

Reading Lesson

B1 Science: In an Instant

Reading

Read the text. What is it about? Is technology helping how we communicate?

In an Instant

As we know, the internet has changed the way we communicate. But it's funny to think that less than 25 years ago, not many people knew what the internet was. Now, most of us write emails, send texts, or have online conversations with people all over the planet. To give you an idea of the size of this communication revolution, in 2019 there were about 3.7 billion email users worldwide, and they sent nearly 294 billion emails *every day*.

But sometimes email can be too slow, especially when you don't know when the person you want to email is online. This explains why instant messaging (IM) has become so popular. The present-day IM experience now includes many different features such as video, pictures, voice messaging, e-commerce (buying services using the app), and gaming. However, the features of popular apps like Snapchat, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp would not be possible without the earlier development of simple instant messaging apps. So how did it all start?

In 1992, someone sent the first IM—"Merry Christmas!"—using the Vodafone UK messaging service. But instant messaging really exploded onto the internet scene in November 1996. That's when Mirabilis, a software company from Israel, introduced ICQ, a free instant messaging service that anyone could use. ICQ is short for "I seek you" (*seek* means "to look for"). Users could download the free software app, called a "client," to their computer. The client communicated with ICQ when you went online and the software was running. This allowed people to chat in "real time." In other words, there was only a very short delay between sending the message and the other person receiving the message. By 2001, there were 100 million users worldwide. America Online (AOL) bought ICQ in 1998.

In 1998, Yahoo released Yahoo Messenger, and a year later, in 1999, Microsoft released MSN Messenger. By 2005, users sent about 2.5 billion messages daily on MSN Messenger. In 2003, Skype started its voice and video calling service, but it was another five years before Facebook started Facebook Chat. This allowed Facebook friends to message one another for the first time. This became Facebook Messenger in 2014, as a separate app from Facebook. In 2009, WhatsApp started and became popular with people who didn't want to pay to send text messages. Two years later, Snapchat started. It allows users to send "snaps," or pictures that disappear after a certain amount of time, and is a huge success with millennials.

And what does the very near future look like for IM? With virtual reality (VR), users won't send text or video, but will be able to see the person they are communicating with in 3-D in real time. The ability to instantly translate from one language to another means that people who speak different languages will be able to communicate, and companies will start using IM as a way of sharing information rather than using emails or telephones.

features (n plural): the distinctive parts of something

explode onto the (internet) scene (idiom): become popular very quickly in a particular area

millennials (n plural): people who reached young adulthood around the year 2000



Reading Lesson

Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box.

delay release software translate worldwide

1. When I was chatting with my cousin in New Zealand on the phone, I noticed there was a short time _____.
2. Around 203 million people _____ use the Snapchat app every day.
3. Jake works for a _____ company that makes computer programs for NASA.
4. The band will _____ their new music video on YouTube.
5. I use the Babylon app to _____ for me when I travel abroad and don't speak the language.

Comprehension

Choose the correct option.

1. In 2019, people sent approximately ... emails every day.
a 2.5 billion b 3.7 billion c 294 billion
2. A person sent the first instant message from ... in 1992.
a the UK b the US c Israel
3. In 1998, ICQ ...
a changed its name. b had 100 million users. c was bought by another company.
4. Facebook Chat started in ...
a 2003. b 2008. c 2014.
5. In the very near future, it's likely that IM will replace ... at work.
a emails b phone calls c both emails and phone calls

Thinking

How is communication using instant messaging different from face-to-face communication?