«OPERATING SYSTEMS»

When computers were first introduced in the 1940's and 50's, every program written had to provide instructions that told the computer how to use devices such as the printer, how to store information on a disk, as well as how to perform several other tasks not necessarily related to the program. The additional program instructions for working with hardware devices were very complex, and time-consuming. Programmers soon realized it would be smarter to develop one program that could control the computer's hardware, which others programs could have used when they needed it. With that, the first operating system was born.

Today, operating systems control and manage the use of hardware devices such as the printer or mouse. They also provide disk management by letting you store information in files. The operating system also lets you run programs such as the basic word processor. Lastly, the operating system provides several of its own commands that help you to use the computer.

DOS is the most commonly used PC operating system. DOS is an abbreviation for disk operating system. DOS was developed by a company named Microsoft. MS-DOS is an abbreviation for «Microsoft DOS». When IBM first released the IBM PC in 1981, IBM licensed DOS from Microsoft for use on the PC and called it PC-DOS. From the users perspective, PC-DOS and MS-DOS are the same, each providing the same capabilities and commands.

The version of DOS release in 1981 was 1.0. Over the past decade, DOS has undergone several changes. Each time the DOS developers release a new version, they increase the version number.

Windows NT (new technology) is an operating system developed by Microsoft. NT is an enhanced version of the popular Microsoft Windows 3.0, 3.1 programs. NT requires a 386 processor or greater and 8 Mb of RAM. For the best NT performance, you have to use a 486 processor with about 16 Mb or higher. Unlike the Windows, which runs on top of DOS, Windows NT is an operating system itself. However, NT is DOS compatible. The ad-vantage of using NT over Windows is that NT makes better use of the PC's memory management capabilities.

OS/2 is a PC operating system created by IBM. Like NT, OS/2 is DOS compatible and provides a graphical user interface that lets you run programs with a click of a mouse. Also like NT, OS/2 performs best when you are using a powerful system. Many IBM-based PCs are shipped with OS/2 preinstalled.

UNIX is a multi-user operating system that allows multiple users to access the system. Traditionally, UNIX was run on a larger mini computers to which users accessed the systems using terminals and not PC's. UNIX allowed each user to simultaneously run the programs they desired. Unlike NT and OS/2, UNIX is not DOS compatible. Most users would not purchase UNIX for their own use.

Windows 95 & 98 (Windows 2000) are the most popular user-oriented operating systems with a friendly interface and multitasking capabilities. The usage of Windows 95 and its enhanced version Windows 98 is so simple that even little kids learn how to use it very quickly. Windows 95 and 98 are DOS compatible, so all programs written for DOS may work under the new operating system.

Windows 95 requires 486 processor with 16 megabytes of RAM or Pentium 75-90 with 40 megabytes of free hard disk space.