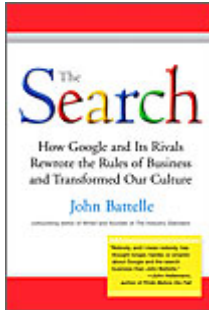


## Reviews



### ***The Search***

#### ***How Google and Its Rivals Rewrote the Rules of Business and Transformed Our Culture***

John Battelle

(Portfolio, 2005)

According to Deloitte & Touche, Google's revenues increased 400,000% in its first five years of business. A number like that can be only partially explained by the entrepreneurial prowess of Sergey Brin and Larry Page, the former Stanford graduate students who are Google's still-youthful founders. So *The Search* sensibly concentrates less on personalities than on the ingenious and rapidly evolving technology that has rendered the Internet usable by a broad public and that allows companies at last to determine whether their marketing expenditures have produced results.

In briefly recounting the history of search engines, Battelle—a cofounder of *Wired* magazine—describes a shift from valuing the number of links *from* a given site (the model for Alta Vista, Excite, and others) to valuing the number of links *to* a given site (the basis for Google's rankings). The author perceptively notes that Google's system is essentially the same as that of academia. The more frequently a Web site is "cited" (linked to), the more influential it becomes (the higher it rises in the rankings) and, consequently, the more likely it is to be found and cited again. The scholar's perspective is perhaps one explanation for the founders' ambivalence about commerce. Until 2001, Google hadn't figured out a way to make money, and it never seriously considered banner ads or rankings based solely on fees paid by advertisers. The company now gets paid when a visitor clicks on an advertiser's link appearing on Google's site or on another site where Google has placed the link.

Although *The Search* does not fail to relate the oft-told tale of Google's IPO, readers are likely to find some of the broader implications of the business more interesting. For example, Battelle dutifully takes on the threats to privacy posed by an indelible record of users' clickstreams. But to this often effusive apostle of technology, anything that brings us closer to what he styles a "perfect search" has destiny on its side. Someday, he prophesies, every fragment of text, image, musical composition, product, and service will be tagged, incorporated

into the Web, and rendered findable by (probably) Google's powerful technology. As the online world comes to resemble a warehouse or department store, Google becomes a fearsome challenger to Amazon and eBay, wielding the power of life and death over the enterprises it chooses to acknowledge or ignore.

Such grandiose arguments are also the most stimulating parts of the book. *The Search*—like its subject—is a pure product of Silicon Valley culture: by turns wonky, earnest, and giddily utopian.

—Ben Gerson

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***The Paradox of Excellence***  
***How Great Performance Can Kill Your Business***

David Mosby and Michael Weissman  
(Jossey-Bass, 2005)

When a company that provides consistently stellar service stumbles, that error is, to quote Raymond Chandler, "as inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of angel food." Customers who have taken perfection for granted are disproportionately angry over flaws and quick to demand compensation. In this entertaining tale set in a fictional logistics business, the authors explain how companies can simultaneously exceed expectations and keep them in check by continually reminding customers of the value they provide.

—John T. Landry

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***The Ape in the Corner Office***  
***Understanding the Workplace Beast in All of Us***

Richard Conniff  
(Crown Business, 2005)

Alpha males sometimes justify their aggressiveness by pointing out that their ancestors *actually were* 800-pound gorillas. But gorillas and the rest of our hairy brethren are far better behaved than most of us think, reports Conniff. Drawing on a wide range of research, the journalist identifies flaws in common analogies between corporate ruthlessness and the animal kingdom. For example, animals commonly practice altruism and reconciliation. And high levels of testosterone are associated with socially confident males who don't need aggression to assert their leadership.

—John T. Landry

***Loyalty Myths  
Hyped Strategies That Will Put You Out of Business—and  
Proven Tactics That Really Work***

Timothy L. Keiningham, Terry G. Vavra, Lerzan Aksoy, and  
Henri Wallard  
(Wiley, 2005)

Fans feel loyalty to their teams. Dogs feel loyalty to their owners. But what customers feel toward companies is much less profound, the authors argue in this relentless indictment of loyalty programs. Indeed, many assumptions about loyal customers—that they are profitable or that repeat purchasing indicates some kind of emotional attachment—are simply wrong. These consultants recommend that companies eschew loyalty programs in favor of good, old-fashioned service and unsentimental cost/benefit analysis.

—John T. Landry

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