



# Jargon buster

## A

**Anti-virus software** A program that detects and (in most cases) removes viruses from a PC. A virus is an unauthorised *program* that can adversely affect the operation of a computer. Viruses are so named because of their ability to spread by making copies of themselves.



## B

**Backup** A copy on disk or tape of what's on a computer's hard disk, to be used in the event of the original information being lost or damaged.

**Benchmark** A way of testing computers and components that yields numerical results so that brands can be compared.

**Bits, bytes** A bit is the smallest unit of information that computers can handle. For convenience, most bits are shunted around in groups of eight called bytes and these are a handy way of measuring the capacity of a computer's *hard disk* and *memory*.

**Boot, boot up, boot disk** To boot (up) a computer is to start it and wait while it goes through the time-consuming process of getting itself ready for use. Booting happens automatically thanks to instructions stored on the boot disk, which is usually the PC's main hard disk.

**Browser, browsing** A browser is a *program* used to view information on the *Internet*. Netscape and Internet Explorer

are the most common programs that are used for browsing.

**Bug** A fault or defect in a computer system; applies to both *programs* and equipment.



## C

**Cache** A type of *memory* devoted to speeding up the operation of a computer.

**CD-ROM** Looks like an audio CD but is used to store computer information.

## Control panel

A program built into *Windows*, through which options and preferences are set.



**CPU** Short for Central Processing Unit. Often referred to as simply the 'processor', it can be thought of as the engine or 'brains' of the computer. Intel is the leading supplier of PC processors. See *Pentium*.

## D

**DOS** A simple *operating system* that requires you to type in commands, rather than pointing and clicking with a mouse.

**Drag and drop** In *Windows*, the process of using a mouse to drag something from one part of the screen to another. This usually produces a response from the computer, as in dropping a document onto a picture of a printer to print it.

**Driver** A small *program* that operates

behind the scenes in a PC. It does the same job as a human interpreter, so add-on equipment often comes with a driver to tell the host PC how it works.



## E

**Electronic mail (e-mail)** Like ordinary mail but sent from one computer to another. E-mail can be viewed on a computer screen or printed out.

**Expansion slots, expansion bus** Both terms refer broadly to the sockets inside a PC where you can add equipment supplied on plug-in expansion cards. Two types of slot (PCI and ISA) are in common use and cards are designed for one or the other.

**Explorer** A *program* built into *Windows* used to view and rearrange information stored on the computer's *hard disk*. Not to be confused with the *browser* called Internet Explorer.

## F

**Floppy disk, floppy drive** Terms often (though incorrectly) used interchangeably. A floppy disk is a cheap, removable disk used for transferring information from one computer to another. A floppy drive is the device into which you insert the disk when you want to use it.

**Folder (directory)** *Hard disks* store vast amounts of information so they are usually subdivided into named folders containing related items, making it easier to

find what you want. You can see the folders when using *Explorer*.



**Font** A broad term usually used to refer to any of the many types and styles of lettering that can be displayed on a computer screen and printed out.

**Format** Before a *hard disk* or *floppy disk* can be used to store information it has to be electronically prepared by a process called formatting. Hard disks are usually pre-formatted by the manufacturer but floppy disks are not, so you format them yourself using a *program* supplied with your PC.

## G

**Graphics card** The component inside a PC that generates the picture you see on the screen.

## H

**Hard disk** The metal (and therefore, hard) disk inside a PC on which information and *programs* are stored. Think of it as the computer's filing cabinet.



## I

**Icon** A small picture on a computer screen that acts as a symbol for *folders*, disks, printers, *programs* and other objects.



**IDE** The most common type of *hard disk* and one that strikes a good balance between price, speed and capacity.

**Internet** An international network of computers you can hook up to through your ordinary phone line. The most popular part of the Internet is the highly graphical World Wide Web but many users also take advantage of its *electronic mail* facilities.

## K

**Kb, Mb, Gb** Abbreviations for kilobytes, megabytes and gigabytes, all of which are used to measure computer memory. Documents you create on a computer can usually be expressed in kilobytes, whereas *memory* is more often measured in megabytes and *hard disks* in gigabytes.

## M

**Memory** Memory is used to temporarily store information such as *programs* and data while computers are in use. See *RAM*, *VRAM*, *ROM* and *Cache*.

**MHz** Abbreviation for megahertz. One of its uses is to describe the internal speed at which computer equipment operates, in which case the higher the megahertz, the better the performance. See *CPU* and *Pentium*.

**Modem** A device fitted inside a PC or connected to its *serial port* used to send digital information down ordinary phone lines. Essential for *electronic mail*, faxing and getting onto the *Internet*.

**Multi-tasking** The ability of computers, especially those using *Windows*, to do several things at the same time, such as printing out a letter and recalculating a spreadsheet while letting you add names to your electronic address book.



## O

**OCR** Short for Optical Character Recognition. A *program* that takes documents copied into a computer using a *scanner* and turns them into text that can be edited in a word processor.

**Operating system** Personal computers rely on their internal components being able to pass information to one another and work in harmony. The operating system, which loads automatically when the computer is turned on, handles this interaction and binds the separate devices into a working



system. The most popular operating system is *Windows* but older computers still use *DOS*.

## P

**Palmtop computer** A battery-operated computer small enough to use in the palm of the hand.



**Parallel port** A socket on the back of a PC for connecting external equipment, particularly printers.

**PC Card** A device the size of a thick credit card that can be plugged into a slot on notebook computers. *Modems*, *memory* and *hard disks* are all available on PC Cards.

**PCI** See *expansion slots*.

**Pentium** The type of processor most often found inside personal computers. Ordinary Pentiums have speeds from 75MHz to 200MHz, and the most recent versions have the designation MMX. Two faster Pentiums generally used for high-level business computing are also available: the Pentium Pro and Pentium II.

**Peripheral** Any external piece of equipment that can be connected to a PC.

**Pixel** One of the many thousands of dots that form the image on a computer screen.

**Plug and play** A feature of *Windows* enabling it to automatically recognise new equipment added to a PC and adjust itself appropriately.

**Programs** Software that lets you and your PC perform different tasks - from playing games to producing a newsletter.

## R

**RAM, VRAM, ROM** Three types of *memory*. RAM is the main memory used as workspace while the PC is in operation. VRAM is separate, faster memory dedicated to producing the screen image. ROM is memory that is already filled with key information required by the PC and cannot be changed or erased.

**Resolution** Refers to the number of *pixels* used to produce an image on the screen, expressed as dots horizontally x dots vertically. SVGA (800x600 pixels) is

Illustrations by Phillip Morrison

typical. Increasing the resolution lets you fit more on the screen but the pixels are smaller. The minimum resolution in *Windows* is VGA at 640x480 pixels.

**S**  
**Scanner** Converts paper documents into electronic pictures usable on a PC. A4-sized flatbed scanners provide the best results but cheaper hand-held scanners can be used for photographs. See *OCR*.

**Serial port** There are one or two of these sockets on the back of every PC. Used to connect external equipment such as a mouse, modem or a second PC.

**SIMM** A group of memory chips mounted on a plug-in circuit board, frequently used to form the main memory of a PC. See *RAM*.

**SVGA, VGA** See *Resolution*.

**T**  
**Taskbar, Start button** Two important screen elements in *Windows 95*. The Start button is in the bottom left-hand

corner of the screen and is used to select the *programs* you want to use. The taskbar runs across the bottom of the screen and shows you which programs are already loaded.

**TFT** Short for Thin Film Transistor, a type of flat screen used on notebook computers to provide a very high-quality picture.

**Trackball** A socketed ball fitted below the keyboard on some notebook computers. It controls the movement of the screen pointer and acts as a substitute for a conventional mouse. Other notebooks use touch-sensitive pads or finger-controlled miniature joysticks.

**TrueType**  
The principal type of font used by *Windows*. TrueType fonts can be scaled from newsprint to poster size without distortion.



**U**  
**URL** Short for Uniform Resource Locator. More usually called an address, it defines a location on the Internet. For example, the URL for mag.net (the home of *What PC?*) is <http://www.vnu.co.uk>. You just type it into your *browser*.

**V**  
**Virus** see *anti-virus software*.

**W**  
**Windows** The world's favourite *operating system*, almost invariably supplied with every new PC, adopts an easy-to-use graphical approach. It combines keyboard-operated controls with the use of a mouse to make things happen just by pointing at objects on the screen and clicking on them. *Windows 95* is the current version.

**WYSIWYG** Acronym for 'What You See Is What You Get'. In other words, the picture you see on the screen is an accurate reflection of what you get when you print a document. ●

# faxline



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