The history of the Internet begins with the development of electronic computers in the 1950s. Initial concepts of wide area networkingoriginated in several computer science laboratories in the United States, United Kingdom, and France.[1] The US Department of Defense awarded contracts as early as the 1960s, including for the development of the ARPANET project, directed by Robert Taylorand managed by Lawrence Roberts. The first message was sent over the ARPANET in 1969 from computer science Professor Leonard Kleinrock's laboratory at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) to the second network node at Stanford Research Institute (SRI).

Packet switching networks such as the NPL network, ARPANET, Tymnet, Merit Network, CYCLADES, and Telenet, were developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s using a variety of communications protocols.[2] Donald Davies first demonstrated packet switching in 1967 at the National Physics Laboratory (NPL) in the UK, which became a testbed for UK research for almost two decades.[3][4] The ARPANET project led to the development of protocols for internetworking, in which multiple separate networks could be joined into a network of networks.

The Internet protocol suite (TCP/IP) was developed by Robert E. Kahn and Vint Cerf in the 1970s and became the standard networking protocol on the ARPANET, incorporating concepts from the French CYCLADES project directed by Louis Pouzin. In the early 1980s the NSF funded the establishment for national supercomputing centers at several universities, and provided interconnectivity in 1986 with the NSFNET project, which also created network access to the supercomputer sites in the United States from research and education organizations. Commercial Internet service providers (ISPs) began to emerge in the very late 1980s. The ARPANET was decommissioned in 1990. Limited private connections to parts of the Internet by officially commercial entities emerged in several American cities by late 1989 and 1990,[5] and the NSFNET was decommissioned in 1995, removing the last restrictions on the use of the Internet to carry commercial traffic.

In the 1980s, research at CERN in Switzerland by British computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee resulted in the World Wide Web, linking hypertext documents into an information system, accessible from any node on the network.[6] Since the mid-1990s, the Internet has had a revolutionary impact on culture, commerce, and technology, including the rise of near-instant communication by electronic mail, instant messaging, voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephone calls, two-way interactive video calls, and the World Wide Web with its discussion forums, blogs, social networking, and online shopping sites. The research and education community continues to develop and use advanced networks such as JANET in the United Kingdom and Internet2 in the United States. Increasing amounts of data are transmitted at higher and higher speeds over fiber optic networks operating at 1-Gbit/s, 10-Gbit/s, or more. The Internet's takeover of the global communication landscape was almost instant in historical terms: it only communicated 1% of the information flowing through two-way telecommunications networks in the year 1993, already 51% by 2000, and more than 97% of the telecommunicated information by 2007.[7] Today the Internet continues to grow, driven by ever greater amounts of online information, commerce, entertainment, and social networking.