

1. Software Overview

Without good programs, computers would amount to little more than expensive paperweights. Computer hardware needs to be told what to do and how to do it. The computer programs or software are multiple lines of instruction (also called code) that tell computers exactly how to work in a given situation. These lines of code are not anything a user has to be concerned about since they have been assembled into what appears to be a single seamless program. When a program behaves poorly or does not respond properly in a given situation, this is referred to as a “bug”. All computer software programs have bugs and computer programmers are continually improving and removing bugs. These new and improved versions are marketed as upgrades.

Operating Systems

Software can be divided into different categories. The first is the operating system. Referred to as DOS, the disk operating system is a program that tells the hardware how to run, store, and retrieve other programs. There are several different vendors of DOS but the largest and most popular is Microsoft’s MS-DOS. Microsoft’s MS-Windows is also a popular operating system. The computer should have its own DOS manual and it will explain the DOS commands. To run P.O.S. LINKER only, any necessary DOS commands will be explained. DOS allows the computer to run as a stand alone system. If a single computer is to talk or network with other computers and terminals then a networking operating system (NOS) will also be needed.

The major types of networks are peer to peer, server, and *multiuser*. Blue Ridge POS, LLC uses a multiuser disk operating system called Real/32. This is by far the most cost effective way to set up a network we have found. The hardware and cabling requirements are meager compared to similar sized networks using some of the alternative schemes.

Another big benefit of multiuser DOS, or Real/32, is that it is MS-DOS compatible. That will allow hundreds of other popular DOS and Windows programs such as word processors, spreadsheets, communications programs and even games to run on the same computer.

DOS is also a *multitasking* operating system. This means numerous different programs can run simultaneously on a single computer, with the capability to instantly switch between them. You could write a letter in your word processor, sell a part, create an order, and do your billing all at the same time. It is especially powerful when used with one of the popular parts lookup and imaging programs saving valuable time loading programs or switching computers.

Software Programs

The P.O.S. LINKER program is a complete software solution written and developed primarily for the power equipment industry. The authors have been in the ag and power equipment business and learned this business from the inside out. Since the first computer installation in early 1985, Blue Ridge POS, LLC has continued to build and enhance the program. The running of the software itself will be fully covered in the following chapters.

There are many other programs available. They may either be purchased from us or from other vendors. A word processor is usually one of the first programs selected. It will produce very professional letters that can be saved and recalled or reprinted instantly. A communications program is also useful for accessing Computer Bulletin Board Systems (BBS). A spreadsheet is sometimes helpful to manipulate many columns of numbers. An art design program could be used to create personalized ad copy. The best way to decide what might be useful is to talk to others using that particular software package and if possible try it out first to be sure it is the right solution. There are also numerous computer magazines that frequently feature reviews of many different programs. Odds are there is a program already written that can provide a solution. If not, software languages are available to write the needed program. P.O.S. LINKER is written in a fourth generation database language called Q-PRO 4 and is available for purchase from Blue Ridge POS, LLC.