



Stanford eCorner

Genesis of Palm Computing

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Hawkins talks about his life, his education and work experience. He started his career at Intel for 3 years and then moved to a start-up that he did not start. While working at the latter he created his first product - first pen-based computer. He soon realised that all personal computing ought to be smaller and simpler. With this thought he started on the path to try and accelerate this shift - and that was the genesis of Palm computing.



Transcript

Let me just give you a little synopsis about my life. I hope you don't find this too boring. I'm 45 years old. I've been working for 23 years. So I studied Electrical engineering at Cornell. And I've been basically into the computer industry since that time. So, I got a few years under my belt. I hope to have a few more years to go. I started my career at Intel. Now, this is back in '79, '80 and '81.

I was there for three years. I actually got to see a really interesting transition there. This is when they were, basically, being clobbered and killed in the memory business which was what their business was. And were moving into the microprocessor business which really hadn't happened yet. This is a very difficult time for them. And it was an interesting transition to go through. So, it was something I learned back then. I, then, went to join a start-up company. I wasn't one of the founders. I didn't design the product.

It was GRiD systems. GRiD invented the laptop. They really invented the laptop. They were the first few people to make a computer where the screen folds over the keyboard. They got a patent on that. I joined them, not in engineering, but in a marketing role, actually, a training and marketing role. And I helped them launched that product. That was a comprehensive struggle. They never could fail. You would like put them out of their misery or make them successful.

But, no, they just kind of hung in there for quite a number of years. They were really doing a 'hot', creative idea but the people who found that company came out of the mini-computer business. And so, the software thoughts they had were sort of mini-computer thoughts. They kind of missed the beginning wave of the PC revolution. But it was interesting to be there. I was there on and off, almost for a total of 10 years until 1992. During that time I, actually, created my first product which was an entrepreneurial effort in its own right. I convinced a company that we ought to go into a new business. They let me run the whole thing. They let me create it and build it.

And this was in the late 1980's. And it was the first pen-based computer that really came to the market. I didn't call them pen-based computers but that's what it was. I brought one with me. What happened to my bag? Oh, right here. I'm not going to bring all the products I've made over my lifetime. But this is the first one I designed. This is a GRiD Pad. And I thought you'd like to see it because this was state-of-the-art at one time. That's not long ago, 14 years ago, I guess.

We had my original success with this. We, actually, built the business at its peak. It was about \$30 million a year, And 10

years ago, which wasn't too bad. But I did that under the auspices of GRiD. It wasn't really a start-up but in many ways was entrepreneurial within that company. In 1992, I got the idea. Well, some people told me about the idea. And I thought it was a good one. They said, "Hey, we like these things. This is pretty cool but can you make ones a lot smaller and more personal." I got this 'bug' at that time.

I started realizing; I had this sort of thought about personal computing, in general. I said, "You know what all personal computing ought to be small. And ought to be reliable. And ought to be cheap and inexpensive. And use less power. And not require an IT staff to run and so on." And I've come convinced and I still believe this, that the future personal computing; if you think about the world and 6 billion people on it, the future personal computing had to be something much smaller and simpler than what we had at that time. What we typically consider a personal computer today. And so I started on the path trying to accelerate that. Not that the world needed me to do that. but I said, "Gee, maybe, I can help out and we can accelerate it and make some good products." And that was the genesis of Palm Computing.