

The IBM Selectric typewriter was a radical innovation that completely disrupted the business typewriter market. It transformed the speed, accuracy and flexibility with which people could generate the written word, and helped pave the way for the use of typewriter keyboards as the primary method for humans to interact with computers.

The Selectric typewriter, launched in 1961, was an overnight hit. Sales in the first 30 days exceeded the forecast for six months. The manufacturing facility expected to make 20,000 Selectric typewriters in its first year. By the end of 1961, they had orders for 80,000 and by 1986, more than 13 million of them had been sold. For more than 25 years, the Selectric was the typewriter found on most office desks.

The Selectric was a radical departure even for IBM, which had been in the typewriter business since the 1930s and was already a market leader. It took seven years to manufacture and design.

At the physical heart of the Selectric typewriter's innovation was a golf-ball-shaped type head that replaced the conventional typewriter's basket of type bars. The design eliminated the bane of rapid typing: jammed type bars. And with no bars to jam, typists' speed and productivity soared.