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101 Gadgets that Changed the World

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e-PowerPoint-era bosses relied on the Kodak Carousel for visual communication. Here, Don Draper pitches the ad campaign for the gadget on Mad Men.

The derringer used to assassinate Abraham Lincoln was actually a derringer, with one r. Renowned pistol-maker Henry Deringer’s original Philadelphia Deringer, produced from 1852 through 1868, spawned copycats worldwide, and the name—albeit misspelled—became a generic term for any small, large-caliber handgun.

60. MOOG SYNTHESIZER
Among the first widely used electronic instruments, the Moog used analog circuits to generate sound electronically. Without it, the Doors’ “Strange Days,” Simon & Garfunkel’s “Bookends” and the Beatles’ “Abbey Road” would have sounded much different.

61. SMOKE DETECTOR
Duane Pearsall wanted to curb static in photo darkrooms, but noticed that a meter measuring ion concentration on his static-control device flat-lined whenever cigarette smoke hit it. “By accident, we had discovered how to make an ionization smoke detector,” Pearsall said.

62. CHARCOAL GRILL
See p. 63, Great American Weekend

63. LUNCHBOX
When Aladdin Industries launched the Hopalong Cassidy kit in 1950, it kicked off the lunchbox boom: Between 1950 and 1970, 120 million lunchboxes shot off store shelves as America’s youth scrambled to get the latest in branded boxes.

64. DERRINGER
The authenticity of the Booth derringer at Ford’s Theater came into question in 1997 after members of a bygone burglary ring claimed to have stolen the original in the 1960s. FBI forensic tests disproved the claim; the gun on display in D.C. (shown here) is the one used to kill Lincoln in 1865.

65. CD-ROM
See p. 60, Saving the World

66. TAPE MEASURE
See p. 57, Man at Work

67. BINOCULARS
See p. 63, Great American Weekend

68. COLEMAN LANTERN
See p. 63, Great American Weekend

69. ELECTRIC TOOTHBRUSH
U.S. Navy submariners didn’t have much to smile about: Subsisting on mushy canned food for months on end, they got almost zero gum stimulation. Electric toothbrushes came aboard in 1959, solving the problem. They later found a wider audience—and inspired the invention of another vibrating device (but that’s a gadget for an entirely different article).

70. BOOMBOX
See p. 53, Music Machines

71. KODAK CAROUSEL
Adman Don Draper said it best in his pitch to Kodak execs in an episode of the ’60s-set show Mad Men: “This device isn’t a spaceship, it’s a time machine.” He waxed poetic about the Carousel, the ingenious 35-mm slide projector, while clicking through images of his family life before it unraveled. “It lets us travel the way a child travels—around and around and back home again.”

72. STOPWATCH
When the TAG Heuer Mikrograph stopwatch was invented in 1916, it allowed the measurement of time with unprecedented accuracy—down to 1/1000 second. This precision led to major changes in the sports world, including records such as the world’s first sub-4-minute mile (3:59.4, by Roger Bannister, May 6, 1954). Digital stopwatches accurate to 1/1000 second debuted in 1971.