CONFIGURATION

WHAT IT MEANS.

A dictionary definition of the verb "to configure" is "to give shape or form to", and for once it is in the context of operating systems in precisely the dictionary sense. Nevertheless, doubtless because it would never do to have things simple, there are two sorts of configuration, which are related but distinct.

The first of these is the set of hardware and software which together make up the computer system. With all the varieties of hardware and software available, even deciding just what you want for a personal microcomputer system is far from easy; the corresponding task for a large commercial system can be horrendously complicated, and if you get it wrong it can be horrendously expensive.

The second meaning of configuration is the action of setting up the operating system when the computer is started. Even when you have decided what system you want, there are many decisions which must be taken on how you want to run it. These are not built into the system code, as they are likely to be different for each installation, so they must be presented as parameters each time the system is started. Determining the values of these parameters and conveying them to the operating system reliably and at the right time is what we mean by this second sense of configuration.

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