Spencer's ILLUSTRATED COMPUTER DICTIONARY

Donald D. Spencer, Ph.D.

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PREFACE

It is unlikely that any field has contributed more new terms (or new meanings of old ones) to the language in the last few years than has computer technology. This is largely because computer technology is itself a new and changing field. As it evolves, fresh terminology must be developed to communicate, describe, and define the heretofore unknown concepts, components, and techniques. Compiled by an internationally known computer science educator and author, *Spencer's Illustrated Computer Dictionary* will help even the novice computer user to better understand the language of computers.

This dictionary offers up-to-date coverage of terms used in reference to hardware, software, programming, logic, and computer graphics, a well as those used in ancillary fields such as desktop publishing, computer networks, computer graphics, data communications and artificial intelligence. Areas of frequent application are also covered, particularly mathematics and business administration.

The primary objective of this dictionary is to present compactly and concisely the most common terms used by computer users. Familiarity with the vocabulary of any business or profession is absolutely mandatory if people working in those areas expect to succeed. Lack of knowledge can cause anger, failure, frustration, and loss of time and effort. This book should help computer users overcome many of the problems associated with learning the terminology of an unfamiliar field. This book is intended for several kinds of readers. It is a basic reference book for the person who knows little or nothing about computers but wants to learn. Business people, professionals, students, teachers, and others will find it a useful source book. Computer professionals will find it a handy reference book.

The keynote of this book is clarity — without sacrifice of authority and precision. All definitions are simple and stand as independent units of explanation. Technical terms are kept out of the definitions as much as possible. In a few cases where a special terminology is required, the expressions used are carefully defined, and related terms or concepts are indicated by cross-references.

Spencer's Illustrated Computer Dictionary contains more than 1600 entries involved in using computers. It contains all the terms that most often confuse a beginner. In many cases, definitions are supported by illustrations in order to aid in the clarification of technical points and other explanations beyond the written definitions.

HOW TO USE THIS DICTIONARY

The terms in this dictionary appear in alphabetical order of the complete term (spaces and hyphens don't count); for example, **computerese** comes between **computer crime** and **computer family**. This order contrasts with some dictionaries in which the alphabetical order is based on a heavier weighing of the first word in a term; for example all terms commencing with "computer" precede all terms commencing with "computerization."

All terms listed in the dictionary are in **boldface**. Cross-references that are important to an understanding of any term are given in *italics*.

If you cannot find a word, it might be listed in a slightly different form. For example, you might try looking for "compute" and find the description under "computing." Only one definition has been included to keep from cluttering the book with the obvious.

The terms normally appear in boldface, lower case characters. Proper names and nouns are headed by an upper case letter, for example, **Babbage, Charles**. Acronyms are presented in boldface caps and the proper letters are amplified in the text; for example, **RISC** stands for Reduced Instruction Set Computer.

weight The variation in the heaviness of a typeface.

what if? (1) Premise on which most electronic spreadsheet programs operate. New values may be substituted to determine the resultant effect on other values. (2) In artificial intelligence, a term used in expert systems. The process is as follows: once a set of data have been entered, questions have been answered, and a conclusion has been reached, changing a portion of the data of answering a question differently to see how the conclusion would be altered.

wide area network (WAN) Data communications network designed to serve an area of hundreds or thousands of miles. WAN's are generally implemented by linking together several remote Local Area Networks (LANs) through the use of gateways and bridges over dedicated telephone lines, satellite dishes or radio waves. See *local area network.*

widow Last line of a paragraph sitting alone at the top of a page of text. Considered undesirable in all forms of printing. Compare with *orphan.*

Wiener, Norbert (1894-1964) One of the most brilliant mathematicians that the United States ever produced, is best known for establishing the science of cybernetics, which is concerned with the common factors of control and communication in living organisms, automatic machines, and organizations, especially the mathematical analysis of the flow of information in such systems. In 1919 he joined the faculty of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Wiener was also very conscious of the long-range impact of the computer on man and society. In a 1950 publication he warned of the dangers that could be caused by selfish exploitation of the computer's potential.

Norbert Wiener

wildcard Method of file-naming conventions that permits an operating system to perform utility functions on multiple files with related names, without the programmer or user having to specify each file by its full, unique name.