



Celebrating 30 Years of Dictionary.com Through the Words That Defined the Times

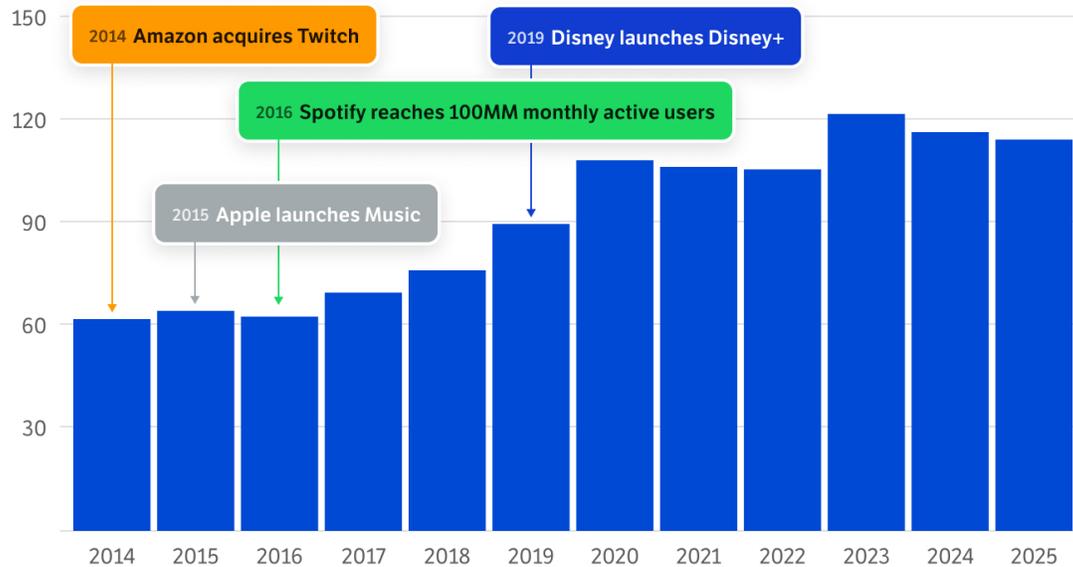
Words grow up, too. From “stream” to “hallucination,” our language—and world—has evolved since 1995.

The Internet — May 28, 2025 — In 1995, the world met *Toy Story*, tuned into the O.J. Simpson verdict and embraced a new tech frontier known as the World Wide Web. That same year, [Dictionary.com](#) opened its virtual doors, becoming one of the internet’s first destinations for word lovers, curious minds and anyone needing to settle a spelling debate.

Now, the world’s leading online dictionary turns 30. And while it hasn’t bought a house or started saving for retirement, it *has* redefined what it means to be the authority on language in a rapidly changing world.

“Over the past three decades, so many words we use regularly have evolved to take on completely new definitions,” said **Steve Johnson, PhD, Director of Lexicography for the Dictionary Media Group at IXL Learning**. “Words like *cloud* and *stream* no longer just refer to natural phenomena—they also reflect how we live and interact with technology. Through it all, one thing remains the same: language never stops evolving, and Dictionary.com never stops paying attention.”

Usage of “stream” 2014-2025



Usage of “stream” by year since 2014 per 1,000,000 words written in a representative corpus.

Taking on new meaning

To celebrate its 30th birthday, Dictionary.com is looking back at how far words have come—in technology, pop culture and how we describe our world. Throughout the last three decades, [Dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com) has documented this evolution, growing alongside our language. Consider these examples:

Technology:

Stream (noun or verb)

- **Then:** A flowing body of water, or a verb meaning "to run or flow"
- **Now:** A verb in digital technology meaning "to send or play video, music, or other data over the internet in a steady flow without having to download it"

The rise of high-speed internet in the 2000s turned *streaming* from a tech experiment into an everyday experience. Today, we can binge-watch an entire series or replay our favorite songs with a tap. (Kids today will never know the pain of waiting for Saturday morning cartoons.)

Hallucination (noun)

- **Then:** A false notion, belief or impression; delusion

- **Now:** False information generated by a machine learning program, such as artificial intelligence, presented as if it were true

Once confined to psychology textbooks, *hallucination* now sits at the heart of conversations about artificial intelligence—especially when AI chatbots “make things up.” The term even earned the title of Dictionary.com’s [2023 Word of the Year](#).

Pop culture:

Ghost (noun or verb)

- **Then:** The spirit or soul of a dead person
- **Now:** a verb meaning "to disappear from communication," especially in reference to dating

People have been getting dumped forever, but *ghosting* adds a modern twist. With social media, dating apps and DMs, there are endless ways for someone to vanish without a trace. Mysterious, much like the original *ghost*.

Lit (adjective)

- **Then:** bright, full of light
- **Now:** "intoxicated" or a term of approval meaning "amazing, cool"

Even in the early 1900s, people described themselves as *lit* after a few too many drinks. Today, it’s a go-to word for anything exciting or fun—whether you’re at a party or just hyping up your group chat.

These shifts reflect more than evolving definitions. They show how language mirrors the spirit of the times—from everyday lingo to coding breakthroughs. For more throwbacks and linguistic insights, check out the full anniversary editorial article here: <https://www.dictionary.com/e/booyah-dictionary-com-is-30-a-trip-back-to-1995/>

Charting a new course

Since its founding, Dictionary.com has grown from a useful tool into a cultural touchstone. It has tracked the rise of internet slang, unpacked buzzy headlines and spotlighted the words that help us make sense of everything from viral memes to major world events. Today, it continues to shape how we think, talk and connect through language, with features like Word of the Day and Word of the Year leading the conversation.

That mission expanded in 2024, when IXL Learning acquired Dictionary.com and formed [Dictionary Media Group](#). The group encompasses [Dictionary.com](#), [Thesaurus.com](#), [SpanishDictionary.com](#), [FrenchDictionary.com](#), [inglés.com](#), [Vocabulary.com](#), [ABCya](#), [StudySpanish.com](#), [Multiplication.com](#) and [HomeschoolMath.net](#). Together, these sites reach over 500 million people around the world each year.

About Dictionary.com

Words define every aspect of our lives, from our ideas to our identities. [Dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com) aspires to empower people to express themselves, learn something new and find opportunities through the power and joy of language. With 96 million visitors each month, Dictionary.com is the premier destination to learn, discover and have fun with the limitless world of words and meanings. Dictionary.com helps you make sense of the ever-evolving English language so you can put your ideas into words—and your words into action.

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