

computer system is of a particular size. The user would only be presented operating systems that are compatible with the size of the RAM as determined by the sniffing program.

In other embodiments, the computer system executing the software selection program that includes the sniffing feature would be on another computer system other than targeted computer system. For example, in FIG. 1, the control computer system 103 executing the specifying program with sniffing feature, would be able to "remote sniff" the targeted computer system 137 via a computer network such as a LAN or WAN. This advantageously allows the specifying program to present choices that are compatible with the hardware of the targeted computer system 137.

In other embodiments, the sniffing feature is used to select compatible hardware components as well. After the sniffing feature determines the existing basic hardware configuration of the targeted computer system, the user is presented lists of additional hardware components that are compatible with the existing hardware configuration as determined by the sniffing feature.

While particular embodiments have been shown and described, it will be obvious to those skilled in the art that changes and modifications may be made without departing from this invention and its broader aspects and, therefore, the appended claims are to encompass within their scope all such changes and modifications as are within the true spirit and scope of this invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for specifying a computer system comprising:

providing a master data base of a first plurality of options that may be implemented on a computer system;

presenting to a user via a user interface a list of a second plurality of options that may be implemented on a computer system, the second plurality of options selected from the first plurality of options maintained in the master data base;

receiving an indication of a selected choice by a user from the second plurality of options presented to the user via the user interface;

generating, in response to the indication of the selected choice, a list of a third plurality of options that may be implemented on a computer system, the generating step including accessing the master data base, performing a compatibility comparison, and selecting each option of the third plurality of options from the first plurality of options as a function of each option's compatibility with the selected choice, the compatibility comparison including reading a characteristic of each option of the first plurality of options and determining whether the corresponding option represents an option which is compatible with the selected choice;

presenting to the user via the user interface, the list of the third plurality of options;

indicating in a computer system readable data file the selection and part number of the selected choice; and associating an executable file with the part number of the selected choice, the executable file for use during manufacture of the computer system.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the selected choice is a specific operating system.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein each of the third plurality of options represents an option offered by a computer system vendor of the selected choice.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the selected choice is an operating system type and each of the third plurality of options is a specific version of the operating system type.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein at least one of the third plurality of options is a computer software program that may be installed on a computer system.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein at least one of the third plurality of options is a patch.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein at least one of the third plurality of options is a word processing program that may be installed on a computer system.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the receiving of the indication from the user interface includes receiving the indication via a computer network.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the computer network is a wide area network.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the selected choice is a hardware component.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the selected choice is a specific processor.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein the selection of the selected choice is entered into the user interface via an individual receiving an indication of the selection from a purchaser of the computer system.

13. The method of claim 1, further comprising: generating a list of a fourth plurality of options, each of the fourth plurality of options being compatible with the selected choice;

presenting to the user via the user interface the list of the fourth plurality of options.

14. The method of claim 13, further comprising: receiving an indication of at least one selected choice from the third plurality of options;

wherein each of the fourth plurality of options is compatible with the at least one selected choice from the third plurality of options.

15. The method of claim 1, wherein the user interface includes a telephone.

16. A method for specifying a computer system comprising:

providing a master data base of a first plurality of options that may be implemented on a computer system;

presenting to a user via a user interface a list of a second plurality of options that may be implemented on a computer system, the second plurality of options selected from the first plurality of options maintained in the master data base;

receiving an indication of a selected choice by a user from the second plurality of options presented to the user via the user interface, the selected choice being a software program;

generating, in response to the indication of the selected choice, a list of a third plurality of options that may be implemented on a computer system, the generating step including accessing the master data base, performing a compatibility comparison, and selecting each option of the third plurality of options from the first plurality of options as a function of each option's compatibility with the selected choice, the compatibility comparison including reading a characteristic of each option of the first plurality of options and determining whether the corresponding option represents an option that is compatible with the selected choice;

presenting to the user via the user interface, the list of the third plurality of options;

indicating in a computer system readable data file the selection of the selected choice; and

installing the software program in a computer system during manufacturing of the computer system according to the data file.