

# Laptop visionary john ellenby dies

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A technology legend who helped change the face of computing has died.

John Ellenby made a name for himself in the 1980s as the head of Grid, a company that delivered what is widely viewed as one of the first laptop computers, the Compass. He died on Aug. 17 in San Francisco at the age of 75, his son Thomas to *The New York Times*.

The Compass featured the traditional clamshell laptop design and featured a flat-panel display that hovered over its keyboard. It was big and clunky and unlike anything current devices offer, but it was a laptop, nonetheless.

However, the Compass wasn't designed to appeal to consumers, like those from Apple, Dell or HP. Instead, the device was built for government officials and corporate users who might have a need for a high-end device. In fact, the Compass was on sale at the time for \$8,150, which according to *The Times*, amounts to more than \$20,000 today.

According to *The Times*, the Compass was used by President Ronald Reagan's national security adviser John Poindexter. James Opfer, director of the White House Communications Agency, told *The Times* that he was almost certain the Compass sat alongside the "nuclear football" that allows the president to launch nuclear missiles. The Compass eventually lost some of its luster in the 1980s as other companies came on the scene and offered consumers, enterprise users, and even the government cheaper, lighter and more powerful options.

Ellenby was born in Corbridge, England, in 1941. He moved to California in the 1970s to work for Xerox and founded Grid in 1979.