Looking back at the original Chromecast, which just turned 10 years old

Ten years ago today — July 24th, 2013 — Google announced a $35 streaming stick called the Chromecast.

I was one of the first journalists to lay hands on the dongle, and it wasn't yet clear how big a deal it'd be. The demo was choppy! It could arguably be classified as a me-too product given Apple's AirPlay was already three years old and Miracast was a buzzword across the industry. (Do you even *remember* Miracast? It was on, like, *every* smart TV.)

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And of course, the Chromecast was compared to the Nexus Q, arguably Google's worst hardware flop in history.

But $35 to sling the Netflix and YouTube you're already watching to your television screen turned out to be a magical

notion – *The Verge*'s Nilay Patel called it a no-brainer for laptop surfers – and frankly, so was the concept of a cheap streaming stick at all. (Amazon's Fire Stick and Roku's Streaming Stick copycatted the idea.)

Google launched the era when streaming gadgets became an impulse buy, a common stocking stuffer, and *the* thing to make sure you pack before your next hotel stay – at least until Alex Cranz's dream of AirPlay in hotels someday comes to pass.

By September of the same year the Chromecast arrived, I all but predicted Miracast was dead. Two years later, Nick Statt wrote for us about how the Chromecast had sold 20 million units to successfully become Google's Trojan horse into our homes. And in October 2017, the last time Google shared sales figures, the company had put 55 million Chromecast devices into the world, including TVs and set-top boxes with Cast built in.

Sure, the original Chromecast could be a bit of a tricky purchase for friends and family. Even the concept of "Casting" takes a little effort to get your head around – the video streams from the internet, not your phone, *unless it actually does* because you're mirroring. (AirPlay is roughly the same.) Not every app had a "Cast" button, and not all of them worked identically.

I sometimes found Netflix or YouTube (but usually Netflix) would stop responding to Cast commands when I wanted to change programs – and it's not like there were other good ways to do that since the Chromecast had only a single button and no remote control. I also wound up tossing *two* first-generation Chromecasts because they got extremely glitchy over the years; my mostly unfounded theory is that they overheat.

So it wasn't much of a surprise to me when Google's second-gen Chromecast became a dongle that dangles, with a long, bendable HDMI arm to keep it further away from the TV. And I think I

can speak for the entire *Verge* staff when I say we were ecstatic to see the 2020 Chromecast ship with a full-fledged remote and excellent 4K playback (including Dolby Vision and Atmos) for a cool $50. You can still use your phone and laptop to cast, but that remote means it's no longer necessary.

I bet Google sold quite a few of those 2020 models — unlike the niche but awesome Chromecast Audio.

But even without the 2020 Chromecast to cement its legacy, the original made quite a mark. We ranked it No. 39 in our "gadgets of the decade" list for making "streaming video a normal part of many households," in the words of my colleague Barbara Krasnoff. Google kept updating the OG Chromecast for nearly a decade, too.

The Chromecast wasn't the cheapest game in town for long. These days, Walmart has a surprisingly good $20 puck, and even Google's recent $30 Chromecast that's limited to 1080p playback trades blows with streaming sticks from Roku and Amazon. But every one of them has a simple casting solution like the one Google introduced — enough that there's even talk of Matter unifying them.

There is one shadow hanging over the Chromecast's legacy, though. The official story behind Chromecast, as shared in an official Google blog post in 2015, is that Google engineer Majd Bakar came up with the idea in 2008 after watching his wife repeatedly use her laptop to *pick* movies, then switch to her game console to watch them on the big screen. He pitched the idea sometime between 2011 and 2012, it seems.

But a company named Touchstream Technologies is arguing that Google stole some ideas along the way.

This week, a federal district court jury in Texas issued the unanimous verdict that Google owes $338.7 million — because the Chromecast infringes on three Touchstream patents. In its legal complaint, the company claims to have met with Google

and discussed a partnership in December 2011 for its Shodogg tech, says it signed NDAs, and suggests that Google suddenly decided not to go ahead with that partnership in February 2012.

It’s possible it’s just another case of patent trolling. The Texas courts are notoriously friendly to companies that sue over technology they’ve never even attempted to produce. But Shodogg does at least look like it was pursuing deals in public. It’ll be interesting to see if the Texas verdict sticks.

Correction, 5:50PM ET: *The jury verdict was reached July 21st, not the 24th as I originally wrote. News of the verdict was revealed on the 24th (today).*

https://www.theverge.com/23537741/google-chromecast-10-year-old-happy-birthday