



CLOG

Feeds



The first publicly available, computerized social media feed was made of paper. This feed was installed at Leopold's Records in Berkeley, CA in 1973 by a group of students who had dropped out of the Computer Science program at UC Berkeley. Accessible inside of a cardboard box with two arm holes, a keyboard-operated terminal allowed people to freely create and retrieve community generated posts. Inputting search terms generated print-outs of relative, unmediated posts containing those same key terms. Psychedelic lettering on the outside of the box read "Community Memory," introducing people to the first public electronic bulletin board system, and likely their first experience with social media. Posts spanned subjects including music, housing, politics, jobs, women's advocacy, art, sex, dreams, and where to find a decent bagel in the Bay Area. An attendant assisted people for whom computers (at the time prohibitively expensive) were unfamiliar or inaccessible. The countercultural, activist founders of "Community Memory" hoped to make computers available to a wider mass of people; they aimed to empower individuals through a two-way decentralized network.

The project took roots as Resource One, which formed in the early 70s as a non-profit dedicated to "technology for the people." The group took up residence in Project One, the "technological commune" housed inside of an abandoned candy factory in San Francisco. Upon securing their first computer, the members of Resource One foresaw the rise of the internet and the massive cultural changes that lay ahead. They strived to make a computing access point that would give people a way of communicating

with each other for free, removing economic and cultural barriers to networked communication systems and supporting "the direct and unmediated exchange of information."

Resource One and Community Memory worked to make information more accessible, and to make that information tied to specific terminal locations, embracing a mesh of regionalism and community. Predating an algorithmically determined feed, each terminal's asynchronous information was based on its geographical location and user base. Evolving through multiple decades and iterations, which eventually utilized digital monitors, Community Memory terminals were installed in libraries, bookstores, cafes, laundromats, senior centers, and other community spaces. After 20 years, the project ceased operations due to lack of funding, the operator's resistance to monetization, and the triumph of personal computing over public computer usage.

Despite its demise, the Community Memory Project explored important questions about how we use feeds, who can access them and where, and who operates them. A piece of early text published by the group states that "The Community Memory Project is an attempt to demonstrate the possibility of using computer technology to support an expansion of public space rather than to reinforce passivity and powerlessness." In the past decade, political uprisings from the Arab Spring to the wake of the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor have been made hypervisible by contemporary social media. Time will tell what the feeds of the future will remember for each community that utilizes and operates them.

