

The History of Multimedia

In the strictest sense of the word, *multimedia* simply means "more than one medium." In other words, television programs, movies, even illustrated books are all examples of multimedia – they all use combinations of text, images, sounds, and movement.

Multimedia has come a long way from its humble roots to today's cutting-edge modern animation and interactivity.

In the real world, though, when most people talk about multimedia, they are talking about computer multimedia. The word has come to represent the realm of computer graphics, video games, on-screen presentations, and a whole world of other possibilities.

Where Did It All Begin? That is hard to say, but one of the earliest and best-known examples of multimedia was the video game Pong. Developed in 1972 by Nolan Bushnell (the founder of a then-new company called Atari), the game consisted of two simple paddles that batted a square "ball" back and forth across the screen, like tennis. It started as an arcade game, and eventually ended up in many homes.

A New Revolution In 1976, another revolution was about to start as friends Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak founded a startup company called Apple Computer. A year later they unveiled the Apple II, the first computer to use color graphics. The computer revolution moved quickly: 1981 saw IBM's first PC, and in 1984 Apple released the Macintosh, the first computer system to use a graphical user interface (GUI). The Macintosh also bore the first mouse, which would forever change the way people interact with computers.

In 1985, Microsoft released the first version of its Windows operating system. That same year, Commodore released the Amiga, a machine which many experts consider to be the first multimedia computer due to its advanced graphics processing power and innovative user interface. The Amiga did not fare well over the years, though, and Windows has become the standard for desktop computing.

Innovations Both Windows and the Macintosh operating systems paved the way for the lightning-fast developments in multimedia that were to come. Since both Windows and Mac OS handle graphics and sound – something that was previously handled by individual software applications – developers are able to create programs that use multimedia to more powerful effect.

One company that has played an important role in multimedia from its very inception is Macromedia (formerly called Macromind). In 1988, Macromedia released its landmark Director program, which allowed everyday computer users to create stunning, interactive multimedia presentations. Today, Macromedia Flash drives most of the animation and multimedia you see on the Internet, while Director is still used to craft high-end interactive productions.

Each new development of each passing year is absorbed into next year's technology, making the multimedia experience, better, faster, and more interesting.

Sources

- Coorough, C. (2001). Multimedia and the Web. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc.
- Lake, S. E. & Bean, K. (2004). Multimedia and Image Management. Mason, OH: Thomson SouthWestern.
- Shuman, J. (2002). Multimedia Concepts, Enhanced Edition—Illustrated Introductory. Boston, MA: Thomson Course Technology.
- Solomon, A.W. (2004). Introduction to Multimedia. Woodland Hills, CA: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill.
- Vaughan, T. (2001). Multimedia: Making it Work (5th ed.). Berkley, CA: Osborne/McGraw-Hill.