

The History of the Microwave

In 1946, Dr. Percy Spencer was quite intrigued when he was testing the magnetron, a new vacuum tube, when all of a sudden the candy bar in his pocket melted. This amazed him so much that he thought he would try another experiment with popcorn kernels. He placed the kernels in front of the magnetron and to his surprise they started popping. It was the next day that Spencer decided to put an egg next to the magnetron. When he did so, the egg began trembling because of the pressure inside of the egg due to the rapidly rising temperature. When a colleague of Spencer's decided to get a better look at the shaking egg, the egg exploded and he was showered with its contents. This brought Spencer to the conclusion that low-density microwave energy was causing these foods to cook quickly. This is when his experimentation took him to entirely new levels. That is when Spencer took a metal box and cut out an opening that he could feed the microwave energy through. Once the energy was in the box it was unable to escape, so this created a high-density electromagnetic field. This caused the temperature of any food put inside the box to rise quite rapidly. What this did was revolutionize the way that food is cooked and was the basis for what would become the microwave oven. The first However, the microwave oven did not look quite like what we use today. In fact, it weighed approximately 750 pounds and was almost 6 feet in height. This was in late 1946 when the patent was filed by the Raytheon Company. A Boston restaurant was put in charge of testing this large microwave and it was in 1947 that the commercial version of the microwave made its debut on the market, but they cost around \$5,000 a piece. Why so expensive? Well, plumbing units also had to be installed because the magnetron had to be cooled by water. Not everyone looked upon this new invention in a favorable way. It was a complicated unit, but improvements would change the view of the public toward the microwave oven. Smaller units were made and the magnetron was able to be cooled by air, so the need for the plumber was eradicated. Eventually, microwave ovens were used for more than cooking food. Many commercial establishments were using them to dry cork, paper, and even leather. Then in 1947, the Radarange was introduced by Raytheon. The price was now between \$2,000 and \$3,000 and the cabinets that housed the microwave were around the size of a refrigerator. Between 1952 and 1955, the first home unit, priced at \$1295, was introduced by Tappan. It was in 1965 that Raytheon acquired Amana and 1967 when they introduced the first countertop models. Progression By 1975, the microwave had made great strides and had even exceeded gas range sales. It became the staple of any kitchen. By 1976, the microwave had more owners than the dishwasher. No longer was the microwave considered a luxury, it was considered a necessity. Now, we see that microwaves come in many shapes, sizes, colors, and it is difficult to find someone that doesn't have a microwave oven. And as time goes on, the microwave still continues to change face. With the many different settings that ranges from power defrost to popping popcorn at the push of a single button, it is no wonder that most of our meals are cooked within the microwave. It is quick, it is easy, and it also saves a considerable amount of energy.

About the Author

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