# Microsoft celebrates 50 years with AI advancements and employee protests



This month, Microsoft marks its 50th anniversary, a notable milestone for the technology giant that began as a modest software startup in a garage in Albuquerque, New Mexico, co-founded by Bill Gates and Paul Allen. Over the decades, Microsoft has significantly influenced personal computing and business productivity, and now targets a pivotal role in the field of artificial intelligence, driven by its substantial investment in OpenAI, the maker of ChatGPT.

As part of its anniversary celebrations, Microsoft has announced a series of enhancements to its Copilot AI assistant, aiming to better integrate AI capabilities across its product range. Among the new features is "Memory," which enables the assistant to remember user preferences, such as dietary tastes or significant dates like birthdays, to assist in practical tasks like making dinner reservations or selecting gifts. The "Vision" upgrade allows users to take photos or videos and receive recommendations, such as home decoration tips based on the images shared with Copilot.

In an interview with Marketplace's Meghan McCarty Carino, Yusuf Mehdi, Microsoft's Chief Marketing Officer for consumers, expressed enthusiasm for the Memory feature, which he described as a tool that helps predict user needs by recalling previous interactions. He illustrated its utility with an example, stating that Copilot could remind users of past solutions to recurring problems, "Oh yeah, this is what we did last time. Here's the answer for you." Similarly, he highlighted the value of the Vision feature by explaining how it can provide information on real-world objects, such as buildings or flowers, using AI to enhance everyday curiosity and learning.

Addressing concerns related to privacy and data security, Mehdi emphasised Microsoft's commitment to ensuring user control over personal data. He stated that users can opt out of the Memory feature if they choose, and can delete specific information at their discretion. Furthermore, features like Vision require manual activation and are designed to notify users when they are in use.

In discussing the processing of user requests, Mehdi explained that actions initiated through Copilot rely on a combination of browser capabilities and AI to facilitate tasks such as making restaurant reservations. He detailed how user input is incorporated where necessary, particularly in situations requiring personal information, such as credit card details.

With emerging AI tools proliferating, McCarty Carino questioned what sets Microsoft's Copilot apart from similar offerings by competitors, including those from OpenAI. Mehdi pointed out that Microsoft has developed two distinct Copilot experiences—one for consumers and another integrated into Microsoft 365 for workplace efficiency—which allow for added features like enterprise security and compliance. He highlighted that while the consumer version may embody more personality, the enterprise version leverages corporate data for enhanced capabilities.

The interview also touched upon the costs associated with advanced AI functionalities. Mehdi acknowledged that while the integration of AI could lead to a complex pricing structure, using Copilot is more efficient than traditional search methods, offering significant time savings for users. He asserted that Microsoft employs various technologies to optimise operating costs, thereby ensuring that as they innovate, their services remain economically viable.

Additionally, amidst the advancements in AI, concerns about environmental impacts remain pertinent. Microsoft has committed to becoming carbon negative by 2030, and Mehdi provided insight into strategies being employed to mitigate energy consumption through the development of more efficient AI models and the capability for some tasks to be executed locally on user devices.

The evening of Microsoft’s anniversary was, however, not devoid of controversy. Celebrations held at the company’s headquarters in Redmond, Washington, were interrupted by protests from employees opposing Microsoft's association with military actions in Gaza. An investigation by the Associated Press revealed that AI models from Microsoft and OpenAI were allegedly being utilised by the Israeli military for targeting operations. Following the protest, reports surfaced indicating that two employees who had disrupted the event were denied access to their work accounts. Although it remained unclear whether they were formally dismissed, a representative for the protestors subsequently claimed that they had been fired. Microsoft has not yet commented publicly concerning the incidents surrounding the protest and the employees' current status.

As Microsoft reflects on its past and navigates through its future as a frontrunner in the AI landscape, the company continues to encounter both milestones of achievement and challenges related to corporate ethics and responsibility.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://gatesnotes.com/microsoft-original-source-code> - This URL supports the claim that Microsoft began as a software startup co-founded by Bill Gates and Paul Allen, and it marks the company's 50th anniversary by celebrating its creation and early milestones.
* <https://news.microsoft.com/microsoft-50/> - This URL corroborates Microsoft's 50th anniversary and the company's mission evolution over the years, highlighting its significant achievements and future goals.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDWCSeaeeJE> - This YouTube video discusses Microsoft's origins and its impact on the technology landscape over the past 50 years, echoing the sentiment of Bill Gates reflecting on the company's history and future.
* <https://www.acquisition.gov/far/part-9> - Although not directly related to Microsoft's anniversary, this URL provides general information about federal contracting policies and could be relevant to arguments about corporate responsibility and ethics in dealing with government or military contracts.
* <https://www.noahwire.com/> - This is the source of the provided article, discussing Microsoft's current developments and challenges, but specific page URLs related to individual claims were not provided.