Computer Tips

Computer Jargon — Part 3

MEMORY — Just like humans, computers rely a lot on memory. They need to process and store data, just like we do. However, computers store data in digital format, which means the information can always be called up exactly the way it was stored. Also, unlike our memory, the computer's memory doesn't get worse over time.

While memory can refer to any type of data storage, it usually refers to RAM, or random access memory. When your computer boots up, it loads the operating system into its memory, or RAM. This allows your computer to access system functions, such as handling mouse clicks and keystrokes, since the handlers are all loaded into RAM. Whenever you open a program, the controls and functions used by that program are also loaded into RAM.

RAM is a very high-speed type of memory, which makes it ideal for storing active programs and system processes. It is different than hard disk space in that RAM is made up of physical memory chips, while hard disks are magnetic disks that spin inside a hard drive. Accessing RAM is much faster than accessing the hard disk because RAM access is based on electric charges, while the hard drive needs to seek the correct part of the disk before accessing data. However, all the information stored in RAM is erased when the computer's power is turned off. The hard disk, on the other hand, stores data magnetically without requiring any electrical power.

Another common type of memory is flash memory, which is typically used for small devices such as digital cameras, USB thumb drives, and portable music players like the iPod. This kind of memory is convenient for portable devices, since it has no moving parts, and it stores information even when its power source is turned off. In addition, it is also smaller and more resilient than a hard drive.

FAT32 — This strange term refers to the way Windows stores data on your hard drive. "FAT" stands for "File Allocation Table," which keeps track of all your files and helps the computer locate them on the hard disk. Even if a file gets fragmented (split up into various areas on the disk), the file allocation table still can keep track of it. FAT32 is an improvement to the original FAT system, since it uses more bits to identify each cluster on the disk. This helps the computer locate files easier and allows for smaller clusters, which improves the efficiency of your hard disk. FAT32 supports up to 2 terabytes of hard disk storage.

BROWSER — A Web browser, often just called a "browser," is the computer program people use to access Internet pages. The browser interprets HTML code including text, images, hyperlinks, Javascript, and Java applets. After rendering the HTML code, the browser displays a nicely formatted page to the user. Some common browsers are Microsoft Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Opera, and Apple Safari.

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