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Computer Dictionary

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Acquisitions Editor: Alex Blanton
Project Editor: Sandra Haynes

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packets. Each autonomous system is assigned a globally unique number called an autonomous-system number (ASN). *Acronym:* AS. *Also called:* routing domain. *See also* IGP.

Auto PC *n.* An information and entertainment system for use in automobiles. Developed by Microsoft and powered by Microsoft Windows CE (a Windows-compatible operating system designed for embedded applications), Auto PC implements speech-recognition technology to enable individuals to rely on hands-free, spoken commands for tasks such as accessing a contact database (names, addresses, numbers), calling up e-mail or traffic reports, controlling an audio system, or obtaining destination directions. The Auto PC fits into the dashboard, in the space normally occupied by a radio. *See also* voice recognition, Windows.

AutoPlay *n.* A feature in Windows 9x and later that allows it to automatically operate a CD-ROM. When a CD is inserted into a CD-ROM drive, Windows looks for a file called AUTORUN.INF on the CD. If the file is found, Windows will open it and carry out its instructions, which are usually to set up an application from the CD-ROM on the computer's hard disk or to start the application once it has been installed. If an audio CD is inserted into the drive, Windows will automatically launch the CD Player application and play it.

autopolling *n.* The process of periodically determining the status of each device in a set so that the active program can process the events generated by each device, such as whether a mouse button was pressed or whether new data is available at a serial port. This can be contrasted with event-driven processing, in which the operating system alerts a program or routine to the occurrence of an event by means of an interrupt or message rather than having to check each device in turn. *Also called:* polling. *Compare* event-driven processing, interrupt-driven processing.

autorepeat *n.* *See* typematic.

autoresponder *n.* E-mail utility that replies automatically to an incoming e-mail. Typically, an autoresponder sends a standard, pre-written message confirming the receipt of the original e-mail.

autorestart *n.* A process or system feature that can automatically restart the system after the occurrence of certain type of errors or a power system failure.

AUTORUN.INF *n.* A file that when present on removable media, such as CD-ROMs, triggers the AutoPlay feature in Windows 9x and Windows NT. The file, located in the root directory of the inserted medium, contains information on what action the operating system is to take on the CD-ROM—generally, an instruction to run an installation program.

autosave *n.* A program feature that automatically saves an open file to a disk or other medium at defined intervals or after a certain number of keystrokes to ensure that changes to a document are periodically saved.

autosizing *n.* The ability of a monitor to accept signals at one resolution and display the image at a different resolution. A monitor capable of autosizing maintains the aspect ratio of an image but enlarges or reduces the image to fit in the space available. *See also* monitor, resolution (definition 1).

autostart routine *n.* A process by which a system or device is automatically prepared for operation with the occurrence of powering up, or turning the system on, or some other predetermined event. *See also* AUTOEXEC.BAT, autorestart, boot², power up.

autostereogram *n.* A computer-generated image, popularized in books and posters, that looks like an abstract design, but which emerges as a three-dimensional picture when the user looks beyond the image, without trying to focus on the hidden picture itself. Autostereograms in which the overlying design consists of a repetitive pattern are known as Single Image Stereograms (SIS). Those in which the design looks like a random pattern of colored dots are called Single Image Random Dot Stereograms, or SIRDS. *Also called:* stereogram.

autotrace *n.* A drawing program feature that draws lines along the edges of a bitmapped image to convert the image to an object-oriented one. *See also* bitmapped graphics, object-oriented graphics.

AUX *n.* The logical device name reserved by MS-DOS for an auxiliary device, or peripheral. AUX usually refers to a system's first serial port, also known as COM1.

A/UX *n.* A version of the multiuser, multitasking UNIX operating system provided by Apple Computer for various Macintosh computers and based on the AT&T System V, release 2.2 of UNIX with some enhancements. A/UX incorporates a number of Apple features, including support for the Macintosh Toolbox, so that applications can

point of sale *n.* See POS.

point-to-point configuration *n.* A communications link in which dedicated links exist between individual origins and destinations, as opposed to a point-to-multipoint configuration, in which the same signal goes to many destinations (such as a cable TV system), or a switched configuration, in which the signal moves from the origin to a switch that routes the signal to one of several possible destinations. *Also called:* point-to-point connection.

point-to-point connection *n.* See point-to-point configuration.

point-to-point message system *n.* In Sun Microsystems's J2EE network platform, a messaging system that uses message queues to store asynchronous, formatted data for coordinating enterprise applications. Each message is addressed to a specific queue, and client applications retrieve messages from the queues. *See also* asynchronous, J2EE.

Point-to-Point Protocol *n.* See PPP.

point-to-point tunneling *n.* A means of setting up secure communications over an open, public network such as the Internet. *See also* PPTP.

Point-to-Point Tunneling Protocol *n.* See PPTP.

Poisson distribution *n.* A mathematical curve often used in statistics and simulation to represent the likelihood of some event occurring, such as the arrival of a customer in a queue, when the average likelihood is known. This distribution, named after the French mathematician S. D. Poisson, is simpler to calculate than the normal and binomial distributions. *See also* binomial distribution, normal distribution.

poke *vb.* To store a byte into an absolute memory location. PEEK (read a byte from memory) and POKE commands are often found in programming languages, such as Basic, that do not normally allow access to specific memory locations.

polar coordinates *n.* Coordinates of the form (r, q) used to locate a point in two dimensions (on a plane). The polar coordinate r is the length of the line that starts at the origin and ends at the point, and q (Greek theta) is the angle between that line and the positive x -axis. *Compare* Cartesian coordinates.

polarity *n.* The sign of the potential (voltage) difference between two points in a circuit. When a potential difference exists between two points, one point has a positive polarity and the other a negative polarity. Electrons flow from negative to positive; by convention, however, current is considered to flow from positive to negative.

polarized component *n.* A circuit component that must be installed with its leads in a particular orientation with respect to the polarity of the circuit. Diodes, rectifiers, and some capacitors are examples of polarized components.

polarizing filter *n.* A transparent piece of glass or plastic that polarizes the light passing through it; that is, it allows only waves vibrating in a certain direction to pass through. Polarizing filters are often used to reduce glare on monitor screens. *See also* glare filter.

Polish notation *n.* See prefix notation.

polling *n.* See autopolling.

polling cycle *n.* The time and sequence required for a program to poll each of its devices or network nodes. *See also* autopolling.

polygon *n.* Any two-dimensional closed shape composed of three or more line segments, such as a hexagon, an octagon, or a triangle. Computer users encounter polygons in graphics programs.

polyline *n.* An open shape consisting of multiple connected segments. Polyline are used in CAD and other graphics programs. *See also* CAD.

polymorphism *n.* In an object-oriented programming language, the ability to redefine a routine in a derived class (a class that inherited its data structures and routines from another class). Polymorphism allows the programmer to define a base class that includes routines that perform standard operations on groups of related objects, without regard to the exact type of each object. The programmer then redefines the routines in the derived class for each type, taking into account the characteristics of the object. *See also* class, derived class, object (definition 2), object-oriented programming.

Pong *n.* The first commercial video game, a table tennis simulation, created by Nolan Bushnell of Atari in 1972.

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