

Silicon Valley

GLOSSARY

start-ups: nuove imprese
patents: brevetti

The name 'Silicon Valley' has become a shorthand way of referring to the US information technology industry. This small part of California around the Santa Clara Valley, just south of San Francisco, has become the most important centre in the world for businesses involved in electronics, computers, software and the Internet.

San Francisco is a major port and has long been a focus of technological development, especially in telegraph and radio. But Santa Clara was once a peaceful agricultural region of fruit farms known as the 'Valley of Heart's Delight'. Then, in 1951, Stanford University set up a campus and industrial park here, attracting institutions like IBM and NASA to establish research facilities nearby. A turning point came in 1956 when William Shockley created his Shockley Transistor Corporation near Palo Alto. Within a few years there were hundreds of high tech companies competing with one another. Development was further stimulated through massive investment by the US government in these new technologies. The USA had been shocked by the Soviet Union's launch of its sputnik, the first space satellite, in October 1957 and the government was determined not to lose the space race. This helped to drive forward a technological revolution that has led to the modern age of the computer and the Internet. Silicon Valley now has over a quarter of a million workers in information technology and is the home of some of the most famous names in this industry. Among the companies which began life as small 'start-ups' in the Valley are Apple, Google, Facebook, eBay, Electronic Arts, Hewlett-Packard, Cisco, Intel, Netflix, Symantec, Yahoo and YouTube.



Silicon Valley has a reputation for innovation, original ideas and a relaxed informal working atmosphere: a combination of high-tech and hippy. San Francisco was at the heart of the beatnik and hippy movements in the 1950s and 1960s and this spirit of rebellion and non-conformity has influenced the mentality and lifestyle. Over 50% of all new patents in California (and over 10% in the USA) originate here.

The creative atmosphere and opportunities of Silicon Valley have been a magnet for inventors and entrepreneurs from all over the world who have come here to set up businesses. A high proportion of the workforce are young and foreign-born. It is estimated that a third of the scientists and engineers are immigrants and a quarter of firms have been set up by Asians, mainly Chinese and Indian. More negatively, Silicon Valley has also been criticised for being too white/Asian and too male-dominated, with Hispanics, blacks and women under-represented.

The region is a model for similar attempts at high tech development in other parts of the world, including around Bangalore in India and Cambridge in Britain. Cities from Dublin to Berlin and from Tel Aviv to Singapore aspire to have their own 'silicon valleys'.

35 041 Read or listen to the article. Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)?

- 1 Silicon Valley didn't exist before the 1950s.
- 2 Political policies played a role in the development of Silicon Valley.
- 3 Silicon Valley is famous for doing things differently from other places.
- 4 Silicon Valley has a reputation for social diversity.
- 5 The Silicon Valley model is unique to California.

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36 EXAM PRACTICE Prepare a report answering the following questions.

- 1 Where is Silicon Valley?
- 2 Why did it become the heart of the US high tech industry?
- 3 How did the industry develop here?
- 4 What is Silicon Valley like today?

WATCH THE VIDEO AND LEARN MORE



YouTube ▶ 'Welcome to Silicon Valley (Ympact)' (first 5 minutes)

Why are people involved in IT so attracted to Silicon Valley?

37 Use the Internet to find information about an interesting Silicon Valley company which is not so famous. Report back about what the company does and how it began.