25 Years of the Internet

The internet is a marvel of modern technology. It is only 25 years old but it has completely revolutionised the way the world works. So what on earth *is* the internet? Who was the genius who invented it? How has it changed the world so drastically in such a short period of time? Find the answers to these questions and more as you keep reading!

What is the internet?

The internet is an enormous and complex network which carries electronic data and information all over the world. It is like a wide-stretching web which links millions of items of technology with each other. Computers, televisions, mobile phones and tablets are all joined together by a gigantic system of huge underground cables, tiny household wires and even wireless connections. Soon our toasters, lights and cars will be linked in as well. Millions upon millions of signals and messages are sent zipping around the internet system 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Particularly in the developed world, people are becoming ever more reliant on the internet and the shortcuts it offers. We also use it for an increasingly wide variety of things, such as viewing websites, watching our favourite video clips and sending emails.

Who made it?

Smaller networks – which were similar in design to the modern internet – were created 50 years ago, but they were relatively tiny and required particular expertise to operate. They were designed mainly to be used by university academics and the military so very few people outside these fields used them at all. Then in 1990, a brainy British scientist called Tim Berners-Lee invented something he called the World Wide Web, which connected networks all over the world and was simple enough for normal people to use and add content to. In 1991, he shared his transformative invention with the planet, and it exploded into businesses and households across the world. Nowadays anybody and everybody can use the internet easily!

Changing the World

Tim Berners-Lee only created the first website in 1990, but now half the population on Earth use the World Wide Web regularly! That very first website was a simple page describing Berners-Lee's project to create his World Wide Web; now there are over one billion websites in existence! Once people had access to the internet they very quickly realised that 'the Web' (as it became known) let people do things they had previously thought were impossible. Millions of websites were created very rapidly with all sorts of information and features.

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Early internet use took place across the network of telephone lines which had spread across the world since that technology had been invented by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876. Mobile phones only became common very recently; previously people used to have just one phone in their house, which was linked to everyone else's phones by telephone wires. Early on in the life of the internet, people could not be on the internet and the phone at the same time because they used the same wires! People used to have to 'dial-up' the internet like you do when you make a phone call!

Nowadays we have wireless networks, broadband and amazing new wire technology called 'fibre-optics' which use light to transmit information. All of this means we can have faster access to the internet in many more places. As the internet system grows and develops, new technologies will replace what we have now. By the end of your life, who can imagine what wonders will exist?

The internet is so revolutionary because it connects people almost instantly and is capable of so many different functions. Using the internet, a person in China can easily have a conversation with somebody in America about a visit or a joint business venture; it is just as quick and simple as talking to someone across a desk or the office! The internet also offers people a much more extensive choice of things to buy than a local shop or even a shopping centre ever could; for example, someone in Britain can buy a car from Australia with a few clicks of their computer mouse!

It is clear from the amount of money made by internet companies that 'online' business is very big business indeed. Amazon, the online retailer, was recently valued at 69.4 billion dollars! Facebook (the social media website) earned its inventor, Mark Zuckerberg, 1.6 billion dollars *in a single day*. Using internet is now one of the most important parts of running a business.

The amount of new things added to the internet is showing no signs of slowing down; if anything, it is speeding up! The possibilities seem to only be limited by people's imaginations! Nowadays, people can meet and fall in love on dating websites. They can store all their precious photos and record memories on social media. They can spread new ideas far and wide on the internet and people are constantly searching for answers on the search engine Google. In fact, Google has become so widely used that 'googling' something (searching on Google) has become a common word! Many people have become millionaires simply by making videos in their house which they share online! New websites, new technology and new ideas are constantly being added. The internet has made progress happen faster than anyone would have believed 25 years ago. Tim Berners-Lee's invention has completely revolutionised the way the world works.

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1.   Who made the first website?

2.   Which information goes with which bit of history? Put the letters next to the right answer.

    A. The first website was made.

    B. Things like the modern internet were made.

    C. Half the people in the world use the internet.

50 years ago	
1990	
Today	

3.   Write down one way you use the internet. Then write down one way an adult you know might use the internet.

4.   The title says '25 Years of the Internet'. Find and copy the sentence which shows that this is a good choice for the title.

5.   'It links lots of things together.' Think of a word which you could use instead of 'links'.

6.   Not many people remember when 'things like the modern internet were made 50 years ago'. Why does the world remember the start of the World Wide Web?

7.   'Things like the modern internet were made 50 years ago, but they were smaller.'
    a. What does the word 'modern' mean?

    b. Rewrite the sentence using a word (or words) other than 'modern'.

8. Sometimes the writing in books which tell us facts is split up into different parts. Why has the writer split this writing into different parts?

9. This piece of writing has a very clear structure.
   a. What is the purpose of the introduction?
   b. How does the way the rest of the writing is presented connect it to the introduction?

10. Make a list of five things which people use the internet for. Your answers must come from the text.

11. Tara says 'This piece of writing is about how the internet has changed the world'. Explain how the first and last paragraphs show Tara is right.

12. 'The internet is a marvel of technology.' Copy from a dictionary what the word 'marvel' means in this sentence.

13. What is the effect of the writer saying that signals and messages are sent 'zipping' around the internet?

14. Which two groups used similar networks years before the invention of the World Wide Web?

15. 'So what on earth *is* the internet?' (Paragraph 1). What is the effect of the italics on the word 'is'?

16. What does the word 'exploded' mean when the author says the World Wide Web 'exploded into businesses and households across the world'?

17. Do you think the internet was used as much as it is today when people had to 'dial-up'? Copy and explain a phrase from the text which supports your answer.

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18. When the author describes the internet as 'like a...web', what figure of speech is being used?

19. By describing the web discussed in the previous question as 'wide-reaching' what writing technique is the author using?

20. This text is all about how the internet has changed the world. Now you have read it, what do you think is the biggest or most important way the world has been changed by the World Wide Web? Give two reasons for your answer.

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