

Johannes Gutenberg

¹ With the invention of the personal computer and the Internet, a new age in communications began. Now people could communicate faster and more easily than ever before. Writing, editing, and storing information became quick and easy. It was no longer necessary to write draft after draft when changes could be made so easily using a word processor program. Messages could now be sent in no time to anywhere in the world, without addressing envelopes or paying for stamps.



² Centuries earlier, around the year 1450, a similar revolution in communications had occurred in Germany. This happened when Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. Gutenberg was not the first person to use printing to copy a piece of writing. Printing had already been invented in China, where they used clay to print Chinese characters. Small items, such as posters and flyers, were already being printed in Europe too, using the woodblock method of printing. Books and other larger works, however, were still being copied by hand. At this time, books were usually produced only in Latin, and only the most educated people read them. Gutenberg's printing press changed all of this.

³ Gutenberg's printing press used type made of metal. Each letter or punctuation mark was cast separately. This meant that the type could be rearranged over and over again to print many different items. This improvement to the printing process was called moveable type.

⁴ With Gutenberg's method, the letters were set by hand into a wooden frame, or printing block. Then ink was rolled over the whole block. Next, a heavy press pushed the printing block down onto a sheet of paper. The printing block could be used over and over again to print many copies, and then the type could be rearranged to set the next page.

⁵ Gutenberg printed calendars, grammar books, and all types of useful publications, but his really extraordinary project was the Gutenberg Bible. Nothing like it had ever been printed before.

⁶ The Gutenberg Bible was a two-volume book that was 1,282 pages long. Even with the printing press, it was a huge undertaking. Gutenberg couldn't do it by himself. He had to recruit workers and find wealthy patrons to sponsor the project. When the printing was done, around 1454, they had 180 copies of the Bible, 150 printed on paper and 30 printed on parchment. Artists added the colorful, or "illuminated," letters to each copy by hand. Forty-eight copies of Gutenberg's Bible still exist today, including two in the Gutenberg Museum. They are considered treasures, not only because they were the latest in technology in their time, but also because they are beautiful books.

⁷ Gutenberg's printing press brought about a revolution in communications; much like the computer did much more recently. Once books could be mass-produced, they began to be

printed in the languages that people spoke every day, not just in Latin. More and more people began to read and write. In fact, Gutenberg's printing press was one of the inventions that led up to the great changes beginning to happen in Europe in the late Middle Ages. Changes in the way people lived and worked, including the Renaissance of art and literature and the Industrial Revolution, all had roots in the new communication technology that Gutenberg began with his printing press.
