Microsoft turns 50 today, and it made me think about MS-DOS 5.0



On this day in 1975, Bill Gates and Paul Allen founded a company called Micro-Soft in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The two men had worked together before, as members of the Lakeside Programming group in the early 70s and as co-founders of a road traffic analysis company called Traf-O-Data. But Micro-Soft, later renamed to drop the hyphen and relocated to its current headquarters in Redmond, Washington, would be the company that would transform personal computing over the next five decades.

I’m not here to do a history of Microsoft, because Wikipedia already exists and because the company has already put together a gauzy 50th-anniversary retrospective site with some retro-themed wallpapers. But the anniversary did make me try to remember which Microsoft product I consciously used for the first time, the one that made me aware of the company and the

work it was doing.

To get the answer, just put a decimal point in the number “50”—my first Microsoft product was MS-DOS 5.0.

Riding with DOS in the Windows era

I remember this version of MS-DOS so vividly because it was the version that we ran on our first computer. I couldn’t actually tell you what computer it *was*, though, not because I don’t remember it but because it was a generic yellowed hand-me-down that was prodigiously out of date, given to us by well-meaning people from our church who didn’t know enough to know how obsolete the system was.

It was a clone of the original IBM PC 5150, initially released in 1981; I believe we took ownership of it sometime in 1995 or 1996. It had an Intel 8088, two 5.25-inch floppy drives, and 500-something KB of RAM (also, if memory serves, a sac of spider eggs). But it had no hard drive inside, meaning that anything I wanted to run on or save from this computer needed to use a pile of moldering black plastic diskettes, more than a few of which were already going bad.

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