

The history of mobile technology — and its future

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Home > Innovation > Advancements > The history of mobile technology — and its future

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By *Rose de Fremery*
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Although mobile phones may seem like a distinctly twenty-first century innovation, the history of mobile technology spans much further back than you might think. At the dawn of the twentieth century, a farmer in Kentucky was tinkering with the wireless phone that he had invented. By the 1920s, radiophones let passengers on ships contact people on land. Our desire to have mobile conversations, it turns out, has been with us for over a hundred years. Here's how mobile technology has shaped the world we live in during that time and how [mobile solutions](#) are poised to

influence our future in the coming years.



WRITTEN BY

Rose de Fremery

Writer

Rose de Fremery is a New York-based writer. She currently covers business IT topics such as technology innovation, mobile strategy, unified communications, CRM and marketing automation, IT management, and the virtual workforce for HP, Intel, Vonage, and IBM Mobile Business Insights....



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The history of mobile technology: Early beginnings

Right after Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone in 1876, inventors began working on a mobile version. As Motherboard notes, Bell himself tried his hand at it in 1880 with [the photophone](#), a telephone that could transmit speech using light. A short while later, in 1908, a Kentucky-based farmer and self-taught electrician named Nathan Stubblefield patented the design of a mobile phone that was intended to facilitate communications among boats, trains and way stations. Although it didn't catch on at the time, people never gave up their fascination with the idea of communicating while in transit.

Radiophones were in use on ships in the 1920s, allowing passengers to keep in contact with their friends and loved ones while traveling in the age before air travel. In 1924, wireless phones were tested on trains shuttling between Berlin and Hamburg. World War II saw an increase in the use of radio-based mobile telephony, enabling military forces in disparate battle zones to communicate with one another. Mobile phones for vehicles were another hot commodity early on,

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finding limited adoption in Europe and the United States.

In the 1940s, AT&T and Bell Labs offered a very limited [mobile telephone service](#) to their customers in the St. Louis, Missouri, area for a time, although it didn't have the coverage or the number of available channels necessary to be truly viable then. Equipment was bulky, too, particularly for intrepid midcentury users wishing to make mobile calls from their automobiles. But engineers kept working on the technology, refining it over time in the hopes that one day it would make their vision of a mobile world a reality.

Mobile phones make a great leap forward

Mobile technology took a great leap forward in 1973, when Motorola released its first mass-produced mobile phone. On April 3 of that year, [Martin Cooper made the first public call](#) ever placed via a mobile phone, as Wired reports. The models used in this era were usually referred to as 0g, or Zero Generation phones, and while they appear bricklike and clunky in comparison to today's palm-sized devices, they still bear a trace resemblance to the smartphones that later became a part of our daily lives.

As early as the 1980s, European engineers and administrators began discussing the possibility of a European digital cellular network, laying the groundwork for a later international standard. Meanwhile, Japan launched the first commercially automated national cellular phone network in 1981. Around this time, it was becoming more common for prominent politicians and business leaders to use car phones, which signaled a certain level of success and prestige. In 1989, Motorola released its MicroTac flip phone — a direct precursor to the personal mobile phones we use today.

Mobile telephony went international in 1987, as the GSM standard that supports interoperability between carriers around the globe was codified. Just a few years later, the world's first SMS message was sent in Britain. The BlackBerry arrived in 1999, heralding a new wave of mobile connectivity for business use. By the start of the twenty-first century, consumers and businesses were beginning to use mobile phones en masse for voice calling, email and limited text-based web browsing. The history of mobile technology saw an important milestone in 2003 with the arrival of 3G cellular broadband service, which would herald a new era of smartphones with full internet connectivity.

The present golden age and tantalizing future of mobile technology

After the iPhone arrived in 2007 — with the first Android device following suit in 2008 — mobile technology exploded into the marketplace and became ubiquitous in our lives. As VentureBeat reports, [five billion people](#) have a mobile phone connection today. There are more mobile subscriptions than there are human beings on the planet Earth. Today's 4G connectivity will give way to higher-bandwidth 5G access in the near future, ushering in another mobile technology boom that will further revolutionize the way we work and live.

With smartphones here to stay, it's worth anticipating where the [future technology of mobile phones](#) is headed next. Devices will

future technology of mobile phones is headed next. Devices will become sleeker with every iteration, and their functionality and meaning in our lives is also in a state of transition. Facial recognition, augmented reality and even virtual reality are becoming more commonplace on mobile devices. Some analysts speculate that smartphones will become extremely durable and possibly even foldable, offering improved battery life via wireless charging. The virtual assistants we now summon on our smartphones will become tomorrow's AI companions, smoothing the path before us and making our lives more convenient.

Today's wearables may give way to smaller and more diversified portable devices that we use to keep track of our communications, our health and much more. Though it makes some people skittish to contemplate, we might also be headed toward a "Black Mirror" future in which mobile technology is directly implanted in the body via chips. Our mobile future could quite possibly resemble our science fiction reveries much more closely than we ever could have expected.

The history of mobile technology is more extensive than we might immediately assume. As we proceed ever more rapidly into the future, it will be exciting to see how such bold innovation once again changes the world around us.

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