

Deciphering the BIOS Serial Number

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Many people want to find out their motherboard manufacturer without having to open their computer. In other cases, such as upgrading the BIOS and seeking drivers for the board, the manufacturer and model of a motherboard must be known.

The motherboard manufacturer can be found through the BIOS serial number. This number is shown onscreen (lower line) during the memory count that is always run when you turn your computer on. If you have never paid any attention, press the Pause key on your keyboard when the memory is being counted and you will be able to read the BIOS serial number from the frozen display. The same line contains important information, like the BIOS date. This information is important when you are considering upgrading your BIOS, to find out on the board manufacturer's site whether there is or not a later version of BIOS than the one your computer is currently using (we have already explained how to upgrade BIOS. Please refer to <http://www.hardwaresecrets.com/article/33>, if required).

For instance, assume that the motherboard indicates the following number onscreen while counting memory: 06/06/2002-VT8366-8233/5-JL6LVC0CC-00. Painlessly, we can deduce two things: the BIOS date (BIOS version) is 06/06/2002, and the motherboard uses VIA chipset VT8366 and VT8233/5, widely known as VIA KT333.

There are three major BIOS software manufacturers, AMI, Award and Phoenix (Phoenix has recently bought Award). The format of serial numbers used by these manufacturers varies, as we will see below.

Deciphering Award BIOS

The format of BIOS Award's serial number is shown in Figure 1, where we can see that the first five digits indicate which chipset is used by the motherboard, the next two digits indicating the motherboard's manufacturer and the meaning of the remaining digits depends on the motherboard's manufacturer.



Figure 1: Award Serial Number

As you will notice, this information is encoded. To decode it, you must use a table given in <http://www.wimsbios.com/numbers.shtml>. Check the serial number used in the above example, of a PCChips motherboard with chipset VX Pro (which is a rebranded VIA Apollo VP1).

Deciphering AMI BIOS

The AMI BIOS serial number is longer than Award's one. The motherboard manufacturer is coded in the last four digits of the third group of numbers, counting from left to right, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: AMI Serial Number

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In the same way as Award BIOS, you will have to consult a table to determine the manufacturer corresponding to the number you have found. This can be done at <http://www.wimsbios.com/numbersami.shtml>. Check the serial number of our example, which is a motherboard made by PCChips.

The major difference between AMI and Award's serial numbers is that the former usually contains information on the model of motherboard directly recorded in the serial number. For instance, serial number 61-1210-000747-001011111-071595-M747 is a PCChips M747 motherboard and serial number 51-0505-001437-001111111-071595-M1531/43-01-10-TX-PRO-0 corresponds to a PCChips motherboard using TX Pro chipset.

Note that there are exceptions to the rules described, mainly when dealing with PCChips motherboards. Looking at the serial number of a M747 motherboard you can see that the manufacturer's ID is an invalid number (there is no 0747 manufacturer); instead of identifying the manufacturer (PCChips), it is giving the model (M747). Whenever a motherboard's serial number does not conform to the rules described, you may be dealing with a PCChips piece.