

Slot machines are, at heart, devices of automation and anticipation. From simple mechanical contraptions where one pulled a lever to set reels spinning, to the sophisticated video slot machines illuminating casino floors today, the journey is studded with innovation and evolving technology. But when exactly did slot machines transition from physical reels and electromechanical parts to the introduction of TV screens displaying their outcomes? In this detailed exploration, we'll trace the story of **1970s video slots** and the technological shifts that paved the way for the screens that now dominate casinos globally.

The Origins of Automation: Coin Mechanisms and the Classic Three-Reel Slot

Before video screens flickered to life on slot machines, the gambling world revolved around electromechanical marvels. The concept of automation in slots started with the ability to accept coins and activate a physical mechanism that spun reels. That sound you might recall from older casinos—the clink of coins dropping and the mechanical whirring—marked the era when slots were evolving beyond the simple, often manually-operated fruit machines of the early 20th century.

The design most players recognized was rooted in the *three-reel template*, a format that became the industry standard for decades. This three-reel setup:

- Offered a distinctive, readable outcome on physical reels.
- Used a relatively simple payout structure based on aligning symbols.
- Featured the iconic **fruit and BAR symbols**, which were catchy and visually meaningful.

This system provided clarity; players could see exactly where the reels stopped—a tangible reading experience that video would later try to mimic.

Icons That Became Synonymous with Slots: Fruit and BAR Symbols

It's worth pausing on those icons because their journey from physical symbols on spinning drums to digital representations on screens is critical for understanding slots' evolution.

The fruit machine's heritage is a story in itself. The fruit and BAR symbols originated partially from attempts to bypass anti-gambling laws in the United States. When traditional payout in coins was outlawed or restricted, manufacturers substituted prizes such as gum or candy, often represented by fruit icons, like cherries, lemons, and plums. The BAR symbol was derived from the logo of Bell-Fruit Gum Company, which essentially branded the machines.

These symbols remained consistent even after gambling laws relaxed, becoming a visual shorthand for slots worldwide. They offered familiarity and simplicity, ensuring that even when the transition to video screens occurred, the iconography remained instantly recognizable.

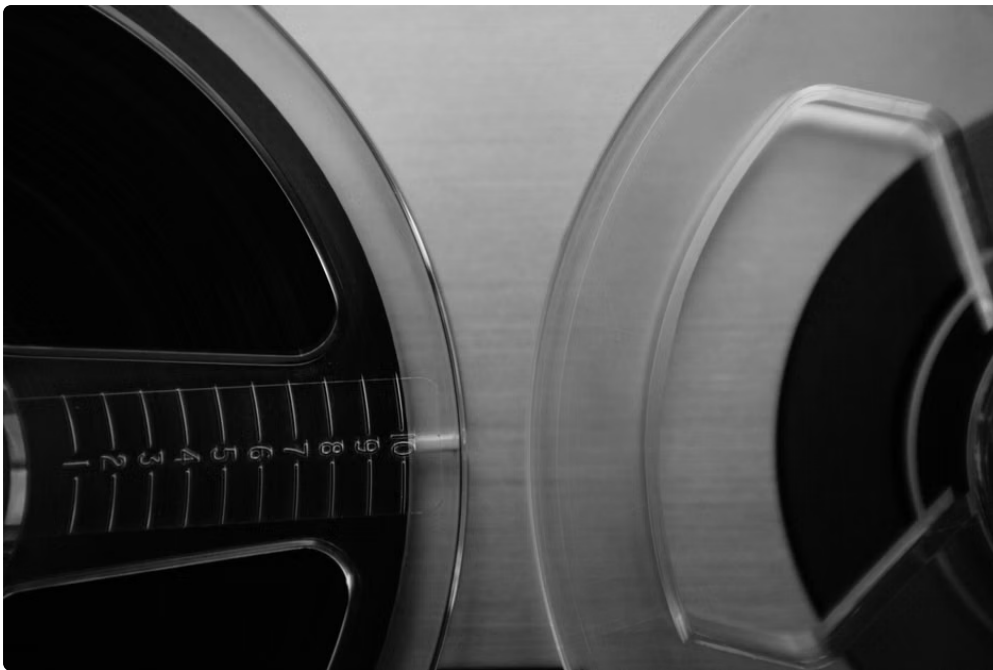
The Electromechanical Transition: Bigger Payouts and Innovative Mechanics

By the 1950s and 60s, slot machines integrated more electromechanical components. This led to:

- Faster spins.
- More complex payout combinations.

- The ability to display features like flashing lights and sound effects.

These innovations made the gaming experience more engaging and built anticipation. Additionally, machines started offering bigger jackpots, thanks to advanced payout mechanisms. Yet, at their core, these machines still relied on physical reels—although increasingly augmented through electronic controls.



Slot developers faced a challenge: enhancing player engagement without adding too much mechanical complexity or maintenance issues. This puzzle was about to see a radical technological solution.

Enter TV Screens: The Revolution of the 1970s Video Slots

The landmark moment when slot machines began using TV screens came in the **1970s**, a decade rife with experimentation in gaming technology. The breakthrough was the use of *modified color television* monitors integrated into slot cabinets. This shifted the reel display from physical drums to electronic screens capable of showing animated outcomes.

The first widely recognized real video slot was developed by the **Fortune Coin Company**, based in Las Vegas. In 1975, they introduced a pioneering machine that:

- Used a modified color TV monitor as the display panel.
- Replaced mechanical reels with computer-generated reels on the screen.
- Enabled faster game cycles and new styles of payout calculations.

Fundamentally, this move to video allowed designers to break free from the physical limitations of reels. The number of possible combinations increased dramatically without adding moving parts. This translated into:

- Higher potential jackpots.
- Smoother gameplay with less mechanical wear.
- New features impossible with physical reels, such as multiple paylines and bonus rounds displayed graphically.

How Modified Color TV Sets Were Adapted for Slots

I'll be honest with you: the use of modified color televisions was no simple plug-and-play. Manufacturers took off-the-shelf TV sets and adapted them with custom circuitry to display random number generator (RNG)-determined

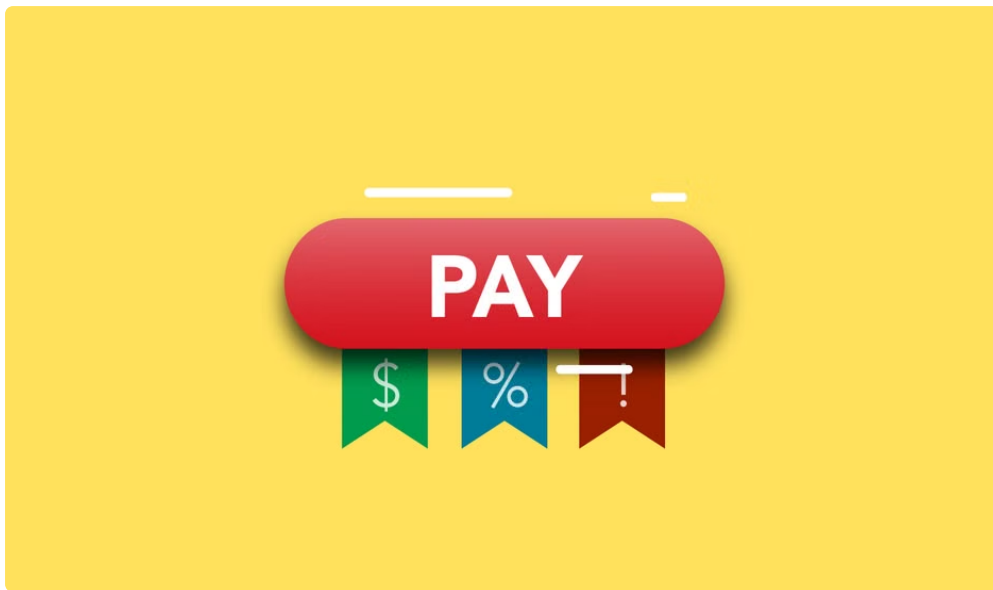
symbols. These changes ensured:

- The screen updated only when the game ended the spin.
- The display was bright and reliable under casino lighting conditions.
- Control electronics could communicate with existing coin mechanisms and payout devices.

This technical synthesis was an early example of combining broadcast television hardware with gaming electronics—a precursor to the sophisticated LCD and OLED screens seen in modern slots.

What Stayed the Same—and What Changed?

One aspect I always appreciate when tracking slot machine history is how certain elements stayed remarkably consistent even through radical innovation:



- The three-reel format remained visually familiar, even if simulated on screen.
- The classic fruit and BAR icons continued their reign, presented digitally but clinging to established player habits.
- The coin mechanism still governed player inputs and payouts, tying new tech back to a reliable physical interface.

The contrasting changes were mostly under the hood, and in the player experience:

- Mechanical reels gave way to computer-generated animations, eliminating mechanical jams and maintenance issues.
- Game speeds became faster, and bonus features more elaborate.
- Jackpots grew larger because electronic RNGs permitted more combinations.

The Legacy of 1970s Video Slots in Modern Casino Gaming

The 1970s video slot machines are more than mere curiosities; they represent a pivotal moment when the gambling industry embraced the <https://www.oddee.com/7-surprising-inventions-that-turned-slot-machines-into-digital-games-79667/> capabilities of video displays. The Fortune Coin Company's innovation laid the foundation for today's slot machines, which routinely display vibrant graphics, complex bonus games, and immersive themes.

While the game interface has evolved enormously—touch screens, HD graphics, and intricate storylines—the basic lineage from coin mechs, three reels, and fruit/BAR icons to video displays remains clearly visible.

Summary Table: Key Changes from Electromechanical to Video Slot Machines

Feature	Electromechanical Slots	1970s Video Slots	Display Type	Physical spinning reels	Modified color TV screen
Symbols	Fruit, BAR, and physical icons	Digitally rendered fruit and BAR icons	Payout Determination	Mechanically controlled combinations	Computerized random number generators
Game Speed	Limited by mechanical operation	Faster cycles, instant resets	Bonus Features	Rare, simple bonuses	Graphical bonuses and new paylines
Maintenance	High (moving parts wear)	Reduced (electronic parts)			

Conclusion: The TV Screen Slot Transformation

If you ask, "When did video slot machines start using TV screens?" the answer is firmly rooted in the mid-1970s, with the Fortune Coin Company pioneering the integration of modified color television sets into slot cabinets. This moment marked the shift from electromechanical complexity to video-enabled flexibility, setting the stage for the multimedia, highly interactive slot games we enjoy today.

Yet the spirit of those early machines—for simplicity in design, clear outcomes, and iconic symbols like fruit and BARs—remains visible. The reel spins are now virtual, but the thrill of anticipation, the bright flashing lights, and that classic chime evoke the same excitement as they did over half a century ago.