

July 2nd

## IBM 650

July 2 (or 14), 1953

IBM announced its 650 series, the first mass-produced computer, which soon became a best-seller: between 1953 and 1962 almost 2000 systems were sold or rented. The original market forecast predicted that just 50 would be needed.

The 650 was positioned as an intermediate size machine, a companion to the much larger IBM 701 [April 7]. The system's most notable advance was that it could automatically resume a program if it was inadvertently interrupted by a "random processing error." Previous computers required a white-coated operator to restart the program.

The 650 was popular in universities due to IBM's Educational Grant Plan which sold commercial equipment at much reduced prices. There was a basic 20% discount, but if a numerical analysis or data processing class was offered at the college then this increased to 40%. If the dynamic institution offered both a numerical analysis *and* a data processing class then the equipment could be rented for 60% off.

Historians William Aspray and Bernard O. Williams later said, "The single strongest impulse for introducing computers on campuses in the mid-1950s did not come from the schools themselves or from any federal agency, but instead from IBM."

The 650 had another feature that may have encouraged sales – an impressive front panel full of blinking lights.

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## Carl Malamud

Born: July 2, 1959; USA

Malamud founded the nonprofit Public.Resource.Org to promote the publication of public domain



The IBM 650 at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. Photo by Alkivar.

information by local, state, and federal government agencies. Back in the 1990's he also set up the Internet Multicasting Service, which developed the first Internet radio station, "Internet Talk Radio". He headlined his own show, "Geek of the Week," on the station

In 1993, he was briefly "Cyber Santa".

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## Independence Day July 2, 1996

The official release date for the sci-fi movie "Independence Day" was July 3, but many theaters began showing the film today since its story begins on this day. Nasty aliens in big spaceships attack Earth, and it's up to a gallant rag-tag team of desperados to launch a last-ditch counterattack.

One of the big computing questions raised by the plot was how Jeff Goldblum, playing a loveable MIT-trained computer expert, stopped the alien invasion by sending a virus from his Mac PowerBook [Oct 21] to infect their spaceships.

The screenwriter and producer Dean Devlin eventually produced an utterly convincing explanation. "Goldblum's character discovered that the programming structure of the

alien ship was a binary code, and as any beginning programmer can tell you, binary code is a series of ones and zeroes. What Goldblum's character did was turn the ones into zeroes and the zeroes into ones, effectively reversing the code that was sent." Incidentally, Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich penned the script in just four weeks.

Clips from the film, showing Goldblum's laptop with its prominent Apple logo, were used in later Powerbook [Oct 21] ads. The slogan was "What kind of laptop would *you* choose to save the world?"

Mad magazine's parody of the movie explained the effectiveness of the virus by revealing that it was a copy of Windows '95 [Aug 24].

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## BitTorrent Released July 2, 2001

Bram Cohen [Oct 12] released the first BitTorrent client on this day, through an announcement on a Yahoo! message board [April 12]. Cohen had worked for the startup behind the MojoNation peer-to-peer network, but it eventually ran out of money so the 25-year old focussed on his own file-sharing protocol. It was built around the idea of downloading parts of a file from multiple sources at once. Thus, the more popular a file, the faster the user could assemble a complete copy.

The brief message was one of the more underwhelming software launches in history, with nothing to hint at the powerhouse BitTorrent would become. Indeed, the Yahoo! post triggered just one response: "What's BitTorrent, Bram?...", which never received a reply.

Nevertheless, the first torrent sites started appearing a few months later, including Suprnova.org, Donkax.com, Bytemonsoon.com, and Torrentse.cx.

The BitTorrent client was initially open source, but slammed shut in 2005. However, the specification has remained free, so alternative clients have appeared.

BitTorrent is deeply disliked by the music and motion picture industries, which claim it facilitates intellectual property theft.

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## Earth Secrets

July 2, 2007

Seattle blogger Dan Twohig was looking at real estate using Microsoft's Virtual Earth when he came across a photo of an Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine at the Naval Submarine Base in Bangor. The picture clearly showed the shape of the submarine's propeller, which had been a design secret for decades.

Something very similar happened in Google Earth [June 11] at about the same time (July 5): Hans Kristensen, director of the Federation of American Scientists' Nuclear Information Project found an image of a classified Jin-class submarine while looking at China's Xiaopingdao base near Dalian.

Back in April, India had complained that Google Earth included images of its government infrastructure, including military bases, and nuclear facilities.

Even earlier, in December 2005, Google Earth had agreed to limit the resolution of its satellite coverage of sensitive military installations in Israel.

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