

One of the world's most important inventions was 'born' in March 1989 and is celebrating its 30th birthday. Read the article to find out what it is.

## Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

### Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

#### Vocabulary

1. ..... a network
2. ..... to make up
3. ..... imaginary
4. ..... abstract
5. ..... vague
6. ..... to contribute to
7. ..... a divide
8. ..... urban

#### Definition

- a. something that only exists as an idea, not as a thing you can see and touch
- b. a distance between two things
- c. a lot of objects that are all connected
- d. to give something to
- e. in a city or town
- f. not very clear or detailed
- g. something you imagine
- h. to make a big thing/number from smaller things/numbers

## The web at 30

Thirty years ago, this website and any other websites were impossible to imagine. Some people had computers in their homes, but they didn't use them for much. Maybe they just used them to play games or type letters to print out and send by post. But, in 1989, a British computer scientist called Tim Berners-Lee changed everything and one of the modern world's greatest inventions was born: the World Wide Web.

### The World Wide Web vs. the internet

Now, let's make sure you're not confused about something. We're not talking about the beginning of the internet itself. Most people use the words internet and web as if they're the same thing. But, in fact, the internet is much older than the web, and they're two different things. The internet was developed in the early 1970s by Vint Cerf and Bob Kahn. It is basically a huge network made up of smaller networks of computers that deliver packets of information to other computers. When this information is in the form of webpages, that's the World Wide Web.

## The idea that started it all

So, in 1989, when Tim Berners-Lee was working at CERN (the European Organisation for Nuclear Research) in Switzerland, the internet already existed. But it was nothing like it is now because there were no webpages. Hard to imagine, isn't it? Email also already existed (Queen Elizabeth II famously sent an email in 1976) and so did the idea of domain names, for example [britishcouncil.org](http://britishcouncil.org). Another tool that already existed was hypertext to jump from one document to another. But, without the web, none of it was as useful as it is now.

Berners-Lee got very frustrated at CERN because all the scientists had different kinds of computers. You could connect the computers with cables, but they couldn't 'speak' to each other. If you wanted information, you had to know exactly which computer that information was on and sit down in front of it and log in. Berners-Lee wrote a report that suggested a way of putting the internet, domain names and hypertext together into one system. This 'imaginary information system which everyone can read' was later called the World Wide Web (and that's why website addresses start with 'www'). At the time, his idea was so abstract that his boss called it 'vague but exciting'. Two years later, in 1991, the world's first website was built at CERN: <http://info.cern.ch> (the site you can see now is a copy made in 1992).

## The web today

Today, thirty years later, that idea is still exciting. The web is just part of the internet, but it is the part that connects us to the rest of the world. The telephone meant that one person could connect with one other person. Television meant that one person's ideas could reach millions of people in their homes. But, with the web, everyone who has internet access is connected and anyone can contribute to the information on it.

## Digital divide

The idea behind the web is to connect people and help them understand each other. But not everyone in the world has internet access – only 55 per cent of people, according to [internetworldstats.com](http://internetworldstats.com). Half the world's population lives in Asia, but only half of Asian people have the internet. In North America, 95 per cent of people have internet access and so do 85 per cent of Europeans. North America and Europe make up only 15 per cent of the world's population, but together they make up 25 per cent of the world's internet users. Compare this with Africa, which makes up 17 per cent of the world's population, but only 36 per cent of its people have internet access.

The digital divide isn't only geographical. If we compare men's and women's access to the internet, World Wide Web Foundation research shows that women are less likely to use the internet in many poor urban communities – 37 per cent of women versus 59 per cent of men surveyed were internet users.

If you're reading this, you're part of the half of the world that has access to this powerful tool. Perhaps our job for the next thirty years is to make the web available to the other half of the world and to help people use it to their best advantage.

## Sources:

<https://webfoundation.org/research/womens-rights-online-2015/>

## Tasks

### Task 1

Match the beginnings (1–8) and endings (a–h) of the sentences.

#### Beginning

1. The idea for the internet .....
2. The problem at CERN was .....
3. The first webpage .....
4. The web .....
5. Forty-five per cent of .....
6. A quarter of .....
7. Thirty-six per cent of .....
8. We should .....

#### Ending

- a. was published in 1991.
- b. Africans are able to use the internet.
- c. the world's internet users live in North America and Europe.
- d. make the web available to everyone.
- e. was developed in the 1970s.
- f. the world does not have internet access.
- g. that information was not easy to access.
- h. is a more powerful invention than television or the telephone.

### Task 2

Are the sentences true or false?

	<b>Answer</b>	
1. The World Wide Web refers to a network of computers around the world.	True	False
2. The internet is just a part of the World Wide Web.	True	False
3. The Queen of England sent the first-ever email.	True	False
4. Tim Berners-Lee had to invent hypertext before he could invent the World Wide Web.	True	False
5. He created the web because scientists at CERN didn't like to talk to each other to share ideas.	True	False
6. You can no longer visit the first-ever webpage.	True	False
7. Access to the World Wide Web is more or less equal across the world.	True	False
8. In poor urban communities, as many women as men use the internet.	True	False

### Discussion

Imagine your life without the internet. How would your day be different?

## Answers

### Preparation task

1. c
2. h
3. g
4. a
5. f
6. d
7. b
8. e

### Task 1

1. e
2. g
3. a
4. h
5. f
6. c
7. b
8. d

### Task 2

1. False
2. False
3. False
4. False
5. False
6. True
7. False
8. False