

Blasts from the Past

5 Years ago in BYTE

Windows NT was slated to enter beta testing and loomed as a threat to Unix and OS/2. Compaq pulled out of the ACE consortium; it seems Intel's processors would be powerful enough. Our cover story was about PDAs and subnotebooks. The PDAs' handwriting and communications capabilities weren't good enough, and subnotebooks, though technical marvels, were too small for doing a lot of real work.



10 Years ago in BYTE

BYTE's cross-platform tests of a Deskpro 386 with FPU against a Mac SE with a 68020 showed the 386 to be faster, but with plenty of caveats. Other articles covered image processing, encoding maps on CD-ROM, and LAN tutorials.

15 Years ago in BYTE

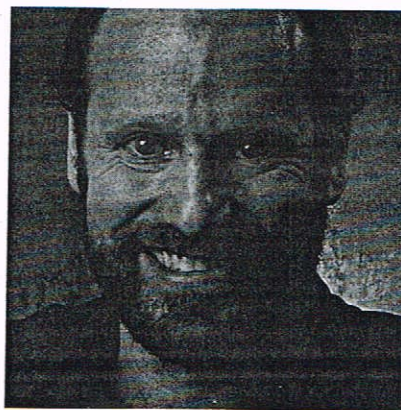
Articles on computers in the arts and sciences ranged from machine-generated poetry to using PCs for audio special effects, graphics, and even to predict wars.

20 Years ago in BYTE

An article explained the difficulty of implementing continuous voice recognition. Another story discussed using virtual memory to give your PC 1 MB of storage. We wrote: "Nobody expects a system to actually have a megabyte of on-line storage."

More Power to Go

Dr. Ted Selker, an IBM Fellow responsible for innovations such as the Trackpoint III pointing device and the Butterfly keyboard, discusses the current and future state of portable computing.



BYTE: Are we going to see drastically smaller form factors in notebooks?

Selker: Well, small is great, but what doesn't work is changing the basic QWERTY keyboard. Most people won't work with [non-QWERTY] keyboards. So we are looking at all sorts of possible designs, including a keyboard that clips onto your belt and one you can wear on your body.

BYTE: That sounds somewhat radical.

Selker: Well, it's all about the social situation, making the usage scenario fit. For example, 50 years ago people had all their focus at the desktop, and they wrote using pens they dipped into an inkwell. But then the ballpoint pen arrived and let them write away from the desk easily. Now, notebook technology is small enough, but the question is how to make the scenario fit so that it doesn't disturb the social situation.

BYTE: What do you mean by that?

Selker: Well, with some of these pen-based devices you pull one out and it is 30 seconds or a minute before anything happens. People end up getting distracted by the technology. That type of thing will have to fall away. Maybe we'll end up with technologies on our bodies, in our hands, or in our backpacks, but we have to look at how not to make it a big pile of things you need to think about all the time.

BYTE: With all these devices—handhelds, phones, notebooks—will we ever get down to just having one device?

Selker: Well, I am working on a mock-up that is based on the idea of a wallet. It would have a clock, and it could open in a trifold to be used as a phone. There could be a display inside that shows medical records and so on. I like the idea of a wallet as a metaphor. It is something that has all the really valuable stuff you have to have with you. You could even have a built-in scanner that could handle business cards and lots more. So I do think we are starting to get into a position where ultimately we can start eliminating the problem of having too many devices. But how can we make them? That is really the question.

BYTE: Do you anticipate big changes in terms of form and function for notebook computers?

Selker: I think it is going to be harder and harder for desktop machines to compete. What you get in a notebook today outperforms anything you got on a desktop two years ago. I think we are now there in terms of having everything you could ever want with you all the time.

BYTE: Do you think we already have more technology than we need to get the job done?

Selker: When I got my hands on a 286 portable it changed my life. I was riding a train [to work] and wrote twice as many papers as I had before I started using the portable. Now, everyone I know is replicating Lotus Notes databases and catching up with what's new on the Web as they ride the train. So more technology seems to let you do more types of things, and that is what I think more powerful notebooks will enable people to do. I think the mobile computing scenario is really changing things and truly letting people work anywhere.