

Internet pioneer Paul Baran dies in Calif. at 84

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In a Sept. 29, 2008 file photo then President Bush presents Paul Baran a 2007 National Medal of Technology and Innovation in the East Room of the White House in Washington. Baran whose work with packaging data in the 1960s has been credited with playing a key role in the later development of the Internet, died Saturday March 26, 2011 his son told The Associated Press. (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak/file)

(AP) -- Paul Baran, whose work with packaging data in the 1960s has been credited with playing a role in the later development of the Internet, has died at age 84, his son said.

Baran died at his home in Palo Alto, Calif. Saturday night of complications from lung cancer, David Baran told the Associated Press Sunday night.

Paul Baran is best known for the idea of "packet-switching," in which data is bundled into small packages and sent through a network. Baran outlined the concept while working on Cold War issues for the RAND Corporation in Santa Monica in 1963 and 1964.

In 1969 the technology became a concept the Department of Defense used in creating the Arpanet, the precursor to the Internet, numerous reports on the subject said.

The idea had been so advanced at its development that private companies had passed on it.

"Paul wasn't afraid to go in directions counter to what everyone else thought was the right or only thing to do," Vinton Cerf, a vice president at Google and a colleague and longtime friend of Baran, told the New York Times, which first reported Baran's death.

President George W. Bush presented him with the National Medal of Technology and Innovation in 2008. A year earlier, he was inducted into the Inventors Hall of Fame in Akron, Ohio, joining the likes of Thomas Edison.

He told the AP around the time that he was pleased there was such a hall.

"I think that we give a lot of attention to music and football, why not those who come up with ideas that we use in a different way," he said.

Baran's method of moving data was designed to still function after a nuclear attack. Because there were no centralized switches, and bundles of data could simply find a new route if one weren't working, the system could still work even if much of it were destroyed, the RAND Corporation said on its website.

He called the process "message blocks." Donald Davies of Great Britain independently developed a similar system and his term, "packet-switching," would eventually be adopted, RAND said.

It would be decades before the social and commercial possibilities of the technology would become clear, and Baran would miss out on a lot of the money and glory that came with it, but he was happy to live to see it happen, his son said in a telephone interview.

"He was a man of infinite patience," David Baran said.

The son said his father recently shared a paper that he wrote in 1966, speculating on the future of the computer networks he was working on.

"It spelled out this idea that by the year 2000 that people would be using online networks for shopping and news," he said. "It was an absolute lunatic fringe idea."

Paul Baran was born in Grodno, Poland in 1926 and his family moved to the United States when he was 2 years old, according to the RAND website.

Baran received many accolades late in life for his pioneering work, but he was anxious to widely distribute the credit.

"The process of technological developments is like building a cathedral," he told the Times in a 1990 interview. "Over the course of several hundred years, new people come along and each lays down a block on top of the old foundations, each saying, I built a cathedral.... If you are not careful you can con yourself into believing that you did the most important part."

Baran's wife since 1955 Evelyn died in 2007. He is survived by his son,

of Atherton, Calif., and three grandchildren.

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