

Sept. 17th

## Flip Wilson's WYSIWYG Sept. 17, 1970

WYSIWYG (wiz-ee-wig) stands for "what you see is what you get". For example, a WYSIWYG text editor, such as MS Word [Sept 29], can edit a document in a form closely resembling its appearance when printed.

Bravo ([Oct 00] 1974) is generally considered the first document preparation program to incorporate WYSIWYG-like technologies, but the really burning question is where did the phrase WYSIWYG come from?



Flip Wilson as Geraldine Jones (1971). Photo by NBC.

"The Flip Wilson Show" was an hour-long variety programme that aired on NBC from Sept. 17, 1970 to June 27, 1974. It starred African American comedian Flip Wilson, who played different characters, including a "Geraldine Jones". Some of Geraldine's famous quotes were, "The Devil made me buy this dress!", and "What you see is what you get!".

This latter catchphrase may be the reason that Karen Thacker, the wife of Xerox hardware designer Charles Thacker [Feb 26] inadvertently commented, "You mean, what I see is what I

get?", when she first saw Bravo running on a Xerox Alto [March 1] in 1974. By 1975, Charles Simonyi [Sept 10] and the other engineers working on Bravo 3, had adopted the phrase.

Brian Kernighan [Jan 1] is known for coining the related expression, "What You See Is All You Get" (WYSIAYG).

---

## RCA Withdraws Sept. 17, 1971

The RCA [July 00] Board of Directors announced its decision to close its computer systems division (RCA-CSD), writing off some \$490 million. However, Sperry Rand's [Jan 25] UNIVAC division later bought most of those resources.

The closure came as something of a surprise since RCA president Robert Sarnoff had written in July, "RCA has no intention of selling its computer division." Also, it was only a year since the company had cut the ribbon on a lavish new \$22 million facility in Massachusetts. At the time, RCA had confidently predicted that computer orders would double in 1971.

Perhaps RCA's biggest problem was IBM's System/360 series [April 7], which had a stranglehold on the mainframe market. RCA competed against it with the Spectra 70 line, that was hardware, but not software, compatible. Also, despite significant investment, RCA only had a 4% share of the market, and it was estimated that it would cost around \$500 million over the next five years to remain competitive.

RCA was one of the original "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" [Dec 21].

---

## Telex vs. IBM Sept. 17, 1973

In a verdict over 200 pages in length, Judge Sherman Christensen validated the

antitrust allegations that IBM and Telex had brought against each other.

Specifically, IBM did try to monopolize the market for pluggable devices such as external drives. As a consequence, the court awarded Telex more than \$352 million.

However, under a counter-claim brought by IBM, Telex was found to have infringed IBM copyrights and to have recruited IBM employees to gain access to trade secrets. IBM was awarded \$22 million for those misdeeds.

Naturally, both companies filed appeals, and eventually reached out-of-court settlements in Oct. 1975.

Today's ruling triggered a flood of similar lawsuits by other companies, including CalComp, Memorex, and Marshall Industries. For more IBM anti-trust action, see [Jan 17; Jan 21].

---

## Teddy Ruxpin Announced Sept. 17, 1985

Teddy Ruxpin, an animatronic talking bear, was produced by toy manufacturer Worlds of Wonder, led by Don Kingsborough, a former Atari [June 27] president. Teddy was designed by Ken Forsse with assistance from Larry Larsen and John Davies.

It became the best-selling toy of 1985 and 1986, and was the first common US household robotic toy. A cartoon show based on the character debuted in 1986.

Teddy's mouth and eyes moved while he "read" stories that played on an audio tape cassette deck built into his back. The tape also contained the commands to make Teddy move his eyes and mouth, ensuring that they stayed in sync with his narration.



US Backpack Toys version of Teddy Ruxpin (2008). Photo by Mathue. CC BY-SA 3.0.

The updated 2017 version employed LCD screen eyes, push-button paws and a Bluetooth-connected [May 20] app. Many of the original team reunited for Teddy's return, although Forsse had died in 2014.

---

## Jobs Circulates his Resignation

### Sept. 17, 1985

Next: [Sept 21]

The day after he resigned from Apple [Sept 16], Steve Jobs [Feb 24] passed on his resignation letter to several media outlets. It also became known that five other Apple employees had left with him (Bud Tribble [Aug 3], Dan'l Lewin, George Crow, Richard Page, and Susan Barnes). Their next venture, NeXT, didn't go public until [Oct 12] 1988.

Years later, Andy Hertzfeld [April 6] recalled, "Apple never recovered from losing Steve. Steve was the heart and soul and driving force." However, Larry Tesler [April 24] said of Job's departure, "People in the company had very mixed feelings about it. Everyone had been terrorized by Steve Jobs at some point or another and so there was a certain relief."

---

In Jobs' 2005 commencement speech at Stanford, he summed it up like so, "I didn't see it then, but it turned out that getting fired from Apple was the best thing that could have ever happened to me."

---

## Not Columbus Day

### Sept. 17, 1989

*The Washington Post* published an article on a virus "that springs to life destructively on Friday the 13th". They didn't mean the preceding Sept. 13, which was a Wednesday, but Oct. 13. An infected file would display the text: "DATACRIME VIRUS' RELEASED: 1 MARCH 1989" and then reformat the first nine tracks of the hard drive, effectively rendering the OS useless.

Many news sources preferred to report the virus trigger date as Oct. 12, perhaps because that meant it could be called the "Columbus Day" virus. A few creative hacks suggested that it had been coded by angry Norwegians who thought that the recognition for discovering America should go to their Leif Erikson.

Only fifty incidents were reported in Europe and seven in the US, partly because of coding errors in the virus. However, to confuse matters, the much more virulent Jerusalem virus [Oct 15; Jan 13] was set to activate on the same day.

---

## Freax Kernel

### Sept. 17, 1991

The first Linux kernel, version 0.01, was released by 21-year old Linus Torvalds [Dec 28], at the time still a computer science student at the University of Helsinki. He uploaded it to the ftp.funet.fi FTP server on the Finnish University and Research Network (FUNET).

The kernel was then known as Freax, a portmanteau of "free", "freak", and "x" (there's an "x" in UNIX). Torvalds had considered

"Linux," but dismissed it as too egotistical. However, Ari Lemmke, one of the server's administrators, didn't much like "Freax", so renamed the project to "Linux" without consulting Torvalds, although he later agreed to the change.

Version 0.02, the first "official" release, was announced in the comp.os.minix newsgroup on Oct. 5. Torvalds wrote, "Do you pine for the nice days of minix-1.1, when men were men and wrote their own device drivers?" This wasn't the first message by Torvalds related to Linux [Aug 25].

By version 0.03, Torvalds was getting a little bored with the project, and was thinking of stopping. Then a nasty mistake suddenly made the OS interesting again. In December, he was auto-dialing from his home machine into the university's computer when he typed /dev/hda1 instead of /dev/tty1. This wiped critical parts of his Minix development environment [March 16], and he now faced a choice: reinstall Minix -- a long-winded, boring job, or "bite the bullet" and make Linux good enough that Minix was no longer needed. He chose the latter.

Several weeks later, version 0.11 arrived, the first to be self-hosted. This meant that the OS could now run the tools for modifying its own code (i.e. it could now perform DIY brain surgery).

Version 1.0 was reached on [March 14], 1994, a program of some 176,250 lines. The first release had been a mere 10,239. Measuring the size of a modern Linux kernel is difficult since it includes many machine-specific modules which aren't all needed on an actual device, and also depends on the attached peripherals. A kernel's size may vary from several hundred KBs, up to over 10 MB.

---

## Sky Captain

### Sept. 17, 2004

Paramount Pictures released the sci-fi film "Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow", directed by Kerry Conran and starring Jude Law, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Angelina Jolie.

It was probably the first movie to be shot entirely against blue screen, with (almost) everything generated by computer except for the main characters.

Around 100 digital artists, modelers, animators and composers created the 2D and 3D backgrounds, although the movie was sketched out first using hand-drawn storyboards.

Several other films using the same approach were released at around the same time, including Immortal (2004), and Casshern (2004).

Conran had obtained funding by making a black and white teaser trailer of giant robots trampling through NYC. He had used a bluescreen setup in his living room and a Macintosh IIci [March 19], and had taken four years to complete it.

---