About Network Cards
Network Cards, also called Network Adapters or Ethernet Adapters, are becoming more and more popular on home PC's. For years, PC's in the business environment have utilized network cards to interconnect to each other, share files and even share Internet connections.   Now that network cards have become so cheap, many home users are enjoying these benefits as well.

Things to Know
When choosing your network card, you should consider both cost and speed. The relative standard for fast networking cards right now is 10/100Mbps. They come in a PCI-based configuration and are made by a variety of manufacturers.   Like modems, one of the most important things to keep in mind when choosing a network card is to stick with a name-brand manufacturer.   Names like 3COM are great but can be expensive; yet smaller, equally reliable companies like Netgear and D-Link have very reasonable offerings.   If you don't need all the speed of a 10/100Mbps card, you can pick up an even cheaper 10Mbps card that often even comes in an ISA-based configuration as well.   If you are replacing an old network card, you have an older motherboard, or you just don't have any free PCI slots, you might have to go with an older ISA design. **For more information on ISA and PCI, please refer to the glossary.**

The last thing to keep in mind is the type of connector your network will have. Most fast cards offer just one connector, the more popular RJ-45 jack.   This accepts standard RJ-45 cable, which is now the most common; this is what we suggest. However, if you are connecting this PC to an existing network, you should check to make sure you get the same type of connector on your new card.   The other type of connector is a BNC or co-axial connector. Some cards have both, which is a safe bet if you are unsure. We recommend checking reviews in major PC magazines for an idea of what's available and which card is right for you.

Software Configuration
Most of today's new PCI-based network cards are Plug-and-play.   This makes software configuration a snap. Once the card is installed and you boot your machine, chances are Windows will display a message like: "Windows has detected new hardware". From here you will be prompted to have Windows search for a new driver for this device, etc.   Most network cards come with a driver CD-ROM or floppy disk. Follow the instructions in your network card's manual for details on installing these drivers.   If you did not get a written manual, try looking for a readme.txt file on the floppy or CD for instructions.   Setting up the actual networking settings in Windows is beyond the scope of this guide. Please refer to your network card's manual, ask your network administrator, or check the Windows Network Troubleshooting help file for help with this.

Important Tips
Network cards are one of the simpler upgrades you can do because there is not a whole lot that can go wrong. Most network cards work right out of the box with no configuration. However, just to be safe, check with your network card's manual for any configuration you may need to do via jumper settings.   **For more information on jumper settings, please refer to the glossary.**