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**CLASS: SOFTWARE ENGINEERING (151)**

**OBJECT ORIENTED DESIGN AND ANALYSIS**

**ATM History and evolution**

# History

The cash dispenser was born almost 50 years ago, in 1967. For many, this was the first tangible evidence that retail banking was changing; the introduction of the ATM marked the dawn of contemporary digital banking. Several lay claim to the invention of the cashpoint, including [John Shepherd-Barron](http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/101102503/John-Shepherd-Barron) and [James Goodfellow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Goodfellow) in the U.K.; [Don Wetzel](http://americanhistory.si.edu/comphist/wetzel.htm) and [Luther Simjian](http://www.nytimes.com/1997/11/02/business/luther-simjian-is-dead-at-92-held-more-than-200-patents.html) in the U.S.; and even engineering companies like De La Rue, Speytec-Burroughs, Asea-Metior, and Omron Tateisi. But the ATM is a complex technology. There was [no single eureka moment](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/atm-dead-long-live-atm-180953838/?no-ist=&preview=&page=1) that marked its arrival.

# ATM origins

The ATM finds its origins in the 1950s and 1960s, when [self-service](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/analysis-and-features/how-britain-became-a-selfservice-nation-2241830.html) gas stations, supermarkets, automated public-transportation ticketing, and candy dispensers were popularized. The first cash machine seems to have been deployed in Japan in the mid-1960s, according to a Pacific Stars and Stripes account at the time, but little has been published about it since. The most successful early deployments took place in Europe, where bankers responded to increasing unionization and rising labor costs by soliciting engineers to develop a solution for after-hours cash distribution. This resulted in [three independent efforts, each of which entered use in 1967](http://ideas.repec.org/p/pra/mprapa/9461.html): the Bankomat in Sweden, and the Barclaycash and Chubb MD2 in the U.K.

Cashpoints materialized thanks to a long chain of innovations. Some were of a general nature, such as steel, video-display units, plastic, magnetic tape, or (more recently) the Windows operating system. Others were purpose-made, such as the cash output mechanism and, in the 1960s, the previously non-existent algorithm that associated an encrypted PIN with a customer account. These components were developed through active collaboration between groups of bankers and engineers, each of which attempted to solve different aspects of the complex challenges inherent in the development of the ATM.

Never before had electronic equipment been so exposed to the elements. The necessity of human intervention in early systems invited further automation. For instance, they could easily jam or run out of product. They could erroneously dispense several bank notes instead of just one—all without the owner's knowledge. They were activated by plastic or paper tokens that would only activate for the operating bank and, in some cases, only that particular bank location. Some banks would keep the token in the machine and return it to the customer (by post) once the account had been debited. As a result, early ATMs were standalone, clunky, unfriendly, and inflexible. They could do one thing: dispense cash when activated by a token.

Given these constraints, it's not surprising that it took more than a decade for banks to deploy cashpoints beyond a handful of experiments. In its early days, few believed that the cashpoint would make a difference to the average consumer. In context, this prediction might have seemed sure; cashpoints appeared before credit or debit cards were a popular alternative to bills and coins, at a moment in time when most of the world's citizens worked in a cash economy. With the exception of the U.S. and France, even personal checks were largely limited to the wealthy.