Symantec at 25: A Short History

From its roots in classified research to its global leadership in online consumer and enterprise data security and storage, Symantec has always been a company fueled by innovation. Building, buying and partnering to develop better products and find new ways of doing business, Symantec reached a milestone this year that few Silicon Valley companies ever do – 25 years in business. The following highlights trace Symantec's evolution through an extraordinary period in the history of information technology.

1975-77
- The U.S. Navy asks computer scientists at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) to develop software enabling it to quickly search and access large databases by questioning a computer in plain English. In tackling this project, Gary Hendrix and his colleagues see the potential for much broader, civilian applications on personal computers.

1978-81
- Weekly brainstorming sessions with fellow Artificial Intelligence experts at SRI and Stanford University lead Hendrix, Charlie Rosen (founder of SRI's Artificial Intelligence Center) and others to first launch the Machine Intelligence Corporation. Their company's first workshop is – like so many legendary Silicon Valley startups – in a garage.

1982-83
- Machine Intelligence Corporation spins off what will shortly be named Symantec, providing $100,000 in seed money. Symantec incorporates on March 1, with an office in Sunnyvale. The name is a combination of the words "syntax, semantics and technology." Steve Shank becomes CEO, allowing Hendrix to focus on R&D.
- Symantec wows people at an American Electronics Association show with a demonstration of its "Straight Talk" natural language-based database management program. Hoping to attract $500,000 in venture capital, Symantec comes away with $3 million from Kleiner Perkins. As the staff grows quickly, the expanding team struggles to balance its traditional research culture with the venture capitalists' intense focus on quick commercial success.

1984-86
- Symantec merges with C&E Software (named for founders Denis Coleman and Gordon Eubanks, Jr.), which was developing software to integrate file reporting and word-processing in a single product. Despite C&E's larger size, the company retains the Symantec name, in part due to its greater name-recognition. Gordon Eubanks, Jr. becomes CEO.
- Symantec launches what will become its first widely successful product, a flat-file database system designed for the IBM PC platform. Called Q&A (short for Questions & Answers), it allows users without advanced computer training to query databases in plain English. Encouraged by strong product reviews but perplexed by low initial sales, Symantec sends its engineers out on the road as a self-described "sales force of nerds." By November of 1986, the product is earning widespread praise and has sold 32,000 copies.

1987-89
- Symantec rapidly expands its product line through a series of acquisitions, focusing on products and companies growing faster than Symantec itself.
- Responding to growing competition in the lower-end productivity market, Symantec shifts its focus to utilities and a new, undeveloped market segment: antivirus software.
- Symantec (SYMC) goes public on June 23, 1989, with an Initial Public Offering on NASDAQ at a share price of $10.50.

1990-1992

- Symantec acquisitions and growth make it one of the world's ten largest software firms. It opens a manufacturing facility in Ireland, an international administrative center in the Netherlands, and subsidiary offices in Australia, France, Germany and many other countries.
- Doubling its size to 2,000 employees, Symantec acquires a half-dozen companies, including Peter Norton Computing and Certus International Corporation, primarily for their antivirus products.

1993-95

- In a sharp contraction that reflects broader industry troubles throughout Silicon Valley, Symantec lays off 800 employees and suffers a steep drop in its share price. Still, it continues to acquire key products and companies and starts work on Symantec products related to Microsoft's planned launch of "Windows 95" platform, two years away. It also moves its headquarters to Cupertino, California. When Windows 95 does go live, Symantec launches the first of its many corresponding products the same day.

1996-97

- Symantec acquires Delrina, whose WinFax product enables users to send and receive faxes via desktop computer.
- As the Web takes the world by storm, Symantec becomes one of the first companies to exploit its potential to meet evolving customer needs by launching LiveUpdate, a Web-based program that lets customers keep their security and utility products up-to-date by downloading missing or updated software drivers, virus definitions, firewall rules or other pieces of software directly from Symantec's Web site. Empowering customers to add code to a base product without having to reinstall the software itself represents a breakthrough in the software industry, and sets a new industry standard.
- Strengthening its growing reputation as a leader in on-line security, Symantec opens its Antivirus Research Centers (SARC) in the United States, Japan, Australia and The Netherlands, to research and develop technologies that eliminate such threats proactively, and to educate the public on safe computing practices. Over time, this will evolve into the Symantec Security Response team. Symantec also launches symantecstore.com, selling full versions of its software online.

1998-99

- Addressing rising concern about the Y2K threat, Symantec organizes the Symantec Millennium Action Response Team. It also launches Norton 2000, making it easier for small businesses and consumers to reduce the threat of downtime from non-compliant components and applications.
- The global Melissa virus – which propagates through e-mail systems – hits on a Friday, causing major disruption. Demand for information and protection is so great that traffic to Symantec's website crashes its server, briefly. Despite initial difficulties, Symantec quickly develops a complete detection and repair solution for affected customers and offers it to all Symantec customers through the LiveUpdate feature in Norton AntiVirus, and at www.symantec.com. Ultimately, the virus scare and resulting media scrutiny highlight the vital importance of Symantec's antivirus business.
- Still buying key products and companies, Symantec grows to more than 2,400 employees and continues to release innovative products, including protection for mobile customers.
- In 1999, CEO Gordon Eubanks leaves the company. The Board of Directors appoints former IBM executive John W. Thompson as Symantec's new Chairman, President and CEO.
- The new CEO, John W. Thompson sets out to establish Symantec as "the world's preeminent company to secure the Internet." He reorganizes the company to grow Symantec's enterprise business and announces his goal of doubling Symantec revenue to $1 billion.

2000-01

- Symantec works to acquire new technology and management capabilities, integrate global branding, and sell integrated security solutions rather than just an array of separate products. As a part of this effort, Symantec acquires Axent for $975 million, gaining an experienced, 700-member enterprise sales force, a base of large corporate and public-sector customers, and complementary products.
- Symantec sets up a network of Global Response Centers to monitor emerging virus threats and respond quickly to potentially malicious code, wherever they emerge – a prescient move. When the NIMDA worm begins damaging files in computers around the world, Symantec's security experts complete an analysis, develop recommendations, post them on the Symantec Security Response Web site and send them out via wireless broadcast – in less than half an hour. Symantec is the first company to release a working repair tool that simultaneously detects the NIMDA worm and fixes damaged files.
- A Gartner Dataquest report ranks Symantec as the world's leading security software provider, based on new license revenue. Total company revenue tops $944 million, and the number of employees nearly reaches 4,000.

2002-04

- Strategic acquisitions enable Symantec to offer customers the strongest, proactive early warning system against the broadest range of threats. Symantec works with The White House to develop the National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace, a plan for securing the nation's critical cyber-infrastructure.
- "Phishing" attacks become a growing Internet threat, deploying e-mails, pop-ups and fraudulent Web sites to deceive recipients into disclosing personal data, such as credit card numbers, bank accounts and Social Security numbers. In response, Symantec becomes a leading member of the Anti-Phishing Working Group, an industry association combating identity theft and fraud resulting from phishing and other on-line ploys.
- By the end of 2004, Symantec has 6,500 employees generating $1.8 billion in revenue.

2005-06

- Symantec continues to grow through strategic acquisitions. The largest and most important acquisition is Veritas. The $10.2 billion purchase adds approximately 7,000 employees to Symantec, many with deep expertise in storage. The merger nearly doubles Symantec's employee base to more than 16,000 employees and doubles the company's revenue to $4.6 billion.
- Symantec launches an integrated email security and availability solution, helping corporations keep messaging systems running, protected and compliant. This is the first combined solution from Symantec after the Veritas acquisition, integrating solutions developed by both teams.
- Symantec's consumer business reaches a key milestone, selling its 200th million Norton Product.

2007

- Symantec acquires Altiris (IT service-oriented management software) and4FrontSecurity (governance, assessment and compliance management software).
- Symantec launches Norton 360, a comprehensive solution integrating antivirus, anti-spyware, firewall, intrusion protection, anti-phishing, backup and tune-up. This all-in-one security product protects computers and data from a broad array of potential Internet threats.
- Symantec launches Information Foundation, an integrated suite helping IT professionals proactively prevent data loss and policy violations, while responding to electronic discovery requests quickly and cost-effectively. The company also releases Symantec Network Access Control 11.0 (code-named Hamlet) to automatically detect and block attacks.
- Symantec celebrates its 25th anniversary.