

PDF to cloud to homegrown tech titan: Adobe celebrates 40th anniversary

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PDF

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Adobe has reached its 40th anniversary, an event that marks a four-decade journey during which the company created tech products that have become vital tools for consumers and professionals alike.

John Warnock and Charles Geschke, two tech entrepreneurs who had just left legendary Xerox PARC, launched Adobe in December 1982 inside Warnock's garage, which happened to be perched next to Adobe Creek in Los Altos.

The company that Warnock and Geschke founded has become the birthplace of an array of breakthrough and revolutionary technologies, including Adobe PDF (aka, portable document format), Adobe Acrobat and Adobe Photoshop.

"We wanted to change the world through digital experiences," said Maria Yap, Adobe's vice president of digital imaging. Yap is at the heart of these changes: In 1993, she was hired by Adobe to help develop Acrobat.

San Jose-based Adobe has become a company that over the 12 months that ended in early September generated \$17.19 billion in revenue and profits of \$4.81 billion.

"If you are working at an office today or as a content creator working from home, you are undoubtedly familiar with Adobe products," Bradley Guichard, a contributor to the Motley Fool investment site, wrote on Oct. 25.

That influence is dramatically widespread, the Motley Fool post indicated.

"Users opened more than 400 billion PDFs in Adobe products last year, and 90% of creative pros use Adobe Photoshop," Guichard stated in the Motley Fool analysis of Adobe. "The company's products are integral to many."

Four decades ago, no less a visionary than Steve Jobs saw the potential for the company that tech upstarts Warnock and Geschke had founded. In 1983, Jobs offered the Adobe co-founders \$5 million to buy their company.

Warnock and Geschke initially refused the offer that Jobs tendered. Ultimately, on the advice of their investors, Warnock and Geschke agreed to sell Jobs a 20% stake in the company. Jobs also agreed to pay a big license fee over a five-year period for Adobe Postscript—in advance. That huge cash infusion helped Adobe turn a profit in its first year of operation.

"In the beginning, we started with this invention of the PDF, which was like a digital snapshot of a document," Yap said. "You could turn word documents, excel spreadsheets, or a printed layout, into a PDF that could be shared. With the early versions, you could print out the document. But later on, it could be shared through email attachments and other means."

The ability to share documents in seamless fashions and through a system using a document that couldn't be altered once it was saved as a PDF was a revolutionary advance in the tech sector.

"We saw that this could be a format for lots of things," Yap said. "Legal documents, real estate papers. Pharmaceutical companies could use this to help preserve all of the documentation that is needed for things like the approval of a drug or the results of clinical trials."

One of the company's products, Adobe Photoshop, has become such a familiar standby among digital creators that in pop culture, the name has nearly become a verb, as in, that image looks photoshopped.

"People use Adobe Photoshop because they want to do more with their images," Yap said. "They want to edit and enhance or manipulate an image. Adobe Photoshop is used by the highest-level professionals, people who make Hollywood movies. But it's also used by people for their own personal use."

Adobe sees enough growth in its future that the company is doubling down on its presence in downtown San Jose.

The company is putting the finishing touches on a new office highrise in downtown San Jose that will dramatically increase the size of Adobe's headquarters campus downtown, which now consists of three towers.

At present, Adobe employs about 3,800 people in downtown San Jose. The new highrise will accommodate about 3,000 people, according to Adobe. The expansion to the North Tower will enable the company's downtown headcount to total 6,800, an increase of about 79% in the number of employees in San Jose's urban core.

Adobe has embraced the dramatic shift to cloud-based services as a way to further widen the availability and functionality of its products and services.

The company has collected many of its software offerings into Adobe Creative Cloud. This cloud-based service gives subscribers access to a collection of software used for graphic design, video editing, web development, and photography, as well as mobile applications.

So far, much of what Adobe offers is available primarily on computer

systems. But what about phones and tablets?

"We are looking at bringing more products and services to the web and to more devices," Yap said. "However you are most comfortable, how you are most creative, that's where we want to bring more tools and services."

The [company](#) also believes that [artificial intelligence](#) and machine learning could spur even more use of its software.

Case in point: Artificial intelligence could help Adobe's software learn how a user prefers to alter an image. Perhaps the user nearly always aims to crop out the background of an image to make a subject in the foreground more prominent. The Adobe software could learn from those tendencies and create shortcuts to make image alteration simpler and more straightforward.

"The idea is to bring technology closer and closer to you," Yap said.

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