Emma Koslow

30 January 2020

English 480

 Digital Humanities History and Research

Professor Anderson

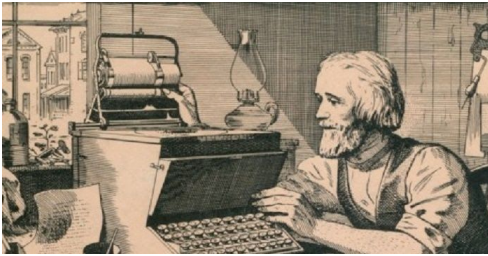Typewriters to Typewriters: The Circle of Word Processors

When people think of word processors, a million and one things may come to mind. They could be thinking of some type of strange machine that receives an input of words and analyzes them. While this description makes it sound like a piece of technology found in a dystopian novel, these individuals are not technically wrong. A word processor is a machine, sometimes mechanical and sometimes a piece of software, that takes in letters and characters, typically from a keyboard, and performs some operation on them. There are hundreds of different types of word processors, some bulky mechanical devices or some small and portable, like the very phone that is probably in your pocket. No matter the variety, word processors have come a long way in their development. Thanks to word processors, writing has never been easier and more collaborative. In this paper, the development and improvement of word processors will be analyzed and discussed in order to show the effect this piece of technology has had on humanities subjects.

The first thing that will be discussed (and the last, but spoilers), is typewriters. Typewriters are the original form of word processing, created in 1714, by Henry Mil, an engineer from Britain.[1] Like the beginning of most inventions, it began as a giant device that (while useful

---

[1] Source 9

in replacing handwriting) was too clunky to take off. This was later rectified as models became

smaller and easier to handle. An American inventor, Christopher Latham Sholes wanted to make

the "first practical typewriter".[2] His machine was a success and he became known as the "father

of the typewriter".

Christopher Latham Sholes

(https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8f/Christopher_Latham_Sholes_artwork.png)

 It did have a presence in classrooms (like laptops and tablets of this generation) in the 1900s.

Due to the still improving mobility of the typewriter, it took time to be adopted and was typically

used individually. This classic invention was a staple in the twentieth century and became the

groundwork for a revolutionary product that would define the nature of communication in the

years to come.

Before turning to the new devices, let's stop to think about the relationship between

technology and humanities subjects like literature and writing. Before the typewriter, there was

no direct connection between the two. Technology was just seen as another word for inventions

and writing was mostly done on paper. However as word processors began to be developed, the

two fields began to blur together in order for technology to be used in order to improve upon

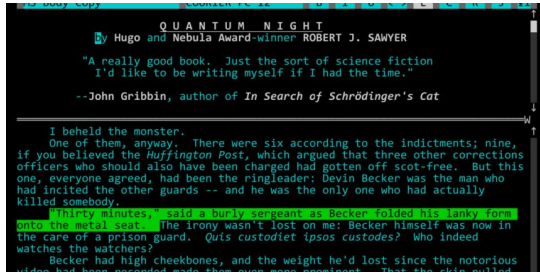writing and literature.

---

[2] Source 10

Word processing software is one of the groundbreaking technologies within when it comes to writing. It made the art of writing easily legible, quick to use, and erasable.[3] The first word processing software was developed by, International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) in the 1960s. In fact, the company was credited with coining the term word processor with the creation of the personal computer.[4] However, it is still not the typical digital software that one would imagine today. It was a typewriter that had the capabilities to store data and previous usage. The first tool that people today would see as a word processor of this generation would most likely be WordStar. This software, developed in 1979, was the first word processor developed for a computer and was created by the company, MicroPro International.[5] It was best known for the inclusion of line and page breaks which was a major revolution in the field. The reaction was generally positive for the program, making it the first commercially successful processor at the time. It started a trend of companies attempting to make their own software for word processors, making it hard for WordStar to keep up with brand new companies who were coming up with different ways to improve the invention. This is exactly what WordPerfect, a processor which was released the same year as WordStar, did, causing its popularity to decline by the mid-eighties. The last version of the software was released in 1999.[6]

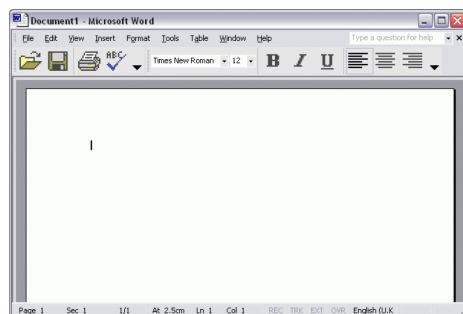---

[3] Source 2
[4] Source 3
[5] Source 6
[6] Source 11

 WordStar Interface

(https://cdn.arstechnica.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/wordstar-under-vdosplus-800x495.png)

After WordStar and WordPerfect, there were several other word processors that came out during this era. However, none of these could ever reach the major breakthrough that is Microsoft Word. Released during the height of this computational revolution in 1983[7], it was originally created under the name Multi-Tool Word.[8] It was the first word processor that showed a preview of the text that would be printed. It also allowed the saving of documents and had a very user-friendly interface.[9] However, it initially struggled against the likes of WordStar and WordPerfect at the height of their popularity. This was mostly because it was created to only work on UNIX devices which were not as popular at the time. After several updates and developments including spell-checking and word-count, the program became a success and was competitive amongst the other processors. By the mid-nineteen nineties, Word had become the most popular processor at the time, becoming accessible to almost every personal computer at
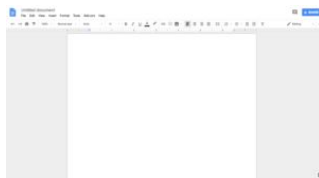

the time.

---

[7] Source 12
[8] Source 7
[9] Source 7

The Original Microsoft Word

(https://www.bltt.org/assets/images/word/large_uncluttered_nodrawing.gif)

      While Microsoft Word defined the early years of advanced and well-designed word processors, it still did not allow for proper collaboration. This distinction goes to Google Documents. Considered to be the "Mother of Modern Word Processor", Google Docs was developed based on a web-based text editor called Writley which became the foundation for the online application.[10] Released in 2006, Google Docs is known for its automatic saving function and easy-to-use platform. However, one of the more important features that defined the new generation of word processing is the sharing function. This allows multiple people communicating to work on a document at the same time.[11] The feature perfectly allowed the combination of technology and writing. Computers are now the bridge between communication in every field and collaboration is a key. Soon after, Microsoft caught on to the new trend of web-based word processors and came out with the development of Word Online (Office 365) which also utilizes a shared user service as well as automatic saving[12]. However, the software is not as advanced and as fast as Google Documents.

Google Docs Window

(https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/4/45/Google_Docs_screenshot.png/300px-Google_Docs_screenshot.png)

---

[10] Source 1
[11] Source 5
[12] Source 4

The title of the paper is from Typewriter to Typewriter so yes, this will be concluded with discussing the original device. Of late, nostalgia and "retro" technologies have been making a comeback. Polaroids have become a recent trend with a new modern look in order to appeal to a new generation. Record players have been re-released with a more innovative design. And, you guessed it, even typewriters have also been regaining popularity. Many people believe they are more practical and help prevent the distraction that comes from using a laptop. Some claim improved writing skills as people can no longer rely on functions like spelling check and auto-correct. Will this growing nostalgic craze slow down the technological developments of this modern era? What will writing skills look like for the next generation? Only the gift of time can answer these questions, but one way or another we will have to adapt to the next technological revolution.

A Modern Typewriter

(https://i.pinimg.com/236x/c7/6b/e0/c76be083ffc565a3ce49aceeb7d83db2--modern-typewriter-vintage-typewriters.jpg)

Works Cited

Source 1: Arrington, Michael. "Google 'Docs & Spreadsheets' Launches." TechCrunch.
TechCrunch, October 11, 2006.
https://techcrunch.com/2006/10/10/google-docs-spreadsheets-launches/.

Source 2: Doppenberg, Jeroen. Product Evolution, February 26, 2018.
https://www.productevolution.org/2018/02/on-the-origin-of-the-word-processor/.

Source 3: Drum, Kevin. "The First 'True' Word Processor Was Invented by ... IBM." Mother
Jones, December 12, 2018.
https://www.motherjones.com/kevin-drum/2018/12/the-first-true-word-processor-was-inve
nted-by-ibm/.

Source 4: Foley, Mary Jo. "The Road to Microsoft Office 365: The Past." ZDNet. ZDNet,
November 30, 2010.
https://www.zdnet.com/article/the-road-to-microsoft-office-365-the-past/.

Source 5: Hamburger, Ellis. "Google Docs Began as a Hacked Together Experiment, Says
Creator." The Verge. The Verge, July 3, 2013.
https://www.theverge.com/2013/7/3/4484000/sam-schillace-interview-google-docs-creator
-box.

Source 6: Hinojosa, Santiago. "The History of Word Processors." The Tech Ninja's Dojo,
June 3, 2016. http://thetech.ninja/history-word-processors/.

Source 7: J. "A Brief History of Microsoft Word." blog.emergeits.com. Accessed January 29,
2020. https://blog.emergeits.com/a-brief-history-of-microsoft-word.

Source 8: Kirschenbaum, Matthew. "How Technology Has Changed the Way Authors
Write." The New Republic, July 26, 2016.
https://newrepublic.com/article/135515/technology-changed-way-authors-write.

Source 9: The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Typewriter." Encyclopædia Britannica.
Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., February 13, 2018.
https://www.britannica.com/technology/typewriter.

Source 10: "The Typewriter." Carbons to Computers: Typewriters. Accessed January 29,
2020.
http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson_plans/carbons/typewriters.html.

Source 11: Vaughan-Nichols, Steven J. "In the Beginning, There Was the Word Processor."
ZDNet. ZDNet, March 12, 2012.
https://www.zdnet.com/article/in-the-beginning-there-was-the-word-processor/.

Source 12: Wright, Lucy. "The History of Microsoft Word." Core Technology Systems.
Accessed January 29, 2020. https://www.core.co.uk/blog/blog/history-microsoft-word.

Picture Sources

https://i.pinimg.com/236x/c7/6b/e0/c76be083ffc565a3ce49aceeb7d83db2--modern-typewriter-vi

ntage-typewriters.jpg

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/4/45/Google_Docs_screenshot.png/300px-Goo

gle_Docs_screenshot.png

https://www.bltt.org/assets/images/word/large_uncluttered_nodrawing.gif

https://cdn.arstechnica.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/wordstar-under-vdosplus-800x495.png

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8f/Christopher_Latham_Sholes_artwork.png