, and other special purpose chips.

CMOS

A special area of memory where the computer setup parameters are stored. A dedicated battery maintains the storage.

CPU (CENTRAL PROCESSING UNIT)

The "brains" of the computer. This is usually contained in a chip on the *motherboard* of the computer. *PCs* have CPUs manufactured by Intel Corporation or makers of compatible chips. *Macintoshes* have CPUs manufactured by Motorola Corporation.

DOS (Disk Operating System)

This term used to be generic, but now it commonly refers to Microsoft's operating systems.

DVD

A high-density CD which can store a full-length motion picture.

FILE

A collection of data such as a document, photographic image, piece of music, or a program. Files have names and are contained in *folders*.

FOLDER

Also called a directory. These form a hierarchy on a disk. Folders can contain other folders or files. Think of a disk as a file drawer containing folders.

FLOPPY DISK

This removable secondary storage medium is now usually contained in 3.5-inch plastic cases. A typical storage rating is 1.4 MB.

HARD DISK

Usually a fixed secondary storage device where all of your *files* and *folders* are kept. Computers now come with hard disks rated at from 6 to 15 GB of available space.

INTERNET

A worldwide collection of computer networks which provide basic services such as *telnet*, *ftp*, *http*, and *email*. See *Computing Doc's Survival Guide #2 – Internet*.

K

Usually means the number 2 raised to the tenth power (1,024). In some contexts it can mean 1,000 (such as Y2K, for example).

MACINTOSH

A computer manufactured by Apple Computer Corporation. Usually called a "Mac".

MEGAHERTZ

A measure of the speed of a computer. It roughly means one million cycles per second. The first IBM PC was a 4.77 megahertz computer. Today's computers are typically from 350 to 450 megahertz.

MODEM (MODULATOR/DEMODULATOR)

A device, which transforms the digital signals from the computer to and from the analog signals which travel through voice phone lines.

MOTHERBOARD

The main circuit board of the computer. This board contains the *CPU* and the *bus* with slots for daughter *cards*.

PC (Personal Computer)

Somehow, in 1981, this designation came to mean computers compatible with the IBM PC.

PENTIUM

A fifth-generation *CPU* from Intel Corporation for *PCs*. The family includes the original Pentium, Pentium Pro, Pentium II, and Pentium III so far. The previous generations were 8086, 80286, 80386, and 80486.

PORT

An interface between the computer and external devices. Typical ports are *serial* (mouse or modem), *parallel* (printer or scanner), USB (Universal Serial Bus), and SCSI (Small Computer System Interface, pronounced "skuzzy").

RAM (Random Access Memory)

Primary storage located on *chips* inside of the computer. At present, RAM is measured in *megabytes* (*MB*). It takes a minimum of 16 MB to run Windows 98.

ROM (Read-Only Memory)

Unchanging areas of storage located on *chips* or *CDs*.

SCANNER

A device that "captures" an image from a photograph or other document. The scanned image can be printed, faxed, or placed on the *Internet* for viewing.

TAPE BACKUP SYSTEM

A relatively slower removable secondary storage device. Typical storage ratings are about 10 GB of available space. See *Computing Doc's Survival Guide #3 – Standard Operating Procedures*.

WINDOWS

A series of operating systems for *PCs* from Microsoft Corporation. Currently, Windows 98 and Windows NT 4.0 are the most recent versions.

Y2K

The year two thousand. Some computer systems and programs store the year using only two digits. This will cause a problem in Y2K because 2,000 stored as "00" comes before 1,999 stored as "99".

ZIP DISK

A removable secondary storage device from Bernoulli Corporation. Typical storage ratings are 100 MB of available space.