

FROM SMOKE SIGNALS to Email: Keeping in Touch From the Stone Age to the present, people have shown a desire to send messages to one another over long distances. And text messaging on cell phones is also increasing, so people can, in effect, be in constant touch with people who are long distances away. The first email message took place in 1971, and according to its sender, Ray Tomlinson, it was probably the following: "QWERTYUIOP". What was significant about that? Nothing, really. This is just the top row of keys on an English-language keyboard. Tomlinson was just testing out the system and using a nonsense message. He had no concept that he was going to start a revolution in communication.

Tomlinson was part of a group of scientists who were working on developing better computers. The scientists at his site were able to send a message to a "mailbox" on the computer on their site. For example, two parallel columns of smoke indicated the successful return of a war party. The ancient Greeks established lines of signal towers at mountain-tops. Because the local dialect alternates in these tones, the sender is able to simulate speech with the drums. That was the start of the emailing systems that we still use today.

At first, the number of people on email was small, but by the end of the 20th century, there were 263 million email boxes.