

The Demise of the Typewriter?

The typewriter...perhaps the greatest innovation in writing since the invention of the printing press and movable type...is, not surprisingly on the verge of extinction.

By the mid-19th century, the increasing pace of business communication had created a need for mechanization of the writing process. Stenographers and telegraphers could take down information at rates up to 130 words per minute, whereas a writer with a pen was limited to a maximum of 30 words per minute (the 1853 speed record).

The first commercial typewriters were introduced in 1874, but did not become common in offices until after the mid-1880s. The typewriter quickly became an indispensable tool for practically all writing other than personal handwritten correspondence. It was widely used by professional writers, in offices, and for business correspondence in private homes.

Although electric typewriters would not achieve widespread popularity until nearly a century later, the basic groundwork for the electric typewriter was laid by the Universal Stock Ticker, invented by Thomas Edison in 1870. This device remotely printed letters and numbers on a stream of paper tape from input generated by a specially designed typewriter at the other end of a telegraph line.

Typewriters were a standard fixture in most offices up to the 1980s. Thereafter, they began to be largely supplanted by computers. Nevertheless, typewriters remain common in some parts of the world, are required for a few specific applications, and are popular in certain subcultures. In many Indian cities and towns, typewriters are still used, especially in roadside and legal offices due to a lack of continuous, reliable electricity. The QWERTY keyboard layout, developed for typewriters, remains the standard for computer keyboards.

Notable typewriter manufacturers included E. Remington and Sons, IBM, Godrej, Imperial Typewriter Company, Oliver Typewriter Company, Olivetti, Royal Typewriter Company, Smith Corona, Underwood Typewriter Company, Adler Typewriter Company and Olympia Werke.

Although it was reported in 2011 that the last manufacturer of office typewriters (in India) had closed, there are a few manufacturers still operating (China, for one). In fact, typewriters have made a comeback within the past few years. People still enjoy using them and collecting them, and some even enjoy cleaning and repairing them to keep them typing. (Tom Hanks, for example, collects typewriters). [<https://www.typewriters101.com/what-you-need-to-know-about-buying-a-typewriter.html>]

