RANDOM HOUSE WEBSTER'S

COMPUTER & INTERNET DICTIONARY

Third Edition

Philip E. Margolis

Random House
New York

DELL - Exhibit 1012 - Page 1

Random House Webster's Computer & Internet Dictionary, Third Edition

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DELL - Exhibit 1012 - Page 2

CPU Abbreviation of *c(entral) p(rocessing) u(nit)*, and pronounced as separate letters. The CPU is the brains of the computer. Sometimes referred to simply as the *processor* or *central processor*, the CPU is where most calculations take place. In terms of computing power, the CPU is the most important element of a computer system.

On large machines, CPUs require one or more printed circuit boards. On personal computers and small workstations, the CPU is housed in a single chip called a *microprocessor*.

Two typical components of a CPU are: (1) The *arithmetic logic unit (ALU)*, which performs arithmetic and logical operations and (2) the *control unit*, which extracts instructions from memory and decodes and executes them, calling on the ALU when necessary.

⇒ See also ALU; CHIP; CISC; CLOCK SPEED; COPROCESSOR; INTEL MICROPROCESSORS; MICROPROCESSOR; MMU; POWERPC; RISC.

CPU time The amount of time the CPU is actually executing instructions. During the execution of most programs, the CPU sits idle much of the time while the computer fetches data from the keyboard or disk, or sends data to an output device. The CPU time of an executing program, therefore, is generally much less than the total execution time of the program. Multitasking operating systems take advantage of this by sharing the CPU among several programs.

CPU times are used for a variety of purposes: to compare the speed of two different processors, to gauge how CPU-intensive a program is, and to measure the amount of processing time being allocated to different programs in a multitasking environment.

⇒ See also CPU; MULTITASKING.

crack **1.** To break into a computer system. The term was coined in the mid-1980s by hackers who wanted to differentiate themselves from individuals whose sole purpose is to sneak through security systems. Whereas *crackers'* sole aim is to break into secure systems, hackers are more interested in gaining knowledge about computer systems and possibly using this knowledge for playful pranks. Although hackers still argue that there's a big difference between what they do and what crackers do, the mass media have failed to understand the distinction, so the two terms—*hack* and *crack*—are often used interchangeably. **2.** To copy commercial software illegally by breaking (cracking) the various copy-protection and registration techniques present in the software.

⇒ See also HACKER; PHREAKING; SMURF.

cracker See under CRACK.

crash *n* **1.** A serious computer failure. A computer crash means that the computer itself stops working or that a program *aborts* unexpectedly. A crash signifies either a hardware malfunction or a very serious software bug.

If your computer crashes, it is not your fault. If the program is good

DELL - Exhibit 1012 - Page 3

- **Double-sided, high-density** microfloppies hold 1.44MB.

⇒ See also DENSITY; DISK; FLOPPY DISK.

micro-justification Refers to the use of microspacing to justify text.

⇒ See also MICROSPACING.

microprocessor A silicon chip that contains a CPU. In the world of personal computers, the terms *microprocessor* and *CPU* are used interchangeably. At the heart of all personal computers and most workstations sits a microprocessor. Microprocessors also control the logic of almost all digital devices, from clock radios to fuel-injection systems for automobiles.

Three basic characteristics differentiate microprocessors:

Instruction set: The set of instructions that the microprocessor can execute.
bandwidth: The number of bits processed in a single instruction.
clock speed: Given in megahertz (MHz), the clock speed determines how many instructions per second the processor can execute.

In both cases, the higher the value, the more powerful the CPU. For example, a 32-bit microprocessor that runs at 50 MHz is more powerful than a 16-bit microprocessor that runs at 25 MHz.

In addition to bandwidth and clock speed, microprocessors are classified as being either RISC (reduced instruction set computer) or CISC (complex instruction set computer).

⇒ See also ALPHA PROCESSOR; AMD; BANDWIDTH; CHIP; CISC; CLOCK SPEED; CPU; CYRIX; INTEL MICROPROCESSORS; MERCED; MICROCODE; MICROCONTROLLER; MOORE'S LAW; MOTOROLA MICROPROCESSORS; OVERCLOCK; PENTIUM MICROPROCESSOR; PENTIUM PRO; POWERPC; RISC; SUPERSCALAR; VOLTAGE REGULATOR.

microprogramming See under MICROCODE.

Microsoft Founded in 1975 by Paul Allen and Bill Gates, Microsoft Corporation is the largest and most influential company in the personal computer industry. In addition to developing the de facto standard operating systems — DOS and Windows — Microsoft has a strong presence in almost every area of computer software, from programming tools to end-user applications.

In recent years, Microsoft has broadened its product categories to include different types of media, such as CD-ROMs and its TV news network (together with NBC) called *MSNBC*. In the mid-1990s, Microsoft was caught somewhat by surprise by the sudden explosion of the Internet, but it quickly re-created itself to make the Internet the core element of its product line. Most observers were amazed by how quickly such a large company could adapt.

Many people have accused Microsoft of monopolistic policies and it has been investigated several times by the U.S. Justice Department. Currently, it is in a fierce battle with Netscape Communications and other

DELL - Exhibit 1012 - Page 4

print spooling See under SPOOLING.

procedure **1.** Same as ROUTINE, *subroutine,* and *function.* A procedure is a section of a program that performs a specific task. **2.** An ordered set of tasks for performing some action.

⇒ See also FUNCTION; ROUTINE.

process *n* **1.** An executing program. The term is used loosely as a synonym of *task.* —*v* **2.** To perform some useful operations on data.

⇒ See also DAEMON; TASK.

process colors Refers to the CMYK color model used in offset printing.

⇒ See also CMYK; COLOR SEPARATION; OFFSET PRINTING.

processor Short for *microprocessor* or CPU.

⇒ See also CPU; MICROPROCESSOR.

processor unit Short for *central processing unit.*

Prodigy An online service developed jointly by IBM and Sears.

⇒ See also ONLINE SERVICE.

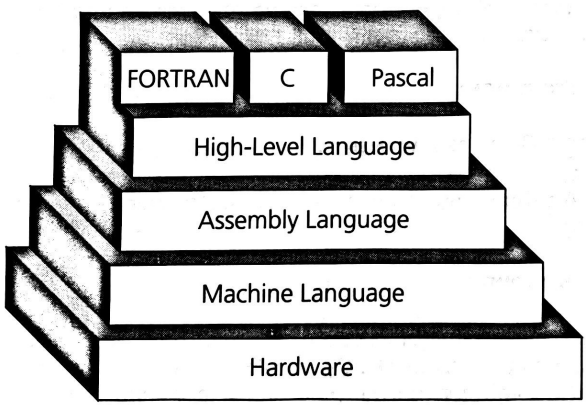

Figure 67: hierarchy of programming language

program *n* **1.** An organized list of instructions that, when executed, causes the computer to behave in a predetermined manner. Without programs, computers are useless.

A program is like a recipe. It contains a list of ingredients (called *variables*) and a list of directions (called *statements*) that tell the com-

DELL - Exhibit 1012 - Page 5