

PCWorld

25 Days That Changed Everything

From a clone's debut to iPhone insanity, here are the most significant moments of the PC World era.

Paul Boutin, PC World

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As PC World celebrates its 25th year, we examine the defining moments we've witnessed in high-tech history. Join us as we relive the Attack of the Clones, the Return of the Steve, the Birth of a Nuisance, and the Day Nothing Happened, among other notable events. [Share your memories](#) about PC World with us, too.

Artwork: Chip Taylor

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September 9, 1986, through May 24, 1991

Compaq Out-Clones IBM

September 9, 1986



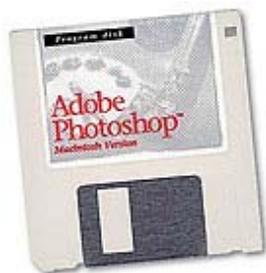
For the first few years of the PC era, IBM faced little challenge from other DOS computer makers. But when Intel bumped up the processing power of its CPUs from 16 bits to 32 bits--a standard that still dominates today--Compaq surprised Big Blue by beating it to market with [a competitively priced \(\\$6499!\) computer](#) carrying Intel's new 386 chip. Suddenly, IBM could no longer set the pace--or the price--for PCs.

Microsoft Builds an Office

August 1, 1989 Few folks remember that [Microsoft Office](#) made its debut as a \$500 Macintosh suite containing three already popular programs (Word, Excel, and PowerPoint), and that it lacked the OLE data format, spelling checker, and Visual Basic scripting that tie Office applications together now. The Windows version came a year later, and many experts now view Office--not Windows--as Microsoft's most productive cash cow.

Desktops Become Darkrooms

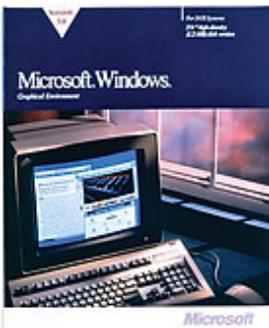
February 19, 1990



Frustrated by his Mac Plus's inability to show grayscale levels for his doctoral thesis on digital image processing, Thomas Knoll wrote a subroutine to simulate the effect. His brother John, an employee at Industrial Light and Magic, got him to turn it into a program that the brothers called ImagePro, but Silicon Valley took little interest until John demoed it to Adobe. Launched on this date, the retitled app is now so closely identified with digital imaging that people use it as a verb, as in, "I'll [Photoshop](#) out the wart."

Windows Hits the Big 3.0

May 22, 1990



The [first few releases of Windows](#) failed to catch fire. But by adding both virtual memory and memory protection, Windows 3.0 turned PCs into capable multitasking machines--and a deal with Apple finally allowed overlapping windows (Windows 2.0 could only tile them). Microsoft sold about 10 million copies of Windows 3.0, establishing Windows as the dominant operating system among personal computers.

The Internet Goes Commercial

May 24, 1991



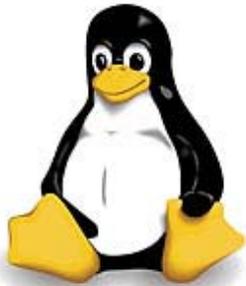
Illustration: Robert
Neubecker

One critic likened the National Science Foundation's decision to [open the Internet to commercial use](#) to "giving a federal park to Kmart." At first, commercial traffic meant e-mail from DEC and IBM. But within a few years, entrepreneur Jeff Bezos would conjure up Cadabra, an online bookstore that he redubbed Amazon before it opened in 1995. Today, Amazon alone takes a billion dollars a year in online orders for several million different products--the giant in a \$100-billion-a-year marketplace that's still growing.

October 5, 1991, through August 24, 1995

Linus Unleashes Linux

October 5, 1991



Finnish college student Linus Torvalds [posted a brief message to the newsgroup comp.os.minix](#): "Do you pine for the nice days of minix 1.1, when men were men and wrote their own device drivers? I'm working on a free version of a minix-lookalike for AT-386 computers. Why? This is a program for hackers by a hacker." To Torvalds's surprise, hackers who had grown tired of waiting for Richard Stallman's GNU operating system--and who couldn't afford to buy expensive Sun, DEC, or HP hardware--pounced on Linux, which along with its cousin FreeBSD allowed PCs to replace workstations and servers.

Mosaic Hits the Times

December 8, 1993



Artwork: Courtesy Of
NCSA/University Of Illinois

"Click the mouse: there's a NASA weather movie taken from a satellite high over the Pacific Ocean," *New York Times* [tech reporter John Markoff wrote in a story](#) describing the World Wide Web as experienced through Mosaic, the first browser to embed images in text rather than in separate Windows. "Click again, et voilà: a small digital snapshot reveals whether a certain coffee pot in a computer science laboratory at Cambridge University in England is empty or full." The article helped transform the Web browser from geek tool into mainstream fixture. And the authors of Mosaic went on to write a commercialized version called

Netscape Navigator.

Spam Rears Its Ugly Head

April 12, 1994 Husband-and-wife lawyer team Laurence Canter and Martha Siegel's [use of a Perl script to post an advertisement](#) for their services titled "Green Card Lottery--Final One?" to more than 6000 Usenet discussion groups prompted outraged programmers to code cancelbots that crawled Usenet looking for the message. But the unrepentant duo claimed 1000 new clients and \$100,000 in income from an ad that was--to them--almost free. Usenet wags tapped Monty Python's mysteriously popular ditty "Spam, Spam, Spam" to describe the message glut.

Microsoft Starts Up Win 95

August 24, 1995



Launched just days after Netscape's soaring IPO, [Windows 95](#) ditched its predecessors' reliance on DOS, added preemptive multitasking and protected-mode 32-bit application support, allowed 255-character file names with both upper- and lowercase letters, and added a Start button from which users could find and launch all applications. The \$300 million advertising campaign licensed the Rolling Stones' "Start Me Up" for TV ads and lit up the Empire State Building in Windows 95 logo colors. But despite the "Where do you want to go today?" slogan, the default Windows 95 installation didn't let you connect to the Internet.

September 4, 1995, through July 9, 1997

eBay Bidding Begins

September 4, 1995



Don't believe the PR fable claiming that [eBay founder Pierre Omidyar created the site](#) to help his fiancée trade Pez dispensers. The first item sold on a little site called AuctionWeb was a broken laser pointer, which went for \$14.83. Omidyar wanted to call the site Echo Bay ("it just sounded cool"), but he had to settle for eBay. These days, eBay supports an economy bigger than that of most countries.

Palm Pilots a Course for PDAs

March 1996



It held 750 contacts and addresses, a year-long calendar of appointments, and 100 to-do notes or memos in a pocket-size gadget, and you could synchronize it with a PC or a Mac. Palm's \$299 [Pilot 1000](#), providing 128KB of memory and Graffiti handwriting recognition software, became [the tech generation's Rolodex](#)--until it was eclipsed by RIM's BlackBerry device and by other phones with keyboards.

AOL Goes Flat-Rate

October 30, 1996 Dial-up users once paid for their online time by the hour--and watched the meter carefully. AOL's [controversial switch to a fee of \\$20 a month for unlimited access](#) immediately overloaded the company's modems. Three years later, however, AOL had garnered 10 million subscribers, and flat-rate fees were the norm. To circumvent busy signals, subscribers simply stopped disconnecting--and accidentally discovered the benefits of being always on.

Steve Jobs Returns From Exile

July 9, 1997 A decade after being ousted from the company he founded, Steve Jobs persuaded Apple to acquire his subsequent company, NeXT--thereby giving Apple both the basis for OS X and, after a boardroom coup, its once and future CEO. In short order, Jobs [killed the failing Newton portable](#), secretly developed the [translucent-blue iMac](#), convinced Bill Gates to retain Internet Explorer and Microsoft Office on the Mac, and acquired professional-caliber digital multimedia applications such as Final Cut. Though he's not as rich as Gates or the Google guys, today Jobs is

tech's biggest rock star.

October 28, 1998, through March 31, 1999

Copyright Crackdown Begins



Illustration: Robert
Neubecker

October 28, 1998 Probably the most unpopular law on Earth among Internet users, the Digital Millennium Copyright Act is the United States' implementation of intellectual-property treaties established by the World Intellectual Property Organization. [Signed into law on this date by President Bill Clinton](#), it established the battle lines between Hollywood content owners and individual file sharers, setting up a fight that continues to this day. It's also why even the act of ripping a DVD you've bought onto your iPod involves wading into murky legal waters.

BlackBerry Untethers E-Mail

January 19, 1999



RIM's two-way pager [offered a QWERTY keyboard](#) and supported instantaneous mobile text communication. At \$399 plus the cost of a data plan, the device was a business tool: For once, the suits beat the teenagers to a tech trend. Though the models have evolved over the years, the BlackBerry remains today's top-selling smart phone--an epic run for a gadget brand.

Melissa Spreads Like Wildfire

March 29, 1999 A Word macro distributed on the alt.sex newsgroup via a file claiming to contain porn-site passwords, Melissa e-mailed itself to the first 50 names in each infected PC's Outlook address book, [crippling mail servers](#) and inflicting an estimated \$80 million in damage upon U.S. businesses. But the [20-month prison sentence](#) served by its coder hasn't prevented virus writers from becoming ever more prolific.

TiVo Transforms TV

March 31, 1999



Time-shifted TV viewing dates back to Sony's 1965 reel-to-reel video recorder. But [TiVo](#), [launched on this date](#), and its archival [ReplayTV](#) helped make video recording nearly effortless by combining a menu-driven scheduling service with no-fuss playback from a hard disk.

January 1, 2000, through July 9, 2001

Y2K Fails to Wreak Havoc



January 1, 2000 [Nothing happened](#) on this day--in part because companies spent hundreds of billions of dollars fixing software to prevent major errors. But the most feverish forecasts--nuclear plants



Illustration: Robert
Neubecker

on actual threats.

melting down, prison gates opening, electrical grids dying--were based more on anxiety and naiveté about how computers work than

The Feds Declare Microsoft a Monopoly

April 3, 2000 In *United States v. Microsoft*, the government accused the company of abusing its alleged monopoly over operating systems to control the Web browser market by integrating Internet Explorer into Windows and punishing PC vendors for installing other browsers. District Court [Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson's decision](#), issued on this date, was followed by a judgment ordering Microsoft to split into two business units--a ruling overturned on appeal. But the protracted legal wrangling made Microsoft a kinder, gentler competitor--or at least a more cautious one.

The Napster Free Ride Ends

July 26, 2000



When [Judge Marilyn Patel ruled on a Wednesday](#) that the popular music service must shut down by Friday, Net traffic shot through the roof. Napster users sent the entertainment business a message: Give me convenience, or give me death. The name has since been revived for a paid service, but "to Napster" still means to digitally undermine a business based on locked-up copies.

Webvan Checks Out

July 9, 2001



With its fleet of tony delivery trucks and massive warehouses, the online grocer became the poster child for the excesses and doomed enterprises of the dot-com boom. Webvan's hoped-for explosion of online grocery orders failed to materialize, and [the company entered bankruptcy](#) on this date. The lesson: People will buy books and CDs online, but they'd rather handle their own lettuce--and skip the delivery fees.

October 1, 2001, through June 29, 2007

iPod Packs Pockets With Tunes

October 1, 2001 [Apple's sleek gadget](#), with enough disk space to hold 100 albums, went on sale on this date, transforming the portable music player from a tech trinket into [a lifestyle icon](#) and ushering in a new era of digital music.

Firefox Starts Browser War II

November 9, 2004

Internet Explorer's monopoly fell victim not to a ruling in the Microsoft antitrust case but to a series of viruses, malware, and bugs that made PC users ready for a replacement. But by mid-2004, the Mozilla open-source browser that would otherwise have been an obvious candidate had been six years in



development without a 1.0 release. So a pair of rebel Mozillians spun off a lightweight version that surfed the Web quickly and safely. Firefox was [released to the public](#) on this date, and the rest is history.

YouTube Turns PCs Into TVs

April 6, 2006



On this date, unknown comic [Judson Laipply](#) posted a stage-performance video, "Evolution of Dance," in which he mimicked dance fads from Chubby Checker's "The Twist" to Outkast's "Hey Ya." The clip has since been watched more than 70 million times, demonstrating both YouTube's easy access and its unprecedented ability to create a video network you can watch from almost any place that has an Internet hookup.

D-Day for iPhone Insanity

June 29, 2007



Advance hype for the iPhone was ridiculous, but [shoppers who stood in line](#) didn't complain. The [iPhone's impact](#) has spread far beyond the 2 million or so people who've bought one: Thanks to its success, we can expect all future phones to sport high-res touch screens, fewer buttons, and more PC-like applications.

Photograph:
Robert Cardin

Get 2 Risk-Free Issues
and
Bonus CD-ROM!

 Two covers of PC World magazine are shown. The left cover features the headline "20 THINGS THEY DON'T WANT YOU TO KNOW" and "Microsoft SECRETS". The right cover features "A FASTER PC FOR FREE!" and "12 WAYS TO MAKE IT WORK LIKE NEW AGAIN". Below the magazines are several CD-ROMs.

Learn How