Oct. 5th

IBM 1401

Oct. 5, 1959

The IBM 1401 was the first machine in the highly successful IBM 1400 series. IBM was pleasantly surprised (perhaps even shocked) to receive 5,200 orders in just five weeks after its announcement – more than had been predicted for the entire lifetime of the device. Indeed, the number of installed machines peaked at over 10,000 in the mid-1960s, and accounted for nearly half of all the computer systems in the world at the time.

IBM 1401 System. From the left: 1402 Card Read-Punch, 1401 Processing Unit, 1403 Printer (1961). Photo by Gobierno de los Estados Unidos.

Crucially, the 1401 cost no more than a couple of IBM's large calculators, but offered programmability. Originally this meant writing machine code or using Gary Mokotoff's SPS (Symbolic Programming System) assembler, but it eventually got a high-level language, FARGO (Fourteen-o-one Automatic Report Generation Operation), a precursor to RPG [Jan 00].

The 1401 was the subject of Jóhann Jóhannsson's album "IBM 1401, A User's Manual" [Oct 30].

IBM 1403

Oct. 5, 1959

The IBM 1403 line printer was introduced at the same time as the IBM 1401 [previous entry]. The original could print 600 lines per minute, but the Model 3 could manage a blazingly fast 1400 lines per minute.

It was the first printer to offer a width of 132 columns, which was subsequently adapted by many others devices, such as the Centronics 101 (1970), the DECwriter II ([Sept 24]1975), and the Epson MX-80 ([Oct 00] 1980). One historian believes this unusual number of columns derives from the spacing used by IBM's pre-1928 punch cards [July 20]. Also, the complex alignment between the 1403's chain and print hammers meant that a line width divisible by 3 (such as 132) worked out best.

The 1403's overstrike feature was capable of generating grey-scale pixel equivalents, which meant that images could be reproduced; "La Gioconda" was a popular choice.

The 1403 was a noisy machine, , and hackers soon discovered patterns of text that generated particular frequencies. Favorite 1403 tunes included "She'll Be Comin'' Round the Mountain" and "Ode to Joy."

The 1403 was the subject of Part 2 of Jóhann Jóhannsson's album "IBM 1401, A User's Manual" [Oct 30].

A 1403 made a cameo appearance in Stanley Kubrick's [April 2] movie "Dr. Strangelove" (1964), serving as a hiding place for a portable radio.

Original Python

Oct. 5, 1969

The comedy series "Monty Python's Flying Circus" premiered on the BBC with the episode "Whither Canada?" The series would run for forty-five episodes over four series. It was conceived, written, and performed Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones, and Michael Palin.

The term "spam" in reference to bulk, unsolicited email [March 31] is derived from the show's "Spam" sketch which premiered on Dec. 15, 1970. "Spam" is uttered at least 132 times.

The Python language [Feb 20] is named after the troupe, and Monty Python references are often found in sample code. For instance, many Python coders like to use spam, ham, and eggs as variables, instead of the more traditional foo [March 10], bar, and baz.

The default Python IDE is named IDLE, and an alternative is called eric, both in honor of Eric Idle.

A 2001 April Fool's Day joke by Guido van Rossum [Jan 31] and Larry Wall [Sept 27] involved the merger of Python with Perl [Dec 18] to create "Parrot," named after the Python's "Dead Parrot" sketch.

Mostek MK 4096 Released

Oct. 5, 1973

Although the Mostek MK 4096 wasn't the first DRAM chip (that was the Intel 1103 [Oct 1]), the 4096 and its successors became the best-selling version , at one point achieving greater than 85% worldwide market share.

The secret was its use of a circuitry trick called address multiplexing, invented by Mostek [Nov 15] co-founder Robert Proebsting. It meant that the chip only required 16 pins, whereas its competitors made by Texas Instruments, Intel, and Motorola needed 22.

ThinkPads

Oct. 5, 1992

IBM introduced the ThinkPad line, including the 700, 700C, and 700T. The series is perhaps best remembered for their red TrackPoint, a mini variation on the joystick, located in the middle of the keyboard.

The original design was developed by Richard Sapper in 1990, who characterized it as a simple, black cigar box that offered a 'surprise' when opened. However, the notebooks were built at IBM's Yamato Facility in Japan, led by Arimasa Naitoh, who is now dubbed the "father" of the ThinkPad. The series went on to collect more than 300 awards for design and manufacturing quality.

The "ThinkPad" name was suggested by IBMer Denny Wainwright, who had a "THINK" notepad in his pocket [Feb 14] at the time. It was opposed by IBM's corporate naming committee initially as IBM computers were traditionally baptized with a number.

According to a ThinkPad book published by IBM in 2000, a German workplace standard came into effect in the late 1970's that required light colors for all office equipment. But IBM wanted to make a statement with the ThinkPad, so although the company was pressured to create a line of pebble grey ThinkPads for the German market, they were adamant that the device should be black. Eventually Germany approved black ThinkPads, but only if they came with a warning that they were not for office use.

Slashdot Founded

Oct. 5, 1997

Slashdot (sometimes abbreviated as /.) is a social news website that billed itself as "News for Nerds. Stuff that Matters". It was founded by Rob Malda (aka "CmdrTaco") and Jeff Bates (aka "Hemos").

The site's name came from Malda's desire to call it something that was both "silly and unpronounceable" – just try saying "h-t-t-p-colon-slash-slash-slashdot-dot-org".

The phrase "Slashdot effect", refers to how a Slashdot article linked to a website, can cause a massive increase in traffic to that site.

PawSense

Oct. 5, 2000

Chris Niswander won the 2000 Ig Nobel prize in Computer Science for his PawSense software which detects when a cat is walking across your keyboard.

It uses momentum and timing patterns to detect the cat, disables the keyboard, displays the message "CAT-LIKE TYPING DETECTED", and begins playing the Gasping Harmonica Concerto (or a loud hissing noise).

The Ig Nobel Prizes are awarded each year to celebrate unusual achievements in scientific research. Several winners have utilized computers in their work. For instance, the Southern Baptist Church of Alabama won an lg for Mathematics in 1994 by employing one to estimate how many Alabama citizens would go to hell if they didn't repent.

Jan Pablo Davila, a financial futures trader from Chile, won the lg for Economies in 1994 for losing an amount equal to 5% of his country's GNP when he accidentally instructed his laptop to "buy" when he meant "sell" .

For Bow-Lingual, which won the Ig for Peace in 2002, see [Oct 3].

Web 2.0

Oct. 5-7, 2004

The "Web 2.0" term finally caught on after a heavy-duty popularization effort by Tim O'Reilly [June 6] and Dale Dougherty [Aug 19] at the O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 Conference in San Francisco. However, the phrase had been coined by Darcy DiNucci back in Jan. 1999 in her article, "Fragmented Future" in *Print* magazine.

Web 2.0 isn't about technical specifications, instead emphasizing user-generated content, ease of use, and interoperability for end users. Tim Berners-Lee [June 8] was less complementary, describing it as jargon: "Nobody really knows what it means… If Web 2.0 for you is blogs and wikis, then that is people to people. But that was what the Web was supposed to be all along…"

The Keyboard Monument

Oct. 5, 2005

The Keyboard Monument is a sculpture of a QWERTY keyboard [June 23] located in the Russian city of Ekaterinburg. It was created by Anatoly Vyatkin and installed on this day.

Ekaterinburg Sysadmin Day [July 26] at the Keyboard Monument in 2011. Photo by Karelina96. CC BY-SA 4.0.

It depicts an IBM PC compatible Cyrillic keyboard at 30:1 scale, with 104 concrete keys. Each

one weighs 180 pounds, but the space bar is 1,000 pounds.

Rumor has it that if you "type" your wish on the keyboard and then jump on Enter, it will come true. If you want to reboot your life, press Ctrl+Alt+Del [Jan 4].

"Keyboard Subbotniks" are held at the end of April to clean and re-paint the device.

AlphaGo Wins

Oct. 5-9, 2015

DeepMind's AlphaGo beat Fan Hui, the European Go champion, five times out of five under tournament conditions.

After AI's conquest of chess [May 11], Go was chosen as the next battleground because of its greater complexity. The rules seem to be relatively simple: gain the most territory by placing and capturing black and white stones on a 19×19 grid. However, the average 150-move game contains more board configurations — 10^{170} — than there are atoms in the Universe. Also, recognizing winning and losing positions is much harder than in chess because the stones have equal values and can influence outcomes far across the board.

AlphaGo prepared for the tournament by using neural networks to study 30 million positions employed in expert games. Then it played Go against itself across 50 computers, seeking to improve with each match.

Fan described the resulting system as "very strong and stable, it seems like a wall. … I know AlphaGo is a computer, but if no one told me, maybe I would think the player was a little strange, but a very strong player, a real person."

On [May 23], 2017, AlphaGo beat the then current world No. 1 ranking Go player, Ke Jie.

For more gaming defeats of humans by computers, see [Jan 11], [Feb 10], [April 29].
