

## The New Technology, 1980–2000

The watchword of the twentieth century has been change—drastic change which has rendered life for those in the industrialized nations of the world much different from that of previous eras. A significant portion of that change is mirrored in the ever-advancing technological innovation of our time.

With each new technology, the world becomes smaller, faster, and the people of the planet become better informed, more in touch with others around the world than they are, perhaps, with their own neighbors next door.

At the center of this technology sweep is the computer industry. With the coming of silicon chips and miniaturization, computers have been reduced in size to that of desktop models, often called personal computers for the home and office.

The personal computer was first made possible by the development of the microprocessor in 1971, a device which transferred the work done by thousands of transistors to a silicon chip no larger than one's fingernail. In addition to the silicon chip's capacity to facilitate calculation and information storage, it was cheap to produce, allowing for affordable use in the home.

By the last decade of the twentieth century, personal computers were everywhere in the West. They could be found at work, in schools, in dorm rooms, libraries, even in police cars. By the late 1990s, technology had developed portable, affordable personal computers, known as laptops, which could be carried anywhere. Such devices allowed people to gather and store vast amounts of information as never before possible.

In addition, by the 1990s, personal computers, through modem hook-ups, were able to access a new and developing "information highway," popularly known as the Internet, which put millions of "Web sites" at the fingertips of computer users everywhere.

Other electronic devices of the final 20 years of the twentieth century were also made available to a vast public ready for instant communication. By the 1980s, fax machines were in use, capable of sending electronic copies of documents across existing telephone lines. Digital cameras became popular in the 1990s, which stored "photographs" on a computer disk and allowed viewing on one's personal computer.

Already established devices such as photocopiers and calculators (solar-powered models were first sold in America in 1978) were further improved, enhanced, and

made more effective. Used mostly for entertainment purposes, a new technology—the CD, or compact disc—was introduced in 1982, replacing cassette tapes. Personal computers were wired into electronic mail, known as "e-mail," which allowed one computer user to communicate with another or even with multiple users.

Wireless communication became more commonplace during the late 1990s as satellites were used to create elaborate cellular communication systems. As a result, more and more people in the industrialized countries found themselves connected through cellular telephones which allowed for phone communication on the road or away from one's desk or home.

Such devices and inventions helped to reduce the distances between people and make them better informed and better prepared to live in a global world where people can experience life as it is elsewhere.

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### *Review and Write*

Take a technology inventory of your home and the places where people in your family work. Which of the following devices does someone in your family use regularly or have easy access to.

Personal computer\_\_\_\_

Internet\_\_\_\_

Calculator\_\_\_\_

Cellular phone\_\_\_\_

CD player\_\_\_\_

Fax machine\_\_\_\_

E-mail\_\_\_\_

Digital camera\_\_\_\_

How important do you think such devices are as part of the experience of living in the industrialized West?