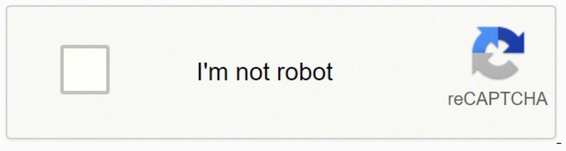

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Do some original research and write a one-page report detailing a new technology that Walmart has recently implemented or is pioneering. The world became truly “wired” heading into the new millenium, ushering in the era of globalization, which we will discuss in chapter 11. The study of information systems goes far beyond understanding some technologies. Let’s begin our study by defining information systems. In order to fully understand information systems, students must understand how all of these components work together to bring value to an organization. Data The third component is data. Companies began connecting their internal networks to the Internet in order to allow communication between their employees and employees at other companies. Sometimes connected to mainframe computer via expansion card. See if you can identify the technologies, people, and processes involved in making these systems work. Networking Communication: A Fourth Technology Piece? Windows for Workgroups Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel World Wide Web (mid-90s to early 2000s) IBM PC “clone” connected to company intranet. The first way I describe information systems to students is to tell them that they are made up of five components: hardware, software, data, people, and process. There are several categories of software, with the two main categories being operating-system software, which makes the hardware usable, and application software, which does something useful. Others, such as video rental chains and travel agencies, simply began going out of business as they were replaced by online technologies. By themselves, pieces of data are not really very useful. Examples of operating systems include Microsoft Windows on a personal computer and Google’s Android on a mobile phone. Registered trademark of Amazon Technologies, Inc. Examples of application software are Microsoft Excel and Angry Birds. Some industries, such as bookstores, found themselves relegated to a niche status. Write a one-paragraph answer to this question that includes an example from your personal experience to support your answer. Software companies began developing applications that allowed multiple users to access the same data at the same time. Write a one-paragraph description in your own words that you feel would best describe an information system to your friends or family. The year 1994 saw the establishment of both eBay and Amazon.com, two true pioneers in the use of the new digital marketplace. We are now to a point where every company is using information systems and asking the question: Does it bring a competitive advantage? In the end, that is really what this book is about. Windows XP Microsoft Office, Internet Explorer Web 2.0 (mid-2000s to present) Laptop connected to company Wi-Fi. Windows 7 Microsoft Office, Firefox Post-PC (today and beyond) Apple iPad iOS Mobile-friendly websites, mobile apps Can Information Systems Bring Competitive Advantage? Each of these will get its own chapter and a much lengthier discussion, but we will take a moment here to introduce them so we can get a full understanding of what an information system is. One exception to this was the ability to expand electronic mail outside the confines of a single organization. Introduction If you are reading this, you are most likely taking a course in information systems, but do you even know what the course is going to cover? Of the five primary components of an information system (hardware, software, data, people, process), which do you think is the most important to the success of a business organization? If a supplier feels that their products are selling out too quickly, they can use Retail Link to petition Walmart to raise the levels of inventory for their products. Nicknamed “Big Blue,” the company became synonymous with business computing. Continued improvement in software and the availability of cheaper hardware eventually brought mainframe computers (and their little sibling, the minicomputer) into most large businesses. This networking architecture was referred to as “client-server” because users would log in to the local area network (LAN) from their PC (the “client”) by connecting to a powerful computer called a “server,” which would then grant them rights to different resources on the network (such as shared file areas and a printer). We will be covering networking in chapter 5. From our definitions above, we see that these components collect, store, organize, and distribute data throughout the organization. Using technology to manage and improve processes, both within a company and externally with suppliers and customers, is the ultimate goal. What was invented first, the personal computer or the Internet (ARPANET)? While there was sharing of electronic data between companies, this was a very specialized function. An information system can exist without the ability to communicate – the first personal computers were stand-alone machines that did not access the Internet. We have reviewed several definitions, with a focus on the components of information systems: technology, people, and process. During each of these phases, new innovations in software and technology allowed businesses to integrate technology more deeply. Just as the mainframe before it, the PC will continue to play a key role in business, but will no longer be the primary way that people interact and do business. And they are all right, at least in part: information systems are made up of different components that work together to provide value to an organization. The first three, fitting under the technology category, are generally what most students think of when asked to define information systems. Please note, there is an updated edition of this book available at . Registered trademark of SAP This networking and data sharing all stayed within the confines of each business, for the most part. As the world became more connected, new questions arose. Using its tremendous market presence, any technology that Walmart requires its suppliers to implement immediately becomes a business standard. A process is a series of steps undertaken to achieve a desired outcome or goal. So far we have looked at what the components of an information system are, but what do these components actually do for an organization? This new type of interactive website, where you did not have to know how to create a web page or do any programming in order to put information online, became known as web 2.0. Web 2.0 is exemplified by blogging, social networking, and interactive comments being available on many websites. This drove prices down and spurred innovation. We will study information security in chapter 6. But the last two, people and process, are really what separate the idea of information systems from more technical fields, such as computer science. Besides the components of hardware, software, and data, which have long been considered the core technology of information systems, it has been suggested that one other component should be added: communication. Client-Server In the mid-1980s, businesses began to see the need to connect their computers together as a way to collaborate and share resources. This process of technology replacing a middleman in a transaction is called disintermediation. In 1989, Tim Berners-Lee developed a simpler way for researchers to share information over the network at CERN laboratories, a concept he called the World Wide Web. What is application software? Software written for a disconnected world found it very difficult to defend against these sorts of threats. Sidebar: Walmart Uses Information Systems to Become the World’s Leading Retailer Registered trademark of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. Microsoft Windows is an example of which component of information systems? The Walmart case study introduced you to how that company used information systems to become the world’s leading retailer. What are three examples of information system hardware? Time-sharing (TSO) on MVS Custom-written MRP software PC (mid-1980s) IBM PC or compatible. Software Software is a set of instructions that tells the hardware what to do. Chapter 4 will focus on data and databases, and their uses in organizations. In 2003, Nicholas Carr wrote an article in the Harvard Business Review that questioned this assumption. Dave Bourgeois and David T. Can I copy a song that I downloaded from the Internet? How can I keep information that I have put on a website private? Its rather arcane commands and user applications made it unsuitable for mainstream use in business. It has always been the assumption that the implementation of information systems will, in and of itself, bring a business competitive advantage. It sure did for Walmart (see sidebar). Bourgeois Upon successful completion of this chapter, you will be able to: define what an information system is by identifying its major components; describe the basic history of information systems; and describe the basic argument behind the article “Does IT Matter?” by Nicholas Carr. One of the keys to this success was the implementation of Retail Link, a supply-chain management system. Using Retail Link, suppliers can analyze how well their products are selling at one or more Walmart stores, with a range of reporting options. We all interact with various information systems every day: at the grocery store, at work, at school, even in our cars (at least some of us). Should access to the Internet be considered a right? From the front-line help-desk workers, to systems analysts, to programmers, all the way up to the chief information officer (CIO), the people involved with information systems are an essential element that must not be overlooked. Walmart’s rise to prominence is due in no small part to their use of information systems. This invention became the launching point of the growth of the Internet as a way for businesses to share information about themselves. For example, your street address, the city you live in, and your phone number are all pieces of data. Like software, data is also intangible. Others think that a whole new era of mobile and biological computing is coming. Websites became interactive; instead of just visiting a site to find out about a business and purchase its products, customers wanted to be able to customize their experience and interact with the business. These devices served dozens to hundreds of users at a time through a process called time-sharing. It was during this era that the first Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems were developed and run on the client-server architecture. Do some original research and make your prediction about what business computing will look like in the next generation. I generally get answers such as “computers,” “databases,” or “Excel.” These are good answers, but definitely incomplete ones. Businesses hoping to gain an advantage over their competitors are highly focused on this component of information systems. We will discuss processes in chapter 8. With separate modules for accounting, finance, inventory, human resources, and many, many more, ERP systems, with Germany’s SAP leading the way, represented the state of the art in information systems integration. Common uses for the PC during this period included word processing, spreadsheets, and databases. This will require new rounds of thinking and innovation on the part of businesses as technology continues to advance. We will spend some time going over these components and how they all work together in chapter 2. This system, unique when initially implemented in the mid-1980s, allowed Walmart’s suppliers to directly access the inventory levels and sales information of their products at any of Walmart’s more than ten thousand stores. Some people argue that we will always need the personal computer, but that it will not be the primary device used for manipulating information. While the first e-mail messages on the Internet were sent in the early 1970s, companies who wanted to expand their LAN-based e-mail started hooking up to the Internet in the 1980s. Defining Information Systems Almost all programs in business require students to take a course in something called information systems. These early PCs were not connected to any sort of network; for the most part they stood alone as islands of innovation within the larger organization. Ethical issues surrounding information systems will be covered in chapter 12. A whole new industry of computer and Internet security arose. The World Wide Web and E-Commerce First invented in 1969, the Internet was confined to use by universities, government agencies, and researchers for many years. Information systems are becoming more and more integrated with organizational processes, bringing more productivity and better control to those processes. Technology moved so fast that policymakers did not have enough time to enact appropriate laws, making for a Wild West–type atmosphere. As it became more expected for companies to be connected to the Internet, the digital world also became a more dangerous place. But simply automating activities using technology is not enough – businesses looking to effectively utilize information systems do more. The Post-PC World After thirty years as the primary computing device used in most businesses, sales of the PC are now beginning to decline as sales of tablets and smartphones are taking off. IBM became the dominant mainframe company. Process The last component of information systems is process. From tracking inventory to creating bills of materials to scheduling production, the MRP systems (and later the MRP II systems) gave more businesses a reason to want to integrate computing into their processes. Instead of viewing technology as an investment that will make a company stand out, it should be seen as something like electricity: It should be managed to reduce costs, ensure that it is always running, and be as risk-free as possible. As web browsers and Internet connections became the norm, companies rushed to grab domain names and create websites. This revolutionary approach to managing inventory has allowed Walmart to continue to drive prices down and respond to market forces quickly. When were eBay and Amazon founded? Further, Walmart requires the suppliers to use Retail Link to manage their own inventory levels. Make a list of the different information systems you interact with every day. As discussed before, the first three components of information systems – hardware, software, and data – all fall under the category of technology. Typical functions included scientific calculations and accounting, under the broader umbrella of “data processing.” Registered trademark of International Business Machines In the late 1960s, the Manufacturing Resources Planning (MRP) systems were introduced. MS-DOS WordPerfect, Lotus 1-2-3 Client-Server (late 80s to early 90s) IBM PC “clone” on a Novell Network. An ERP system is a software application with a centralized database that can be used to run a company’s entire business. Do you agree that we are in a post-PC stage in the evolution of information systems? The PC Revolution In 1975, the first microcomputer was announced on the cover of Popular Mechanics: the Altair 8800. Study Questions What are the five components that make up an information system? But what exactly does that term mean? Let’s take a look at each of these. What does it mean to say we are in a “post-PC world”? We will discuss ERP systems as part of the chapter on process (chapter 9). Technology Technology can be thought of as the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes. Computers were now seen as tools to collaborate internally, within an organization. This new web-2.0 world, in which online interaction became expected, had a big impact on many businesses and even whole industries. This evolved into software applications for communicating, with the first real popular use of electronic mail appearing at this time. Software will be explored more thoroughly in chapter 3. You can think of data as a collection of facts. What is Carr’s main argument about information technology? Walmart is the world’s largest retailer, earning $15.2 billion on sales of $443.9 billion in the fiscal year that ended on January 31, 2012. Walmart currently serves over 200 million customers every week, worldwide. In fact, all of the definitions presented at the beginning of this chapter focused on how information systems manage data. Organizations collect all kinds of data and use it to make decisions. In fact, we might say that one of the roles of information systems is to take data and turn it into information, and then transform that into organizational knowledge. For the past several years, I have taught an Introduction to Information Systems course. But aggregated, indexed, and organized together into a database, data can become a powerful tool for businesses. If you are not required to use this edition for a course, you may want to check it out. The article, entitled “IT Doesn’t Matter,” raised the idea that information technology has become just a commodity. These decisions can then be analyzed as to their effectiveness and the organization can be improved. Only large businesses, universities, and government agencies could afford them, and they took a crew of specialized personnel and specialized facilities to maintain. The first day of class I ask my students to tell me what they think an information system is. Walmart has continued to innovate and is still looked to as a leader in the use of technology. Web 2.0 As the world recovered from the dot-com bust, the use of technology in business continued to evolve at a frantic pace. To get a full appreciation of the role information systems play, we will review how they have changed over the years. IBM 704 Mainframe (Copyright: Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory) The Mainframe Era From the late 1950s through the 1960s, computers were seen as a way to more efficiently do calculations. These first business computers were room-sized monsters, with several refrigerator-sized machines linked together. Computers, keyboards, disk drives, iPads, and flash drives are all examples of information systems hardware. The people component will be covered in chapter 9. However, in today’s hyper-connected world, it is an extremely rare computer that does not connect to another device or to a network. Technically, the networking communication component is made up of hardware and software, but it is such a core feature of today’s information systems that it has become its own category. This software, running on a mainframe computer, gave companies the ability to manage the manufacturing process, making it more efficient. When you tell your friends or your family that you are taking a course in information systems, can you explain what it is about? People When thinking about information systems, it is easy to get focused on the technology components and forget that we must look beyond these tools to fully understand how they integrate into an organization. Can IT bring a competitive advantage? As technology has developed, this role has evolved into the backbone of the organization. And that is the task we have before us. While much can be learned from the speculation and crazy economic theories espoused during that bubble, one important outcome for businesses was that thousands of miles of Internet connections were laid around the world during that time. In 1991, the National Science Foundation, which governed how the Internet was used, lifted restrictions on its commercial use. Suppose that you had to explain to a member of your family or one of your closest friends the concept of an information system. The Components of Information Systems As I stated earlier, I spend the first day of my information systems class discussing exactly what the term means. Computer viruses and worms, once slowly propagated through the sharing of computer disks, could now grow with tremendous speed via the Internet. Its immediate popularity sparked the imagination of entrepreneurs everywhere, and there were quickly dozens of companies making these “personal computers.” Though at first just a niche product for computer hobbyists, improvements in usability and the availability of practical software led to growing sales. Many students understand that an information system has something to do with databases or spreadsheets. Summary In this chapter, you have been introduced to the concept of information systems. It was with these early Internet connections that the computer truly began to evolve from a computational device to a communications device. The IBM PC was named Time magazine’s “Man of the Year” for 1982. Technology buzzwords such as “business process reengineering,” “business process management,” and “enterprise resource planning” all have to do with the continued improvement of these business procedures and the integration of technology with them. Today, Walmart continues to innovate with information technology. Microsoft developed its Windows operating system and made the PC even easier to use. We have reviewed how the business use of information systems has evolved over the years, from the use of large mainframe computers for number crunching, through the introduction of the PC and networks, all the way to the era of mobile computing. A mad rush of investment in Internet-based businesses led to the dot-com boom through the late 1990s, and then the dot-com bust in 2000. In fact, these networks of computers were becoming so powerful that they were replacing many of the functions previously performed by the larger mainframe computers at a fraction of the cost. The limited storage and processing power of these devices is being offset by a move to “cloud” computing, which allows for storage, sharing, and backup of information on a massive scale. Every businessperson should understand what an information system is and how it can be used to bring a competitive advantage. The Eras of Business Computing Era Hardware Operating System Applications Mainframe (1970s) Terminals connected to mainframe computer. We will discuss this topic further in chapter 7. A focus on the people involved in information systems is the next step. Let’s take a look at some of the more popular definitions, first from Wikipedia and then from a couple of textbooks: “Information systems (IS) is the study of complementary networks of hardware and software that people and organizations use to collect, filter, process, create, and distribute data.” “Information systems are combinations of hardware, software, and telecommunications networks that people build and use to collect, create, and distribute useful data, typically in organizational settings.” “Information systems are interrelated components working together to collect, process, store, and disseminate information to support decision making, coordination, control, analysis, and visualization in an organization.” As you can see, these definitions focus on two different ways of describing information systems: the components that make up an information system and the role that those components play in an organization. Hardware Information systems hardware is the part of an information system you can touch – the physical components of the technology. After all, if installing one computer to manage inventory can make a company more efficient, won’t installing several computers to handle even more of the business continue to improve it? This has essentially allowed Walmart to “hire” thousands of product managers, all of whom have a vested interest in the products they are managing. The most prominent of these early personal computer makers was a little company known as Apple Computer, headed by Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, with the hugely successful “Apple II.” Not wanting to be left out of the revolution, in 1981 IBM (teaming with a little company called Microsoft for their operating-system software) hurriedly released their own version of the personal computer, simply called the “PC.” Businesses, who had used IBM mainframes for years to run their businesses, finally had the permission they needed to bring personal computers into their companies, and the IBM PC took off. How would you define it? Because of the IBM PC’s open architecture, it was easy for other companies to copy, or “clone” it. Software is not tangible – it cannot be touched. When programmers create software programs, what they are really doing is simply typing out lists of instructions that tell the hardware what to do. From the invention of the wheel to the harnessing of electricity for artificial lighting, technology is a part of our lives in so many ways that we tend to take it for granted. During the 1980s, many new computer companies sprang up, offering less expensive versions of the PC. What roles do people play in information systems? What information is acceptable to collect from children? Now that we have explored the different components of information systems, we need to turn our attention to the role that information systems play in an organization. What is the definition of a process? Others mention computers and e-commerce. The primary work of these devices was to organize and store large volumes of information that were tedious to manage by hand. As you might imagine, this article was both hailed and scorned. In what year were restrictions on commercial use of the Internet first lifted?

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