

College of Business Book Review by Lyn Lazar.

Title: "The Search: How Google and Its Rivals Rewrote the Rules of Business and Transformed Our Culture"

Author: John Battelle

Publisher: Portfolio, a member of the Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

Length: 311 pages (with notes and index)

Price: \$25.95 (hardback)

Reading time: 7 hours

Reading rating: 8 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy)

Overall rating: 4 (1 = average; 4 = outstanding)

Google is a predominant institution for almost anyone who regularly uses a computer. "The Search: How Google and Its Rivals Rewrote the Rules of Business and Transformed Our Culture" describes the history of Google, the way it has risen to its current state as that institution, and discusses a bit of the future of search.

Beginning in 2001, Google published Zeitgeist, a weekly list of the most popular search terms. This led the author to coin the term Database of Intentions, referring to the fact that the collection and ranking of search terms used most frequently in a week shows the culture of our country. When the search terms were collated into a yearly summary, showing both the top gaining queries and the fastest-declining queries, the heartbeat of a nation was revealed. The next question would be how to turn this wealth of information into a profit generating business model. Battelle was convinced that Google would become a media company as Yahoo had, but Google leadership then maintained that they would remain a technology business.

Think for a moment about how Google currently affects your life. You may use it while shopping, to find information, for curiosity's sake, for directions, or in many other ways. The Internet would be virtually useless without the ability to find what you need in the vast amount of data located somewhere out there. Search existed as early as 1990, but search of a different nature. Most of the users of the Internet at that time were academics or technologists. Search was awkward, as were many of the available features of the Web. Google was created by the need to search, but the way to search could be argued to have been created by Google.

While search was fascinating, paying the employees and the bills was quite another issue for Google. The business model which would turn the vast amount of information into something other than fodder for curiosity seekers was paid search. While trying to maintain the pure search model, the founders of Google knew that they had to determine how to charge for search while still delivering what everyone wanted from Google. They could fall back on banner ads if necessary, but started with sponsored ads related to the keywords used in the search. The advertisers paid for these ads based on cost per thousand, the number of times the ad appeared on a search determined the cost to the advertiser. This advertising model produced low revenue, and coupled with the NASDAQ market crash in 2000, forced Google to look at other options. Other search

engines had used pay-per-click advertising, and now Google needed to investigate this option. When moving to the pay-per-click approach, they were careful to keep the paid ads separate from those generated solely by the search. This gave customers a choice between paid search and pure search, and was viewed positively.

So where does search go from this point? You can usually find what you want within a few tries on the page of search results from Google. Will it get any better than this? Should we expect search to continue to improve? Search is not yet solved. Improvements are still possible, and should be expected. Will you be able to discuss the problem with your computer, as Captain Kirk or Michael Knight did? Those capabilities are being explored even now. Will your computer know the perfect answer to your search? Will it be able to distinguish between a search for new information and a search for information you have seen previously? Will it be able to summarize the search results and present them to you in the most usable format? Search as we know it does not have the capabilities to accomplish these things, but search of the future will likely morph into more of an intelligent agent, and give you the perfect result to your search.

Lyn Lazar is an assistant professor of computer information systems in the College of Business at Western Carolina University. Her research interests include computer anxiety, supply chain agreements, and radio frequency identification (RFID). For previously reviewed books, visit our Web site at www.wcu.edu/cob/.