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BUSINESS

Larry Ellison Is More Interesting Than Ever at 81

The Oracle co-founder is almost as wealthy as Elon Musk, and he's in the middle of the AI revolution, the future of entertainment and maybe even a deal for TikTok



Larry Ellison, center, celebrates after a sailing race at the America's Cup in 2014. NOAH BERGER/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

By [Sebastian Herrera](#) [Follow](#)

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Quick Summary

- Larry Ellison's Oracle shares surged due to AI contracts, briefly making him the world's richest man. **View more**

Larry Ellison seems to be in the middle of everything these days.

The 81-year-old briefly became the richest man in the world this past week, as [Oracle](#) ORCL **-1.86%** ▼ shares surged on the news of key artificial-intelligence contracts, including a [massive deal with OpenAI](#).

A day later, Ellison made headlines as a cultural power broker. The Ellison family, which recently took over Paramount, is preparing a bid for [Warner Bros. Discovery](#) WBD **1.12%** ▲, a [behemoth](#)

[combination](#) that would transform the entertainment industry, The Wall Street Journal reported.

He has Trump's blessing to buy TikTok, should the Chinese government sign off on the sale. And his son, who runs [Paramount Skydance](#) PSKY 2.03% ▲, is in hot pursuit of the Free Press, Bari Weiss's digital news outlet. Ellison even made a surprise donation to help secure the No. 1 quarterback for the University of Michigan [football team](#) late last year.

"I'm addicted to winning," Ellison told "60 Minutes" in 2004. "The more you win, the more you want to win."

The billionaire chairman of Oracle has always relished being close to the action, whether that's courtside at the Indian Wells tennis tournament (he owns it) or on the deck of a yacht in the America's Cup (he has won the sailing competition). He has cemented himself as a preferred partner for the Trump administration, and continues to influence the future of technology some half a century after co-founding Oracle, which changed the game in how organizations store and manage vast quantities of data.



Stargate, an Oracle, OpenAI and SoftBank joint venture to build data centers for AI, was announced in January. President Trump was joined by Ellison, at podium, SoftBank's Masayoshi Son and OpenAI's Sam Altman. ANDREW HARNIK/GETTY IMAGES

The AI revolution—in the view of no less an authority than Ellison himself—is poised to reshape the global economy and society as we know it.

"AI is a much bigger deal than the Industrial Revolution, electricity and everything that's come before," Ellison told former U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair in an interview at the World Governments Summit in Dubai in February.

Written off by Wall Street as an also-ran in the cloud-computing wars after falling behind [Amazon](#) and [Microsoft](#), Oracle has come surging back thanks to several billion-dollar contracts with big AI players, most notably OpenAI. Oracle's disclosure in its recent earnings report that it has \$455 billion in outstanding contract revenue led to its biggest single-day stock gain since December 1992. The gain briefly propelled Ellison, who owns a roughly 40% stake in Oracle, past [Elon Musk](#) as the world's richest individual. His fortune is estimated at around \$363 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

Ellison was raised in a two-bedroom apartment on the South Side of Chicago by his aunt and uncle after his 19-year-old biological mother gave him up. He never knew his biological father. "I had all the disadvantages necessary for success," he said in a 2018 interview with Fox Business.

Ellison dropped out of college twice before moving to Berkeley, Calif., and eventually took a job at technology firm Ampex. There, he worked on a database project for the Central Intelligence Agency that was called "Oracle"—a name he liked enough to eventually use it for his own database startup, formed in 1977.

Oracle went public in 1986, and by the early '90s, Ellison had joined the Forbes list of billionaires.



Ellison in 1996 in France WILLIAM STEVENS/GAMMA-RAPHO/GETTY IMAGES

As his fortune grew, so did his competitive streak, with Microsoft CEO [Bill Gates](#) becoming a particular focus. In 2000, when Microsoft was under an antitrust investigation, Ellison admitted publicly to hiring investigators to dig up information on Microsoft's political activities and allies. He called the act a "[civic duty](#)." A federal judge [ruled](#) that Microsoft wielded its monopoly power over operating systems for personal computers.

Ellison's own rise has drawn scrutiny. In the early 2000s, shareholders sued Ellison and alleged that he sold approximately \$900 million worth of Oracle stock before the company announced it wouldn't meet its expected earnings. He later [settled](#) the suit, without admitting wrongdoing, and agreed to donate \$100 million to charity.

Ellison has voiced a desire to be the world's richest person for years, according to a person familiar with the matter. He has funneled much of his wealth into real estate. His holdings include a [massive estate in Malibu](#), an 8,000-square-foot home in Silicon Valley modeled on an imperial Japanese palace, a villa in Japan and the crown jewel: the Hawaiian island of Lanai, which he [purchased](#) 98% of in 2012 and has since developed into a luxury holistic wellness resort.

Ellison has been through four divorces and has two adult children: David, the head of Paramount Skydance, and Megan, founder of Annapurna Pictures. When Ellison made the football donation last year, it was [revealed](#) that he was married to Jolin Zhu, more than 40 years his junior and a Michigan alum.

Musk has described Ellison as "one of the smartest people," and Ellison has often cited Musk, publicly and privately, as driving his thinking.

When Musk went seeking outside investors for his \$44 billion purchase of Twitter in 2022, Ellison was among the first to step up. He texted Musk, offering "a billion...or whatever you recommend."

At the Oracle Health Summit in 2024, Ellison, explaining the company's \$28.3 billion acquisition of medical-data firm Cerner, said healthcare was "the only big problem Elon left us. So space was gone, clean power generation, electric vehicles were gone." Ellison also has cited Musk's network of science- and technology-focused companies as one source of inspiration for the [Ellison Institute of Technology](#), a massive project he is funding where University of Oxford academics will use Oracle technology to seek for-profit solutions to food security, climate change and other global problems.

In recent years, Ellison has also expressed interest in having more children, according to a person familiar with his thinking, having taken to heart Musk's warnings about global under-population.



Ellison, who remains closely involved in day-to-day operations, speaks at an Oracle conference in 2018. DAVID PAUL MORRIS/BLOOMBERG NEWS

An avid athlete, Ellison had a basketball court installed on the deck of his megayacht, with a chase boat on hand to fish errant shots from the sea. He nearly died in 1990 while bodysurfing, and again in 1998 when a storm hit his yacht during a race. A pilot, he has owned two fighter-style jets and used to square off against his son in mock dogfights over the Pacific Ocean, the Guardian wrote in 2000.

Ellison stands to attract more attention following the combination of Paramount Global by Skydance Media, the entertainment and sports production company started by his son. While David serves as CEO of the new conglomerate, his father is controlling shareholder of the entities that own it. On Thursday, the Journal reported that Paramount Skydance was preparing a majority-cash bid for Warner Bros. Discovery, a deal that would bring together two of Hollywood's most storied studios and the parent companies of streaming services HBO Max and Paramount+.

Trump, who secured a \$16 million legal settlement from CBS News over the editing of a "60 Minutes" episode, has praised David Ellison as "a great man." David Ellison was quick to install a Trump ally, Kenneth Weinstein, as the network's new ombudsman.

David Ellison also is in advanced talks to buy the Free Press, a digital publication that has rocketed in popularity by promising to serve as an alternative to mainstream media. Skydance Paramount has discussed giving founder Bari Weiss a key editorial role at its CBS News division, according to people familiar with the situation.

Larry Ellison, left, with his son, David Ellison, at the Indian Wells tennis tournament in 2021. CLIVE BRUNSKILL/GETTY IMAGES

Once a vocal fan of Bill Clinton's presidency, Larry Ellison describes himself as a centrist. He was initially slow to embrace Trump. In 2020, he held a fundraiser for him but didn't attend personally. He also sought to boost Sen. Tim Scott for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination. Still, Trump sees him as a more reliable ally than some of the other tech executives who only started supporting him shortly before or after the most recent election, people familiar with the relationship said.

Oracle has expressed readiness to buy a stake in TikTok ever since 2020, when Trump, citing national security risks, first attempted via executive order to force ByteDance, its Chinese parent company, to divest its U.S. operations. Then-President Biden signed a potential TikTok ban into law in 2024, but Trump has delayed enforcement while his administration negotiates a broader trade agreement that could coincide with a sale of the company. In January, at a White House appearance with Ellison, Trump was asked if he was open to Musk buying TikTok. "I would be if he wanted to buy it, yes," Trump responded. "I'd like Larry to buy it, too."

The purpose of the event was to announce Stargate, a \$500 billion joint venture by Oracle, OpenAI and SoftBank to build data centers for AI.

More than a decade after he relinquished the CEO title, Ellison is chief technology officer and

remains closely involved in day-to-day operations at Oracle, according to people familiar with the matter. He leads development meetings each week and has a close working relationship with CEO Safra Catz.

Ellison wants to live for as long as he can and has donated hundreds of millions to aging research.

“Death has never made any sense to me,” he once told a biographer. “How can a person be there and then just vanish?”

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Corrections & Amplifications

Hyperscalers operate large data centers that provide cloud-computing services. An earlier version of this article incorrectly described OpenAI as a hyperscaler. (Corrected on Sept. 15)

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