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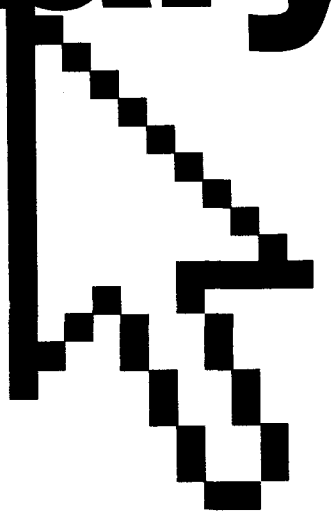
Fourth Edition



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Acquisitions Editor: Christey Bahn
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own message. *See also* ActiveX controls, control (definition 2), OCX, VBX.

Message Security Protocol *n.* A protocol for Internet messages that is based on the use of encryption and verification to ensure security. It also allows for permissions at the server level for delivery or rejection of e-mail. *Acronym:* MSP.

message switching *n.* A technique used on some communications networks in which a message, with appropriate address information, is routed through one or more intermediate switching stations before being sent to its destination. On a typical message-switching network, a central computer receives messages, stores them (usually briefly), determines their destination addresses, and then delivers them. Message switching enables a network both to regulate traffic and to use communications lines efficiently. *Compare* circuit switching, packet switching.

messaging *n.* The use of computers and data communication equipment to convey messages from one person to another, as by e-mail, voice mail, or fax.

messaging application *n.* An application that enables users to send messages (such as e-mail or fax) to each other.

Messaging Application Programming Interface *n.* *See* MAPI.

messaging client *n.* An application program that enables its user to send or receive messages (such as e-mail or fax) to and from other users with the help of a remote server.

messaging-oriented middleware *n.* *See* MOM.

meta- *prefix* Literally, a prefix that describes a process or characteristic beyond the normal meaning of the word without the prefix. For example, metaphysics is "beyond physics." In computing, meta- is usually attached to a word to indicate that the "metaterm" describes, defines, or acts upon objects or concepts of the same type as itself. So, for example, metadata is data about data and a metatool is a tool for working on tools.

metacharacter *n.* A character embedded in a program source or a data stream that conveys information about other characters, rather than itself representing a character. A simple example is the backslash (\) character, which, when used in strings in the C programming language, indicates that the letter following the backslash is part of an escape sequence that enables C to display a nongraphic character. *See also* escape character.

metacompiler *n.* A compiler that produces compilers. The UNIX utility *yacc* (Yet Another Compiler-Compiler) is a metacompiler. If it is given a language specification, yacc produces a compiler for that language. *See also* compiler (definition 2).

Meta-Content Format *n.* An open format for describing information about content of a structured body of data such as a Web page, a set of files on a Windows desktop, or a relational database. Meta-Content Format might be used for indexes, data dictionaries, or price lists. *Acronym:* MCF.

metadata *n.* Data about data. For example, the title, subject, author, and size of a file constitute metadata about the file. *See also* data dictionary, repository.

Metadata Interchange Specification *n.* A set of specifications dealing with the exchanging, sharing, and managing of metadata. *Acronym:* MDIS. *See also* metadata.

metafile *n.* A file that contains or defines other files. Many operating systems use metafiles to contain directory information about other files on a given storage device.

metaflow *n.* One of the four stages of the data warehousing process, during which metadata (data about data) is tracked and managed; the business modeling stage. During metaflow, the operational environment is mapped to the data warehouse environment. *See also* data warehouse (definition 2), inflow, downflow, upflow, metadata.

metalanguage *n.* A language used to describe other languages. Backus-Naur form (BNF) is a metalanguage commonly used to define programming languages. *Also called* language-description language. *See also* Backus-Naur form.

metal-oxide semiconductor *n.* *See* MOS.

metal-oxide semiconductor field-effect transistor *n.* *See* MOSFET.

metaoperating system *n.* An operating system under which several other operating systems are active. *Also called* supervisor.

metatag or **meta tag** *n.* A tag in an HTML or XML document that allows a Web-page creator to include such information as the author's name, keywords identifying content, and descriptive details (for example, nontext objects on the page). The information

servo *n.* The part of a servomechanism, controlled by the servomechanism's feedback circuit, that produces the final mechanical output. *Also called* servomotor. *See also* servomechanism.

servomechanism *n.* A control system in which the final output is mechanical movement. A servomechanism uses feedback to control the position, velocity, or acceleration of a mechanical component. *Also called* servo system.

servomotor *n. See* servo.

servo system *n. See* servomechanism.

session *n.* **1.** The time during which a program is running. In most interactive programs, a session is the time during which the program accepts input and processes information. **2.** In communications, the time during which two computers maintain a connection. **3.** A specific protocol layer in the ISO/OSI reference model that manages communication between remote users or processes. *See also* ISO/OSI reference model, session layer.

session layer *n.* The fifth of seven layers in the ISO/OSI reference model. The session layer handles the details that must be agreed on by the two communicating devices. See the illustration. *See also* ISO/OSI reference model.

ISO/OSI MODEL

ISO/OSI Layer	*Focus*
Application *(highest level)*	Program-to-program transfer of information
Presentation	Text formatting and display, code conversion
Session	Establishing, maintaining, and coordinating communication
Transport	Accurate delivery, service quality
Network	Transport routes, message handling and transfer
Data-link	Coding, addressing, and transmitting information
Physical	Hardware connections

Session layer.

set[1] *n.* In printing and display, a group of related characters, such as a character set. *See also* character set.

set[2] *vb.* **1.** To change the value of a bit to 1. **2.** To establish a particular condition, such as setting tab stops, setting a counter to 0, or setting a breakpoint. *See also* breakpoint.

SET protocol *n. See* Secure Electronics Transactions protocol.

settling time *n.* The time required for a disk drive's read/write head to stabilize over a new location on the disk after being moved.

set-top box *n.* A device that converts a cable TV signal to an input signal to the TV set. Set-top boxes can be used to access the World Wide Web.

setup *n.* **1.** A computer along with all its devices. **2.** The procedures involved in preparing a software program or application to operate within a computer.

setup program *n.* **1.** A built-in BIOS program for reconfiguring system parameters to accommodate a new disk drive. *See also* BIOS. **2.** *See* installation program.

setup string *n. See* control code.

setup wizard *n.* In Windows, a utility that asks users a structured series of questions and give them options to aid the process of installing a new program.

seven-segment display *n.* A light-emitting diode (LED) display or liquid crystal display (LCD) that can show any of the 10 decimal digits. The seven segments are the seven bars that form a numeral 8 as in a calculator display.

sex changer *n. See* gender changer.

.sgm *n.* The MS-DOS/Windows 3.*x* file extension that identifies files encoded in Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML). Because MS-DOS and Windows 3.*x* cannot recognize file extensions longer than three letters, the .sgml extension is truncated to three letters in those environments. *See also* SGML.

.sgml *n.* The file extension that identifies files encoded in Standard Generalized Markup Language. *See also* SGML.

SGML *n.* Acronym for **S**tandard **G**eneralized **M**arkup **L**anguage. An information management standard adopted by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in 1986 as a means of providing platform- and application-independent documents that retain formatting, indexing, and linked information. SGML provides a grammarlike mechanism for users to define the structure of their documents and the tags they will use to denote the structure in individual documents. *See also* ISO.