It’s 1980,

a new consumer market is emerging, what was once only used by academics will now swarm to the lives of millions of people, changing the way they work, think and interact.

The age of the microcomputer is here.

Commodore, Apple, Atari, Sinclair.

These are some of the manufacturers carving their own path in this uncharted landscape.

But one newcomer propelled the industry to the mainstream. International Business Machines.

IBM.

The company had most of its attention towards the enterprise sector, and their attempts at previous “minicomputers” failed. But the growing success of Apple and Commodore could not be ignored.

They had to enter the market before their competitors deny any attempt at a foothold.

5150MB.jpg

Alt text //Front view of the IBM PC 5150 Motherboard

Their hardware, assembled from off-the-shelf standard parts, meant easy user repairability and expansion, mixed with a proprietary custom BIOS to safeguard from copycats. Software was non-existent though, meetings with established software developers fell through and IBM was running out of options and time.

What’s hardware’s worth if there’s no software?

Microsoft, founded in 1975 by Paul Allen and a very young Bill Gates, found success selling their own BASIC Language interpreters for the Altair 8800, when IBM came knocking on their door, Gates cleared his schedule immediately and signed a contract with IBM to provide a suite of software, and an operating system. Microsoft do not have an Operating System.

Msfirstphotop.webp

Alt // Paul Allen (left), Bill Gates (right)

Bill’s business ingenuity secured the non-exclusive full rights to Seattle Computers 86-DOS OS, which became the MS-DOS powering the now called IBM Personal Computer product line. The PC.

ibm-pc-5150-print-ad.jpg

Alt text :  
1981 Ad for the IBM PC

Quiz locked

Released in 1981, the Intel 8088-powered PC was a smashing success launching both IBM and Microsoft to market dominance. Efforts to reverse-engineer the closed IBM BIOS let to the explosion of “IBM PC-Compatibles”, which Microsoft capitalized on with its non-exclusive agreement with IBM to sell their software to those devices as well. Tightening their grip on the software world.

welcome ibm.png

In response, Apple sought to reclaim their position as a major player in the microcomputer market with releasing the Apple Lisa in 1982, featuring a Graphical User Interface. It tanked, the limited software library and high price was, incompatible with the market’s demands.

But by 1984, Apple introduced, The Macintosh, a more financially accessible microcomputer that introduced a very intuitive Graphical User Interface and it’s never seen before human interfacing device, The Mouse.

Microsoft had to make their own response, and in 1985. They did, in the form of

Microsoft Windows

winlogo80s.svg

Released on November 20, 1985, Microsoft Windows 1.0 represented a significant departure from the command-line interfaces of its time. It was designed to provide a graphical user interface (GUI) for MS-DOS, making personal computing more accessible and user-friendly.

win1ad.jpg

alt text: Advert for Windows 1.0

Key features of Windows 1.0 included a tiled windowing system, which allowed users to multitask by running multiple applications simultaneously. Users could resize, minimize, and maximize windows, a departure from the static and text-based interfaces that were prevalent in earlier computing environments.

The graphical nature of Windows 1.0 made it easier for users to interact with their computers. The operating system included several built-in applications, such as MS-DOS file management, Paint, Windows Write, and the Notepad. These applications introduced users to the concept of point-and-click navigation.

However, the hardware requirements were steep, 256 Kilobytes, two double-sided floppy drives, and a graphics adapter. Additionally, software support was initially sparse, and compatibility issues with existing MS-DOS applications was too big a sacrifice for some users.

Windows 1.0 laid the groundwork for the future success of the Windows operating system. Microsoft continued to refine and enhance the user interface with subsequent releases, responding to user feedback and technological advancements.

It set the stage for the evolution of personal computing interfaces, marking the beginning of the now-Redmond based company journey, to become a dominant force in the software world.

While the initial version may not have achieved widespread popularity, it was a crucial stepping stone towards the more user-friendly and visually oriented computing experiences that would follow in later Windows releases.

Partnership with IBM would continue with developing OS/2, but as the years went on, the once blossoming relationship, started to sour.

Microsoft continued to refine and expand its graphical operating system with the introduction of Windows 2.0 in December 1987.

Windows 2.0 represented a significant advancement over its predecessor. One of the most notable improvements was the introduction of overlapping windows, a feature that allowed users to have multiple windows open on the screen simultaneously, enhancing multitasking capabilities. This release also brought about the concept of desktop icons, providing users with a more intuitive way to launch applications.

excel2.png

Microsoft Excel, the first version of the now-famous spreadsheet software, made its debut with Windows 2.0. This integration of Microsoft Office applications marked the beginning of Microsoft's strategy to bundle productivity software with the Windows operating system, solidifying itself as the industry standard for office software.

The graphical enhancements in Windows 2.0 included improved graphics support, better colour coordination, and enhanced performance. While still tethered to MS-DOS, it laid the groundwork for a more visually appealing and functional user interface.

Building on the success of Windows 2.0, Microsoft released an updated version called Windows 2.1 in May 1988.

This version primarily focused on improving stability and addressing performance issues. It also featured support for more display devices and expanded memory, making it compatible with a broader range of hardware configurations.

Windows 2.1 maintained compatibility with 2.0’s applications, ensuring a smooth transition for users who adopted the earlier version. Microsoft continued to refine the user interface, making incremental improvements to enhance the overall user experience.

During this period, Microsoft faced competition from other graphical user interfaces, notably IBM's OS/2. Despite the competition, Windows still stood strong in the market, setting the stage for future releases.

While Windows 2.0 and 2.1 may not have achieved the same level of success as later versions, they were crucial milestones in the evolution of the Windows operating system. These releases demonstrated Microsoft's commitment to refining the graphical user interface, improving performance, and expanding the capabilities of personal computing.

And it all culminated in…

Win90.svg

Microsoft Windows 3.0 and 3.1

Video :

<https://youtu.be/pyg-DYm7b0A>

As Microsoft forged ahead with the development of Windows 3.0, there was a notable internal shift in the company's strategy. Bill Gates recognized the potential of a graphical user interface and redirected Microsoft's efforts from OS/2 to Windows. This strategic pivot highlighted Gates' foresight and played a pivotal role in establishing Windows as the company's flagship product.

The development of Windows 3.0 was not without its challenges. Microsoft faced skepticism both within the company and from external observers. The graphical user interface was still a relatively new concept, and some doubted its widespread appeal. However, Microsoft invested heavily in marketing, emphasizing the advantages of the new operating system. This strategic marketing effort played a crucial role in shaping public perception and driving anticipation for Windows 3.0.

Video :  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-9S8VMMDUw>

Quiz Locked

Microsoft actively collaborated with third-party developers to ensure a robust software ecosystem for Windows 3.0. The company understood that the success of the operating system depended on a rich library of applications. This collaborative approach laid the foundation for Windows' future dominance in the software market.

Externally, the microcomputer market was entering a phase of rapid expansion. The increasing affordability of personal computers and their growing utility in both homes and businesses fueled a surge in demand. With its more intuitive interface and multitasking capabilities, contributing significantly to making personal computing more accessible and appealing to a broader audience.

In the period leading up to Windows 3.1, Microsoft faced intensified competition, particularly from IBM's OS/2. The collaboration between IBM and Microsoft on OS/2 eventually dissolved as the companies pursued divergent visions for the future of operating systems. Microsoft decided to focus on Windows, setting the stage for a strategic showdown between the two tech giants.

Within Microsoft, organizational changes were underway. The company was in a state of rapid evolution, attracting and hiring top talent that would later play crucial roles in its success. The decision to shift from OS/2 to Windows showcased its willingness to make bold decisions to stay ahead in the rapidly changing tech landscape.

doom.jpg

Externally, the microcomputer market was dynamic. In 1992, Windows 3.1 was released at a time when personal computing was transitioning from being a niche interest to a mainstream phenomenon. The business world was increasingly integrating computers into its operations, and more households were adopting personal computers for various tasks, from productivity to gaming.

Windows\_3.11\_workspace.png

Windows 3.1, with its enhanced features, improved performance, and expanded hardware compatibility, became a blockbuster success. It sold millions of copies and significantly contributed to Microsoft's revenue, firmly establishing Windows as the dominant platform in the personal computer market.

win3.1splash.png

As Microsoft solidified its position, the company's influence extended beyond software. Partnerships with hardware manufacturers and aggressive marketing strategies further fuelled the adoption of Windows. The microcomputer market was becoming synonymous with Microsoft, and its Operating System was not just software, but a cultural and technological phenomenon.

The era of Windows 3.0 and 3.1 was marked by strategic shifts at Microsoft, intensified competition, and a rapidly growing microcomputer market. Its success during this time not only shaped the trajectory of the Redmond company but also played a foundational role in defining the personal computing experience for millions of users worldwide. The stage was set for the paradigm-shifting release of the next major version, which would further propel it to unprecedented heights.

Set to conquer another frontier, with any means necessary.

win95.svg

Microsoft Windows 95

Windows 95, released on August 24, 1995, marked a watershed moment in the history of personal computing. It was a groundbreaking release that introduced several transformative features and fundamentally changed the user experience of personal computers.

Video:  
<https://youtu.be/wRdl1BjTG7c>

Windows 95 introduced the iconic Start Menu, providing users with a centralized location to access programs, documents, and system settings. The Taskbar, a persistent bar at the bottom of the screen, allowed for easy navigation between open applications and provided quick access to the Start Menu.

Windows\_95\_at\_first\_run.png

Windows 95 heralded widespread support for Plug and Play technology, making it significantly easier for users to install and configure hardware devices. This streamlined the process of adding peripherals like printers, scanners, and external drives to a computer.

Windows 95 was built on a 32-bit architecture, providing improved performance and stability compared to its 16-bit predecessors. This allowed for better multitasking and support for larger amounts of RAM, addressing the limitations of earlier versions.

For the first time, Windows 95 introduced support for long file names, allowing users to create and manage filenames with up to 255 characters. This was a significant departure from the 8.3 filename convention used in previous versions, enhancing file organization.

This new version also replaced the File Manager with Windows Explorer, offering a more intuitive way to navigate and manage files and folders. This shift marked a transition towards a more graphical and user-friendly file management system.

While not bundled on release, Microsoft introduced Internet Explorer following the pressure made by the emerging Netscape Navigator. This move was indicative of the growing importance of the internet and set the stage for Microsoft's subsequent dominance in the web browser market.

The operating system also included built-in support for multimedia features such as CD-ROM drives, sound cards, and video playback. It also introduced DirectX, a collection of APIs (that is, Application Programming Interfaces) designed to handle multimedia tasks, particularly gaming. DirectX played a crucial role in standardizing game development on Windows, leading to the platform's dominance in the gaming industry. With Microsoft using its power and wealth to fund and partner with many studios, it made sure Windows, is the only platform for gaming.

Video:

<https://youtu.be/KN0K58EfJSg>

Quiz locked

The launch of Windows 95 was a highly anticipated event, accompanied by a massive marketing campaign. Microsoft invested heavily in promotion, featuring a globally televised launch event and the iconic "Start Me Up" commercial featuring the Rolling Stones' song. The anticipation and hype surrounding Windows 95 generated immense excitement in the tech industry and among consumers.

Windows 95 was a commercial juggernaut. Within just four days of its release, Microsoft sold over seven million copies. This success was unprecedented, and it significantly outpaced sales of any previous operating system. To put this into perspective, it even outperformed the highly popular video game Doom, which had set records in the gaming industry.

Video :  
<https://youtu.be/ZBbvmORcgSo>   
  
ne pas telechargez, veuillez faire embed

[Cliquez ici pour savoir comment faire](https://www.w3schools.com/html/html_youtube.asp)

Windows became THE operating system for the PC. And the tech giant became terrifyingly…unstoppable.

Microsoft has fallen into legal scrutiny in the 90’s. With the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) investigating the giant for antitrust violations, with its controversial EEE strategy (Embrace. Extend. Extinguish). This investigation would lead to a landmark antitrust case against Microsoft in the late 1990s.

Competitors, especially Apple and various Unix-based systems, closely watched the Redmond giant. Apple had already established itself as a contender in the graphical user interface market, and Unix-based systems were prevalent in enterprise environments.

Windows 95's impact extended beyond the personal computer market. The operating system's emphasis on internet integration, with Internet Explorer bundled in, played a significant role in popularizing the World Wide Web.

It was not just a new operating system; it was a cultural phenomenon that reshaped the technology landscape. Its commercial success, legal battles, marketing strategies, and technological innovations collectively marked a pivotal chapter in the history of computing.

win98.svg

Microsoft Windows 98

Windows 98, released on June 25, 1998, built upon the success of Windows 95, addressing some of its predecessor's issues while introducing new features. One key focus was improving system stability and performance. The Plug and Play system received enhancements, simplifying the installation and configuration of hardware devices. This not only contributed to a more user-friendly experience but also increased the overall reliability of the operating system.

Internet integration remained a significant aspect of Windows 98. The introduction of Microsoft Windows Update allowed users to easily download updates and patches to enhance system security and stability. Internet Explorer 4.0 was bundled with the operating system, reflecting the increasing importance of the internet in everyday computing. It also brought native support for Universal Serial Bus (USB), a technology that was gaining prominence for its convenience in connecting various peripherals. This support significantly expanded the range of devices that users could seamlessly integrate with their computers, contributing to a more versatile computing experience.

The Device Manager was introduced, providing users with a centralized interface to view and manage installed hardware devices. This streamlined the process of troubleshooting and maintaining the various components of a computer system. Additionally, the System File Checker (SFC) tool allowed users to scan and restore corrupted system files, contributing to a more robust and reliable operating system.

Video :  
<https://youtu.be/N3s0_yf2mS4>  
  
ne pas telechargez, veuillez faire embed

[Cliquez ici pour savoir comment faire](https://www.w3schools.com/html/html_youtube.asp)

Despite these improvements, Windows 98 was not without its challenges. It faced criticism for certain stability issues and compatibility issues with some hardware and software. The operating system was positioned as more of an evolutionary upgrade, lacking the groundbreaking impact of its predecessor, Windows 95.

Windows 98 Second Edition (98SE), released in 1999, was an updated version that aimed to address some of the criticisms and further enhance the user experience. Notable improvements included enhanced support for networking and internet connectivity. Internet Connection Sharing (ICS) was introduced, allowing users to share a single internet connection among multiple computers in a home or office network. This feature was particularly beneficial as home networking started to gain traction.

The inclusion of improved drivers and enhanced support for new hardware components contributed to better compatibility and system performance. Windows 98SE also featured updates to Internet Explorer and Windows Media Player, aligning the operating system with the evolving landscape of internet and multimedia usage.

Windows 98SE played a transitional role as Microsoft was preparing for the release of Windows Millennium Edition (Windows Me) and, subsequently, the highly anticipated Windows 2000 and Windows XP. As the company started to shift from MS-DOS to it’s proprietary NT Kernel for subsequent releases.

During this period, Microsoft's dominance raised economic and ethical concerns. The bundling of Internet Explorer with Windows led to allegations of anti-competitive practices, as Microsoft was accused of leveraging its operating system monopoly to gain an advantage in the browser market.

This period also witnessed the prominence of the "Embrace, Extend, Extinguish" (EEE) strategy, an internal 3-part tactic; Welcoming the emerging competitor and offering aid in development and distribution, modifying the software with enough proprietary blobs to distinguish itself from the competition, before leveraging the Windows platform to market the Microsoft version as THE version to use, pushing the competitor out of the market segment and ensuring Redmond’s dominance. One of the most high-profile examples of the EEE strategy was with Netscape v. Internet Explorer

Video :

<https://youtu.be/iK6SS8CXYZo>

Netscape Navigator, developed by Netscape Communications Corporation, was a pioneering web browser that played a significant role in popularizing the World Wide Web. Microsoft offered an offer to Netscape, which the latter refused. Microsoft then developed Internet Explorer, a bundled component of Windows that presented fierce competition by aggressive promotions which inevitably gained a dominant market share.

Video :

<https://youtu.be/ZBbvmORcgSo>

The legal landscape during the late 1990s saw the United States government taking action against Microsoft for alleged antitrust violations. The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and several states filed a highly televised landmark case: United States v. Microsoft Corporation.

The primary focus was on Microsoft's bundling of Internet Explorer with Windows, which was seen as an attempt to undermine competition in the web browser market.

The trial was a protracted legal battle that spanned several years. Microsoft was accused of engaging in anti-competitive practices to maintain its monopoly in the operating system market. The case brought attention to issues of monopolistic behavior, product tying with hardware manufacturers, and the impact of Microsoft's actions on competition.

Microsoft was facing the threat of being broken into smaller independent companies, but was narrowly overruled by appeals, on basis of bias by the judicial system.

Ultimately, in 2001, Microsoft reached a settlement with the Department of Justice. The company agreed to modify its business practices and allow computer manufacturers more flexibility in the installation of software on Windows. The settlement aimed to promote competition and address concerns about Microsoft's dominance in the technology industry.

The legal battles and regulatory scrutiny during this period left a lasting impact on its business practices and set precedents for future antitrust cases in the technology sector. The events surrounding the United States v. Microsoft case were emblematic of the broader challenges and ethical considerations that emerged as technology companies gained unprecedented influence in the global economy.

Windows NT & Windows Millennium Edition

Released in September 2000, Windows Millennium Edition (Windows Me) was positioned as the successor to Windows 98SE. However, it did not achieve the same level of success or longevity. Windows Me aimed to provide enhancements in multimedia capabilities, system stability, and internet integration. It introduced features like System Restore, aimed at allowing users to revert their system to a previous state in case of issues. Despite these improvements, Windows Me faced criticism for its instability and limited benefits over Windows 98SE. Its lifecycle was relatively short-lived, as Windows XP, based on the more robust Windows NT kernel, emerged as the flagship consumer operating system for Microsoft.

In parallel to the consumer-focused Windows 9x series, Microsoft was concurrently developing the Windows NT architecture. Featuring a robust and modular kernel, it was initially designed for business and enterprise environments. The "NT" in Windows NT stood for "New Technology," signalling a departure from the older MS-DOS-based architecture.

The Windows NT kernel offered significant advancements in terms of security, stability, and multi-user capabilities. Unlike the Windows 9x series, it was not built on top of MS-DOS but rather featured a native 32-bit architecture from the ground up. This made it more suitable for professional use and laid the foundation for future iterations of Windows.

While the Windows NT series initially targeted the business sector with releases such as Windows NT 3.1, Windows NT 3.5, Windows NT 4.0, it eventually converged with the consumer-oriented line with the release of Windows 2000. This merger of the Windows 9x and Windows NT codebases would be a critical turning point in the evolution of Microsoft's operating systems, leading to a more unified platform in subsequent releases, starting with….

winxp.svg

Microsoft Windows XP

Released on October 25, 2001, Windows XP (codenamed "Whistler") represented a significant evolution in Microsoft's operating system strategy. Merging the consumer-oriented Windows 9x series with the more robust Windows NT architecture, XP aimed to offer a stable and versatile platform. Key features included a refreshed graphical user interface (Luna), improved system stability built on the Windows NT/2000 kernel, enhanced networking capabilities, backward compatibility with Windows 9x applications, and security features like a built-in firewall and automatic updates.

Video :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Xbs4-aV3Cs>

Microsoft invested heavily in marketing Windows XP with the "Yes You Can" campaign, emphasizing its user-friendly and versatile nature. Released in multiple editions, including Home and Professional, Windows XP became one of the most widely adopted versions of Windows. The marketing efforts, combined with positive reception of the new features, contributed to its success.

Windows\_XP\_Luna.png

Windows XP had a profound impact on the computing landscape. Its stability and improved user experience made it a favorite among both consumers and businesses. DirectX 9 solidified Windows in computer graphics. The widespread adoption of Windows XP led to its enduring legacy, and it continued to be a dominant operating system for an extended period.

Throughout its lifecycle, Windows XP received several updates and service packs. Service Pack 1 (SP1) and Service Pack 2 (SP2) were particularly notable, introducing major security enhancements and features like Windows Firewall. These updates aimed to address vulnerabilities, improve system performance, and enhance overall functionality.

Winxptimeline.png

Despite its success, Windows XP faced challenges as it continued to be widely used even after Microsoft officially ended mainstream support in 2009 and extended support in 2014. This prolonged use posed security risks, as Microsoft ceased to provide regular security updates. The end of life for Windows XP brought attention to the importance of transitioning to more secure and supported operating systems.

The reluctance of some users and organizations to upgrade from Windows XP became evident during the WannaCry ransomware attack in May 2017. Exploiting vulnerabilities in unpatched systems, the attack affected numerous computers worldwide. This incident highlighted the security risks associated with using outdated software and the imperative of keeping operating systems up-to-date. Microsoft responded by releasing emergency patches for unsupported versions, including Windows XP, underscoring the severity of the situation and the potential consequences of delayed upgrades.

The next version of Windows wouldn’t come until 2006.

Windows Longhorn was initially announced as the codename for the successor to Windows XP, with ambitious plans for innovation and modernization. Announced in 2001, Longhorn underwent an extensive development process, aiming to introduce a range of new features and improvements. However, the project faced numerous challenges and encountered delays.

longhorn.png

One of the significant shifts in Longhorn's development was the introduction of the WinFS (Windows Future Storage) file system, which was designed to provide advanced searching and organization capabilities. However, as development progressed, challenges arose, and Microsoft eventually decided to remove WinFS from the Longhorn project.

The extended development timeline and feature adjustments led to anticipation and speculation in the tech community. As the project continued, Microsoft rebranded it as Windows Vista during the Professional Developers Conference in 2005.

vista.svg

Microsoft Windows Vista

Windows Vista was officially released to businesses on November 30, 2006, and for consumers on January 30, 2007. It aimed to deliver a more secure, visually appealing, and feature-rich experience compared to its predecessor, Windows XP. Key features included:

Vista introduced the Aero (Authentic, Energetic, Reflective, and Open) interface, providing a more visually appealing and modern desktop environment.

Windows\_Vista.png

UAC was implemented to enhance security by requiring user approval for certain system-level changes, reducing the likelihood of malware infections.

Featuring desktop gadgets, the Sidebar provided users with quick access to information such as weather, news, and system resources.

Vista also included a built-in anti-spyware tool, Windows Defender, to enhance security against malicious software.

The Media Center capabilities were expanded, allowing users to manage and enjoy multimedia content more seamlessly.

Despite its innovative features, Windows Vista faced mixed reviews. The introduction of UAC was criticized for being intrusive, and there were concerns about hardware requirements. Compatibility issues with existing software and drivers also affected user experiences.

While Windows Vista addressed security concerns, its performance on lower-end hardware led to user dissatisfaction. These challenges contributed to a slower adoption rate compared to its predecessor, Windows XP.

To address user feedback and improve system stability, Microsoft released Service Pack 1 (SP1) for Windows Vista in 2008. SP1 included various updates, enhancements, and improvements to address performance issues.

Windows Vista paved the way for the subsequent release of Windows 7 in 2009, which addressed many of the performance and compatibility issues.

win7.svg

Microsoft Windows 7

Released on October 22, 2009, Windows 7 represented a significant departure from its predecessor, Windows Vista. Microsoft aimed to address the criticisms and challenges faced by Vista, focusing on enhancing performance, compatibility, and user experience.

Windows\_7\_SP1.png

The taskbar underwent a redesign, introducing features like Jump Lists and improved taskbar previews. The Start Menu received a more streamlined and user-friendly design.

Windows 7 was also optimized for better performance, making it more resource-efficient than Vista with improved memory management and reduced system requirements contributed to a smoother user experience. It also introduced the DirectX 11 API, built upon Vista’s DX10, it added many features like Tessellation.

Aero Snap allowed users to easily organize and compare open windows, while Aero Shake enabled the user to minimize all windows by shaking one.

Libraries provided a centralized and efficient way to manage files and folders across multiple locations.

While maintaining the User Account Control (UAC) introduced in Vista, Windows 7 implemented additional security measures to enhance system protection.

DirectAccess was also introduced in the Enterprise and Ultimate editions, it simplified remote access to corporate networks without the need for a traditional VPN.

Windows 7 was met with widespread acclaim, in stark contrast to the mixed reception of Windows Vista. Users and businesses appreciated the improved performance, enhanced stability, and streamlined user interface. The positive reception led to a faster adoption rate, with many users transitioning from Windows XP and Vista to Windows 7.

Windows 7 achieved remarkable market dominance, becoming one of the most widely used and beloved versions of Windows. Its success led to an extended support period, with Microsoft providing regular updates and security patches for an extended duration.

Service Pack 1 (SP1) for Windows 7 was released in 2011, consolidating updates and introducing new features. Microsoft continued to release updates and patches to address security vulnerabilities and improve system reliability throughout the supported lifecycle of Windows 7.

Despite its enduring popularity, Windows 7 eventually reached its end of extended support on January 14, 2020. This prompted users and organizations to transition to newer operating systems like Windows 8.1 or Windows 10. Microsoft encouraged the move to ensure users had access to the latest security features and improvements.

Windows 7's legacy lies in its ability to redeem Microsoft's reputation following the challenges faced by Windows Vista. It set a standard for user-friendly design, performance optimization, and stability. Elements of its interface and features continued to influence subsequent Windows versions, contributing to the ongoing evolution of Microsoft's operating systems.

win8.svg

Microsoft Windows 8 and 8.1

Released on October 26, 2012, Windows 8 represented a significant departure from traditional Windows interfaces. Microsoft aimed to create a unified operating system for both traditional desktops and touch-centric devices like tablets.

Metro.png

Windows 8 introduced the Microsoft Metro UI Design Language which focused on typography and simplified icons, absence of clutter, increased content to chrome ratio ("content before chrome"), and basic geometric shapes.

Windows 8 introduced the Start Screen, a tile-based interface designed for touch input. Live Tiles provided dynamic updates for apps directly on the Start Screen. A side menu called the Charms Bar provided quick access to essential functions like search, share, and settings.

Windows 8 also marked the introduction of the Windows Store, allowing users to download and install apps directly from Microsoft's curated marketplace. Users were encouraged to sign in with a Microsoft account for personalized settings synchronization across devices.

While heavily promoting the touch-centric interface, Windows 8 retained a Desktop mode for traditional keyboard and mouse input.

The radical departure from the familiar Start Menu and the emphasis on touch input led to a generally negative reception. Traditional desktop users found the interface changes challenging, especially without a Start Menu. The coexistence of the new Start Screen with the classic Desktop mode created a somewhat disjointed user experience.

Win8store.jpg

Released in October 2013, Windows 8.1 aimed to address user feedback and refine the Windows 8 experience.

Windows 8.1 reintroduced the Start Button, providing a more familiar entry point for users. However, it did not restore the classic Start Menu. But users could now choose to boot directly to the Desktop, bypassing the Start Screen. Improved multitasking was also introduced with the ability to run multiple apps side by side in resizable windows.

Despite the improvements in Windows 8.1, this version still faced challenges in winning over traditional desktop users. Many businesses and consumers chose to stick with Windows 7 due to the perceived complexities and learning curve associated with Windows 8.

So, Microsoft mainly returned to the drawing board for their next version.

Windows 8.1 received extended support until January 10, 2023, after which users were encouraged to transition to Windows 10 for continued security updates and feature enhancements.

Win10.svg

Microsoft Windows 10

Windows 10, released on July 29, 2015, marked a significant shift in Microsoft's approach. It aimed to create a unified operating system across various devices, including traditional desktops, laptops, tablets, and even smartphones. Windows 10 was designed to address the criticisms of its predecessor, Windows 8, while introducing new features and improvements.

Windows 10 reintroduced the Start Menu, combining elements of the classic Start Menu with Live Tiles from Windows 8. This move aimed to provide a familiar experience for both touch and non-touch devices. The virtual assistant, Cortana, based on the character from the Microsoft Xbox flagship Halo game series, was introduced to provide voice-activated assistance, search, and personalized recommendations. The new Task View allowed users to see all open applications and switch between them, while Virtual Desktops provided a way to organize and switch between multiple desktops.

10start.png

Microsoft also introduced The Universal Windows Apps that could run across various Windows 10 devices, fostering a more consistent experience and minimal development time in porting compared to regular applications.

Windows 10 was also optimized for 2-in-1 devices by automatically adjusted the user interface based on whether a device was in tablet or laptop mode and baking in pen & Windows Ink support.

Windows 10 also introduced a new approach to updates, with a more continuous delivery model, including regular feature updates and security patches as focus for the main selling point of the OS.

The concept of Windows as a Service, where the operating system receives continuous updates and improvements. Instead of releasing entirely new versions, Microsoft opted for regular feature updates, ensuring that users have access to the latest features, security enhancements, and bug fixes.

Windows 10 received generally positive reviews for addressing the issues of Windows 8 and providing a more cohesive user experience. The familiar Start Menu, improved performance, and new features contributed to a faster adoption rate compared to previous Windows versions.

Windows 10 also included various security features, such as Windows Defender Antivirus, BitLocker for encryption, Windows Hello for biometric authentication, and advancements in Windows Update to ensure the latest security patches.

Windows 10 has become the most widely used version of Windows with 62.7% market share as of Nov. 2023, with a large user base spanning consumers, businesses, and educational institutions. Its continuous update model ensures that users benefit from ongoing improvements, features, and security enhancements. It is set to be sunset October 2025 as Microsoft focuses on Windows 11.

Win11.svg

Microsoft Windows 10X and its lead up to 11

Neo.webp

Initially announced in 2019, Windows 10X was designed to provide a specialized experience for dual-screen devices, set to debut to the now-cancelled Surface Neo, with a particular focus on flexibility and adaptability. The development of Windows 10X was part of Microsoft's broader initiative to address the evolving landscape of device form factors.

Windows 10X introduced a containerized approach for running apps, enhancing security and performance. Apps were isolated from the core system to prevent conflicts and improve overall system stability. The Start Menu and Taskbar also received a redesign, offering a more streamlined and simplified experience for users on dual-screen devices.

Windows 10X also included a modernized File Explorer, offering a cleaner interface and improved file management capabilities.

In 2020, Microsoft announced a shift in its strategy for Windows 10X. Instead of being a standalone operating system, elements of Windows 10X were expected to be integrated into the core Windows operating system. This shift was part of Microsoft's broader focus on unifying the Windows experience across various devices.

11start.png

Announced in June 2021, Windows 11 represents a significant evolution in the Windows operating system. It builds upon the foundation laid by Windows 10 while introducing a refreshed user interface based on the Fluent Design Language, new features, and improvements in performance and security.

Windows 11 featured a controversial centered Start Menu and Taskbar, providing a cleaner and more modern aesthetic. Enhanced multitasking capabilities with Snap Layouts were also introduced for organizing multiple windows and Snap Groups for quick access to grouped apps. It also follows the Windows as a Service (WaaS) model, ensuring that users receive regular updates with new features, security patches, and improvements.

The Microsoft Store also received a comprehensive redesign on Windows 10 and 11, offering a more curated and user-friendly experience.

Due to events of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Microsoft optimized Windows 11 to accommodate work-from-home via integration with Microsoft Teams, Office 365, Edge and the reintroduction of Widgets.

It also introduced more gaming-centric features, including support for Auto HDR, DirectStorage (Resizable BAR), DirectX12 Ultimate (DirectX12 + Direct X Raytracing), and enhancements to Xbox Game Pass integration.

Windows 11 brought updated system requirements in response to increasing security risks headlined by Specter and Meltdown CPU vulnerabilities, which brought environmental concerns and skepticism due to the arbitrarily high requirements.

As of Nov. 2023, Windows 11 only represents 22% of the market share, but even with growing competition from Linux and Apple Silicon powered MacOS. Microsoft Windows continues to be the face of the personal computer.