

# The Rise and Fall of Flash — and What Entrepreneurs Can Learn From It

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*A personal reflection on riding the Flash wave — from teenage freelancer to building sites for major music labels — and the lessons in tech transitions.*

Flash is officially dead. For all its service to the internet and popular culture, it was very much a product of the 1990s and early 2000s. We now have web technologies that are faster, safer and more accessible.

When Adobe announced the end of Flash, I recalled fond memories of my early journey into entrepreneurship. Surfing the first wave of Flash, I learned foundational lessons about doing business in emerging technologies that have served me for two decades.

When I first discovered Flash, I was 11 years old. I was in middle school and already mesmerized by new media and the internet. It was love at first sight. This new software enabled me to create interactive web experiences with all the bells and whistles imaginable, and I knew this was exactly what I wanted to do.

At school, I'd sneak in time on the class computer to stay connected to the two worlds I was passionate about — Flash and music. After school, I'd race home to spend hours experimenting with Flash. Between building programs and completing homework, the “real” studying happened on sites like Flashkit, FWA and Macromedia's Site of the Day. I looked for news, inspiration and cutting-edge approaches to developing this next chapter of the web. I spent my nights and weekends immersing myself, learning and honing my skills. Through a mix of persistence and luck, I landed a few freelance gigs with local indie and punk rock bands. Musicians were just starting to realize they needed an internet presence, and I was a kid who knew the scene, and I could design and build not just websites but online experiences — all thanks to the power of Flash.

Through word of mouth, more jobs kept trickling in, and before long, I, a music- and tech-obsessed teenager, was building websites, splash pages and e-cards for some of the largest independent record labels in America. Long nights and weekends locked away with my computer were starting to pay off.

The floodgates opened after my first project for Capitol Records — what I considered the holy grail of record labels. Inbounds from Atlantic Records, Warner Music, Sony Music and Def Jam soon followed. These iconic major labels wanted interactive websites and marketing materials for their biggest stars. It's mind-blowing in retrospect — one day I was on a call with Katy Perry to discuss a Flash-powered media player shaped like a strawberry, and the next, I was designing websites for Lenny Kravitz, Snoop Dogg and New Kids on the Block.

My most unforgettable moment came when I was invited to encounter a living legend. Mick Jagger and I met up in New York City to walk through the new Flash website I had built for him. He was impressed by the elegant design, smooth animations and interactive audio and video elements, while I stood in awe of

rock & roll royalty. I'm not sharing this to brag or to make it sound like I was living the techie-version of Almost Famous. I'd be lying if I said I don't love an opportunity to mention this buzzy past life, but that's not the main takeaway.

For those building businesses in technology, a few key skills determine our success. One is the ability to spot trends and emerging technology. Another is the foresight to know that the tides will one day turn. Flash's journey provides an excellent example of both.

When Flash burst on the scene, there was nothing quite like it. The internet was just becoming mainstream, and Flash promised a supercharged version of the web. I was lucky enough to get in just before the music industry exploded with demand. While teenage-me stumbled into an opportunity, adult-me has learned that this is something you can anticipate.

If you pay attention, you can spot a crossover point between new tech and a market fit. Sometimes, as with Flash and the entertainment business, you need to be ahead of the hype train, but that's by no means a rule. Consider the technology's maturity and its available distribution channels, as well as the market's awareness and appetite. Those lines can cross at unpredictable moments. More often than not, you don't need the first-mover advantage. An early mover advantage, however, can take you far.

Often overlooked in business advice is that getting out at the right time is as important as getting in. The tech landscape is always shifting, and if you bet your business on a specific stack, you might be on top for a while, and then suddenly, you're scrambling to get your next lead. Being well established in a niche market will buy you more time, but don't bet on being the equivalent of COBOL, the 1950s programming language that remains crucial for global banking infrastructure. That kind of longevity is the exception, not the rule. Eventually, almost every platform becomes obsolete or loses its luster. That's what happened with Flash.

Just about every industry's appetite for interactive, boundary-pushing marketing materials has increased exponentially, yet modern browsers have made it possible to accomplish great things with good old HTML and JavaScript. At the end of the day, the critical question is: What delivers the most value for the customer? And the underlying tools required to deliver this value never stay the same for long. You need to look ahead, remain aware and move with the times.

Be ready to reinvent your business, and when the right moment comes, lean into what comes next and the different technologies needed to deliver value. It's a cycle that repeats endlessly. As one technology fades, another arrives, and the key to success is to predict and adapt to each wave. Focus and mastery are important, but being open to change and ready to ride a new wave will lead in unexpected directions.

Flash may be dead, but like other once emergent and now obsolete technologies, its lessons and influence will live on.