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## The Fax Newspaper

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# The Fax Newspaper

**Faxübertragungen sind viel älter als gemeinhin angenommen. Die Technik war schon über hundert Jahre alt, als 1948 beinahe mit einer Idee der Durchbruch gelang, die wir heute Internet und E-Paper nennen.**

I watched a 1948 Jimmy Stewart movie on TV the other evening, *Call Northside 777*. It had one *startling* detail. Toward the end, Stewart *cleared* an innocent man by getting a FAX copy of an old photo from another city – a FAX in 1948! The movie makes a big deal of it – makes it into the high technology of 50 years ago.

Actually, 1948 was late in the game for FAX machines. By the early nineteenth century we had photographic cameras as well as the new telegraph systems. Suddenly we could *capture an image*, and we could *transmit* a message – both almost *instantaneously*. It didn't take long to put those two ideas together.

A Scot named Alexander Bain patented a primitive FAX machine in 1843, only six years after Morse's telegraph. By 1865 a commercial FAX system was operating between Lyons and Paris. Those systems were *cumbersome*. You couldn't just copy from paper. You had first to create an image on some form of metal block or *sheet*.

German scientist Arthur Korn built the *forerunner* of modern FAX machines in 1902. Korn's device used a light-sensitive scanner to read images from regular paper. Five years later he had a commercial system running. In 1925 AT&T began public FAX service in the United States. They called it Wirephoto. The technology has changed, but you still see AP Wirephoto images in your newspapers.

Now writer George Mannes tells about another variant on the FAX machine – William Finch's facsimile newspaper. Finch took an interest in FAX machines in 1920 and *amassed* 200 patents while he worked for Hearst's International News Service. In 1935 he set up a company to sell his own FAX system. His design had a lot in common with Bain's machine. A light swinging on a *pendulum* moved over a slow-moving paper strip, four inches wide. It picked up and transmitted a hundred lines of light and darkness per inch.

The big push to sell the machine took place right after WW-II. Finch set out to place a FAX machine in every living room. He meant to bring newspapers into our homes electronically. *Proponents* put radio under attack. "In the

primitive people ... carved	stone
beginning to accept	
Knowingly ... promotion	
campaign ... *see list	
*see list	
surprising ... *see list	
triumph ... disaster	
take a picture	fighting for
send	
immediately	
awkward	
page	
prototype	
collected	
*see list	
Supporters	

history of humanity it is never the spoken word [used] by ... *backward tribes*, but the *inscribed tablet* ... the written word [has built] knowledge."

Newspapers were just *buying into* the idea when Jimmy Stewart made that 1948 movie. *Intentionally* or not, he was part of the *advertising blitz*. But we consumers never took the *bait*. Finch's FAX newspaper became one more technological dead end, while we all went out and bought TV sets. The company went bankrupt in 1952.

New technologies ride a thin line between *success* and *failure*. You and I still read the morning paper. But we also click on the Web to check news articles. In that sense, Finch's electronic newspaper is here in our houses, after all. TV, radio, newspapers, and the Web are all *clamouring* for our favour, and we're no nearer to sorting them all out than we were in 1948. ■

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<i>advertising</i>	Werbung, Reklame
<i>amass, to</i>	anhäufen, sammeln
<i>backward</i>	rückständig, zurück geblieben
<i>bait</i>	Köder, Lockmittel
<i>blitz</i>	Großaktion
<i>buy into, to</i>	glauben an
<i>Call Northside 777</i>	dt. Titel: Kennwort 777
<i>capture an image, to</i>	ein Bild machen
<i>clamour for, to</i>	lautstark fordern
<i>clear, to</i>	hier: reinwaschen, läutern
<i>cumbersome</i>	schwerfällig, mühsam
<i>failure</i>	Niederlage, Fehlschlag
<i>forerunner</i>	Vorläufer
<i>inscribe, to</i>	beschriften
<i>instantaneously</i>	unmittelbar, sofort
<i>intentionally</i>	absichtlich
<i>pendulum</i>	Pendel
<i>proponent</i>	Befürworter
<i>sheet</i>	Bogen, Folie, Platte
<i>startling</i>	überraschend
<i>success</i>	Erfolg
<i>tablet</i>	Tafel
<i>transmit, to</i>	übertragen
<i>tribe</i>	Stamm