

Inventor Sir Tim Berners-Lee given special Pride of Britain award for developing the World Wide Web

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Not only did Sir Tim invent the Web, he gave it away for free

Sir Tim will get the Judges special award for outstanding achievement at the Pride of Britain Awards 2014

It is impossible to think of any aspect of our lives that has not been transformed by the World Wide Web.

It has sparked a revolution in the way we communicate, work, learn, shop, connect with our friends, travel, engage with politics and raise money for charity.

We use it for entertainment, to listen to music and to watch films, but it has also powered campaigns that have changed the world and sparked revolutions that toppled governments. And it is all down to one man, who not only invented the World Wide Web, but gave his creation to the world for free.

It is 25 years since Sir Tim Berners-Lee devised plans for the Web while working at the European physics laboratory CERN. He was frustrated that scientists would come to the Swiss centre to take part in experiments, but once they returned to their own laboratories across the globe, it was difficult to swap results and data.

Also researchers used dozens of different computers, each with different software, which meant none could

communicate with each other.

Sir Tim, who was working at CERN as a software engineer, says: “I found it frustrating that in those days there was different information on different computers. You had to log on to different computers to get at it.

“Also, sometimes you had to learn a different program on each computer. So finding out how things worked was really difficult. Often it was just easier to go and ask people when they were having coffee.”

Sir Tim became focused on the challenge of finding an easier way to swap information. He wrote a paper titled Information Management: A Proposal, which outlined the initial idea of the Web as “a universal linked information system”. His boss wrote, “Vague but exciting” on the cover, and Sir Tim went away to work on his plans.

Working with colleagues at CERN, he tried different programs and tested his work, and, by October 1990, he had created the three fundamental technologies that remain the foundation of today’s Web – HTML, URI and HTTP.

[The first website](#) , with links that users could click on with a mouse, was launched in December of that year.

At that stage, the technology was known as The Mesh, but Sir Tim coined the term World Wide Web and by 1991 people outside CERN started to access and connect to it.

In 1993, CERN announced the technology would be available to everyone for free, and the biggest communications revolution since the printing press was under way.

Sir Tim says: “Some people point out that the Web can be used for all the wrong things. For downloading pictures of horrible, gruesome, violent or obscene things, or ways of making bombs which terrorists could use.

“Other people say how their lives have been saved because they found out about the disease they had on the Web, and figured out how to cure it.

“The thing to remember is that any really powerful thing can be used for good or evil. Dynamite can be used to build tunnels or to make missiles.

“So what is made of the Web is up to us. You, me, and everyone else.”

Don’t miss the most moving awards show of the year: ITV, 8pm, Tuesday 7 October